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Health Department of Northwest Michigan

Students at 10 High Schools Benefit from New Chill Lounges

Collaboration of health department, schools, and federal funding support the vision

Sometimes life is stressful. Sometimes classrooms are abuzz with activities. Sometimes students need a quiet place to think, process.

For these reasons and more, chill lounges, also known as peace rooms, have been established at 10 area high schools—Alanson, Boyne Falls, Charlevoix, Elk Rapids, Ellsworth, Gaylord, Mancelona, Pellston, Petoskey, and Round Lake. The rooms are getaways for students who need to regroup. They're gathering places for students who would otherwise need to leave campus between class and sports practices or games.

"This is a big improvement, more than I could have hoped for," said Jordan Devers, a senior at Boyne Falls School. "There are lots of pillows and chairs. It's comfortable, more cozy."

The Chill Lounge gives Jordan a place to transition from stepping off the bus from welding class to his upcoming Silent Sustained Reading time.

Also a senior at Boyne Falls, Amber Cool says the high school volleyball team uses the space to gather before games. They put their phones away and visit, sometimes using the old-school games to initiate conversation.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan (HDNW) received a grant from American Rescue Plan Act through the Northern Michigan Regional Entity to help the schools purchase a total of \$80,000 worth of supplies to create calm spaces for kids. The grant increases youth protective factors throughout Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. The proactive intervention is hoped to interrupt the stress that can lead to substance use.

"We are thankful for this funding," said Susan Pulaski, HDNW Community Health Supervisor. "A peace room is a dedicated, safe, and neutral space in a school building for students to work through difficult emotions and challenging situations. Examples of what the peace rooms may include are: low lighting, comfortable furniture, inspirational messages, soft music, sensory items, and healthy snacks. Additionally, this provides funding for school/HDNW staff to complete the Mindfulness Schools Training to further support students."

Each school determined the location of their chill lounge. They were able to customize orders based on their space and the overall feel of the room. In Boyne Falls, for example, a wood theme was woven in to

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For more information, visit nwhealth.org.

represent the Loggers. Student Success Advisor Brooke Fenske said they looked for seating to maximize the space for students, opting for a couch, chairs, large floor pillows, and two tables with taller chairs around them. Overall, the chill lounge has three potential spaces for small groups. But it also comfortably accommodates a single student with a headache or in need of a quiet space to write a paper or depressurize from a conflict.

“If someone feels frustrated, they can just ask their teacher if they can come down,” Amber said.

A small portion of the money was used to stock personal hygiene items the students can access, like toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant, and Chapstick. There are cups for Keurig machines and creamers.

Even though the lounges just opened, one example of their benefit includes a student asking to go to the lounge after arriving at school upset from fighting with a family member.

“He was embarrassed to be in class because he was emotional from what happened at home,” Fenske said. “The chill lounge gives the students assurance that there’s a safe, quiet retreat available for them.”

“The space is beneficial for students managing difficult feelings while they are at school,” said Julie Jamison, the HDNW mental health professional for the Boyne Falls Wellness Program.

To schedule a tour of a chill lounge at one of the 10 area schools, call the onsite wellness center.

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Cutline: Amber Cool (left) and Jordan Devers enjoy a short break from class Wednesday in the Logger Chill Lounge.

