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## Rivier University hosts mental health wellness day

By *TINA FORBES*

*Staff Writer*

Rivier University hosted a mental health fair for students Wednesday called "Fresh Check Day" to help remove the stigma of mental illness and teaching ways to cope with stress and mental health conditions.

Fresh Check is the signature event of the Hartford-based Jordan Matthew Porco Memorial Foundation, and aims to bring the campus community together to "check in" on student mental health and wellness.

"It's about reducing the stigma around mental health, and making it something you can talk about," said Pamela Graesser, Rivier's director of counseling and wellness. Offering mental health screenings for students at the event, Graesser said Fresh Check fell the same week as the Oct. 8 National Mental Health Screening Day.

Program Director Leah Nelson said the Jordan Porco Foundation has been working to prevent student suicide for almost five years.

"Fresh Check is trying to help students develop healthy ways of coping with stress. Stress is part of the academic experience, but there are ways of alleviating it, there are resources," she said, listing student affairs and counseling and wellness. "And it's not just the resource groups you think of first, but off campus resources like LGBT outlets," she said.

Dozens of Rivier students gathered at the Dion Center to take part in interactive booths and activities such as yoga, meditation, massages, depression screening and visits with a therapy dog.

Tanairy Rodriguez, a resident advisor and psychology major, ran an art activity in where students threw darts at balloons filled with paint hanging over a large white canvas.

"Art and creativity is therapeutic, and beneficial to health and coping strategies," said Rodriguez, who was also handing out black and white illustrations for students to color.

As an RA, she said she's seen students having to deal with stress. "Especially nursing majors. With midterms coming up, this came at a perfect moment."

An LGBT group was running the tie-dying booth for students, and Nashua-based group Bridges: Domestic and Sexual Violence Support was also present to offer support for students dealing with domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Although events are held around the U.S., Rivier is the first to participate in New Hampshire,

just weeks before a similar event at the University of New Hampshire.

"I'm super happy with the response, especially from freshman class. It's a really great event to help them with their transition to college," said Natalia Guisao, event coordinator and Rivier's resident director. Guisao participated in a Fresh Check day as a student in Connecticut two years ago, and pitched the idea at Rivier.

Vice President for Student Affairs Kurt Stimeling said Fresh Check was a good way to deal with hard problems.

"It's really a welcoming environment to talk about issues that are difficult to talk about," he said.

Ashley Mulvey, a senior nursing student, handed out participation cards students can enter into a raffle, and directed students to the "9 out of 10" suicide prevention booth.

"Everyone must go to the 'Nine out of Ten' station, because 9 out of 10 students are fine, but it's the one this day is for," she said. The Nine out of Ten program helps students recognize warning signs in friends, and offers ways to help. More about the program online at [nineoutoften.org](http://nineoutoften.org).

Nelson said many schools reach out to her group for preventative programs instead of as a reaction to campus tragedies, such as the recent shooting at a community college in Oregon.

"Folks hear about our program and consider it a positive stepping stone in the process to create a healthy campus environment," she said.

The organization is working on an outreach program for high school students, "to help them transition to college," said Nelson.

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