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Two Baldwin Park Unified Seniors Awarded NAMI Scholarships

BALDWIN PARK – Two Baldwin Park Unified seniors have been awarded \$1,000 scholarships from the East San Gabriel Valley chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) for their exceptional work in advocating for mental health on campus and de-stigmatizing mental health issues in their communities.

Baldwin Park High School senior Marisa Martinez and Sierra Vista High School senior Jade Zuniga were recognized for their leadership in NAMI Club activities and for essays on how being a part of the NAMI Club has impacted their lives.

“Becoming involved in the NAMI Club has affected my lifestyle and my perception of myself and the world,” Zuniga said. “I not only became more aware of the stigma and prejudice against mental illnesses and even discussion of mental health, but it allowed me to understand and help myself.”

Sierra Vista High established its NAMI club four years ago, the first school in the East San Gabriel Valley to do so. Baldwin Park High and North Park Continuation High School quickly established their own clubs. More than 100 BPUSD students are NAMI Club members, working to support their classmates and community.

“Through NAMI, I learned how being a friend to people can change their day, a week, a lifetime, more importantly their mental health,” Martinez said. “NAMI has inspired me to further my education in mental health. I want to be able to help those who are vulnerable to mental illness. No one should be alone in their fight.”

In fall 2019, NAMI Club student leaders and advisers attended a [day-long training session at Kaiser Permanente Baldwin Park Medical Center](#). NAMI representatives from Sacramento trained students on how to discuss mental health issues with classmates and provided resources on how to bolster club outreach.

“Our NAMI Club members are a new generation of students who are committed to being mentally well and helping their friends and family live healthy lives,” BPUSD psychologist Dr. Susan Coats said. “We could not achieve this without our wonderful NAMI Club advisers, who challenge and inspire our students to do so much good work.”

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The NAMI Club advisers – Melanie Graf of Sierra Vista High, Nicole Melamed of Baldwin Park High and Janni Martinez of North Park High – coordinate campus-wide activities to show support and let students know they have a safe space to discuss issues relating to mental health and wellness.

At Sierra Vista High, NAMI members place Post-It notes on lockers across campus so that students can start their day with compliments and support. Prior to Thanksgiving break, students received candy hearts attached with notes of encouragement. Club members also invited a self-improvement speaker to the school and led Sierra Vista students in a meditation session.

Baldwin Park High conducts themed spirit weeks with students encouraged to dress up to show solidarity with their classmates, including a moustache week for guys. Afterschool mental health workshops are open to all students, with topics including coping with anxiety, depression awareness, and stress management.

This is the third year ESGV NAMI has awarded scholarships to Baldwin Park Unified students. The amounts were the largest yet, in part due to the COVID-19 virus, which forced the cancellation of the annual Spring Fling. Money that would have gone to fund the event was added to the scholarship fund.

“Our NAMI Club students bring the gift of compassion, empathy and understanding to the Baldwin Park community, and they are true leaders on campus,” Superintendent Dr. Froilan Mendoza said. “Congratulations to Jade and Marisa for their scholarships and a huge thank-you to their advisers and the East San Gabriel Valley NAMI chapter for their tremendous support.”

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