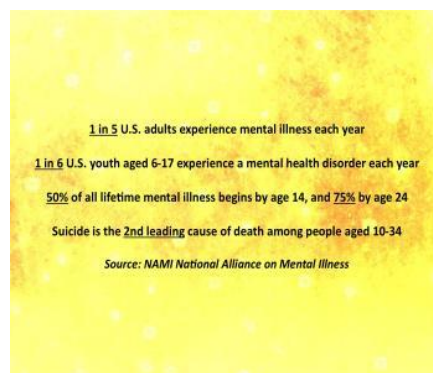




## From the Wellness Committee: Yellow Tulips Grow Hope

*by Julie Joy Butler, Falmouth Community Wellness Committee Member*

**If you or someone you know is in crisis, please call 988:  
the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline available 24/7**



Tulips were her best friend's favorite flower. Yellow was the favorite color of her other closest friend. Both friends died by suicide independent of each other during the school year that Julia Hansen was a 15-year-old sophomore. Julia had also struggled with depression since middle school but kept silent rather than face stigma. After her friends' deaths, she became a warrior fighting mental health stigma among youth. In April 2016, she and her mother, Suzanne Fox, started the [Yellow Tulip Project \(YTP\)](#) here in Falmouth.

More than half of all Americans will experience a mental illness or disorder during their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Despite the rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses in the population, stigma continues to permeate the culture. Dismissing or suppressing emotions and mental hardship can lead to further feelings of isolation, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts and acts. YTP seeks to "smash" that stigma with its stated mission that: "...someday mental illness will be as

*normal to talk about as any physical illness, and we are fiercely dedicated to making this goal a reality."*

At Falmouth High School, YTP Club leaders, seniors Chloe Libby and Eliza Belcher, began doing their part as sophomore club members. That year, their video of students sharing mental health stories ("faces you know in the hallway struggling alongside you") was shown in every homeroom. Last year they videotaped student services staff explaining their roles. They also outfitted a quiet room where students could rest and recuperate if they felt anxious or depressed during the day. "Huge appreciation" from students for their efforts, the project and the club "...keep us going and shows that we're making a difference here," said Eliza.

They both say that the degree of focus on academic rigor contributes to a high-anxiety environment. "We live in an area that comes with many privileges, but it also comes with groups of parents who tend to be on the higher-pressure side," said Eliza.

"We're very fortunate to have a lot of parental involvement, but mental health can take a back seat when academic rigor is more prevalent in people's lives," said Chloe. "When students are so devoted to their learning, mental health really needs to be on the forefront of the agenda. It's one thing to say you have a mental health organization and another to say, 'We're actively working on decreasing student anxiety,'" she said.

YTP's staff and over 500 youth ambassadors in the United States and abroad are working in schools and with communities to effect youth-driven change. To build support and awareness, YTP also invites community members to plant a yellow tulip Hope Garden to remind folks that they are not alone and that: "Hope Happens." Over 500,000 bulbs have been planted to date.

**During National Mental Illness Awareness Week (October 2-8) the Falmouth Community Wellness Committee provided free bags of yellow tulip bulbs for residents to plant in their gardens. All of the available bags of bulbs have now been distributed. Thank you to everyone who picked up bulbs for supporting this vital Falmouth conversation. Please share photos of the bulbs blooming in May to mark Mental Health Awareness Month. Thank you also to Allen Sterling & Lothrop and Skillins Greenhouses for donating an additional 140 bulbs to this effort.**