

# PEER HEALTH EXCHANGE

## PRESS RELEASE—

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### **Peer Health Exchange Chicago's annual fundraiser celebrates the outstanding work of college health educators making a difference in the lives of young people**

**March 13, 2019—Chicago, IL—** Nearly 200 philanthropic, education, and youth advocate leaders celebrated Peer Health Exchange's annual benefit *An Orange Affair*, March 13, 2019 in support of the organization's work to advance health equity and improve health outcomes for young people in Chicago.

The event held at Carnivale, also marked Peer Health Exchange's 12th year providing health education to ninth grade students at Chicago Public Schools. This is done through an innovative near-peer model that trains 300 college volunteers from Northwestern University; The University of Chicago; and The University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) to deliver skills-based health workshops to youth across the city.

Attendees heard firsthand about the impact of this work from Chicago Military Academy Principal Octavio Casas. In his speech, Octavio shared his experience partnering with Peer Health Exchange for the past seven years.

“Our students spoke to the lessons as relevant, engaging, and ‘fun and interesting,’” said Casas. “One student shared that she went from ‘shy’ to feeling ‘comfortable...accepted...where I can share my story’ and opening up with my peers.”

Peer Health Exchange's curriculum spans over the course of 14 workshops. Workshops equip ninth graders with the knowledge, skills and resources to make healthy decisions about substance use, sexual health and mental health.

“One of our high school teachers, credits our college student volunteers and program with saving student lives,” said Peer Health Exchange Chicago Executive Director Brittany Merritt. “During a workshop in which students can ask anonymous questions on slips of paper, a student divulged that she was contemplating suicide. Because our volunteers noticed, they notified the school administrator about the situation, they were able to get her the help she needed.”

Over the last decade, Peer Health Exchange has grown to provide their trauma-informed, skills-building health curriculum to more than 18,000 young people across the country while building a culture of preventative health and wellness. This year it has reached 3,600 ninth graders in 25 high schools across Chicago.

Chicago's young people face difficult decisions every day, many of which threaten their bodies, well-being, and futures. According to the CDC, among Chicago high school students:

- 1 in 5 has seriously considered attempting suicide

**Empowering young people to make healthy decisions**

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- 1 in 4 has been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property
- 2 in 5 sexually-active young people did not use protection the last time they had sex

All young people deserve the knowledge, skills, and access to resources they need to make healthy decisions. Health education improves young people's health outcomes, high school graduation rates, and life opportunities.

Peer Health Exchange is grateful for funding support from our Volunteer Sponsors: Amy and Andy Bluhm, The Bluhm Family Charitable Foundation, CDW Product Protection, CIBC; Classroom Sponsors: Dentons, Kirkland & Ellis LLP, Northern Trust, Rivers Casino Des Plaines; Honor Roll Sponsors: Advocate Children's Hospital, Albatross Ventures, LLC, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, Ashley Capital, Cigna Foundation, Fifth Third Bank, Rush University Medical Center, and UChicago Medicine.

It also extends a special thank you to its host committee: Amelia Bailey, Amy Bluhm, Ryan Clougherty, Mary Kay Conlon and Chip Plumb, Jill Fraggos, Marcelino Garcia, Chris Goldrick, Chelsea Greenbaum, Laura Henchey, Julie Hoffmann, Daniel and Shilpa Hosler, Hannah Law, Jen Peters, Jennifer Petterson, Victoria Poindexter, Dr. Candice Norcott, Jameika Sampson, and Carol Zatorski.

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**About Peer Health Exchange** Peer Health Exchange's mission is to empower young people with the knowledge, skills, and resources to make healthy decisions. We do this by training college student volunteers to teach a skills-based health curriculum in under-resourced high schools across the country.