NEW JERSEY: New Jersey teens help create new law for youth to access mental health without parents’ consent

January 29, 2016
News Type: Weekly Spark, Weekly Spark News
State: New Jersey

Youth Today [1]

A law recently passed in New Jersey will allow teenagers under age 18 to obtain mental health care without permission from a parent. Some other states have passed similar legislation, but New Jersey may be the first state in which teenagers helped develop the law and lobbied for it at the state legislature. The bill was promoted as a teen suicide prevention effort. In addition, the ability to get help without parental permission may remove a barrier for teens who need mental health services because they live in families with violence or substance abuse issues. The law now requires that information on how teens can obtain mental health resources be made available on the New Jersey Department of Children and Families website and provided to all behavioral health organizations and licensed professionals. “I can’t find any other examples [nationally] where a group of teens initiated and changed state law,” said Janet Wallach, the director of program development and teen services for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Hudson County [2]. “These are kids who come from an inner-city environment and had no knowledge of the political process. . . .They have done the research, and lobbied, and it was their voices that made this a reality.”

Spark Extra! For information on other resources for teens, see Suicide Prevention Resources for Teens [3].

Links within this resource