

# Help Isn't On The Way...

## How The Lack of Mental Health Services in the School Affects the Student Body

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According to the Cedar Rapids Abbe Center for Mental Health, 1 in 17 Americans struggle with some sort of mental illness in their lives. Not to be taken lightly, mental health is something that people of all ages struggle with on a daily basis. For some, the struggle is so much that they need to seek out therapy for help with ways to deal with it. However, that help may be harder to reach than most high schoolers realize.

In previous years, Washington High School had a therapist that was on-location or on-call 24/7, who was provided by the Abbe Center in Cedar Rapids. That was before everything changed. A year ago, Surveyor staff reporter (and current Editor-in-Chief) Molly Hunter wrote a story in the September 2014 issue about the changes to the care provided by the Abbe Center, entitled "Mental Health Remodeled". In the story, Hunter describes the changes to the Abbe Center that the new school year had brought. In essence, the on-call therapist was replaced by a Abbe Center Mental Health specialist, who was used to help students a few hours a week, greatly reducing the time a therapist spent on campus.

However, this was the old system. As of this year, or rather last summer, all of the help that District schools received from the Abbe Center or any other organization

has become virtually non-existent. Now, instead of a therapist being on-call for a few hours each week, Washington and the District schools have something worse - that is to say, nothing at all.

Jennifer Byers, Wash counselor, describes the outcome of the lack of a system as detrimental to the student body.

***"If we are all out of the building, there is no backup person," said Byers.***

"A student came in [needing help], but there was no one to help him. He had previously utilized the Abbe Center person." Byers explained that the counselors at Wash can talk to the students, but they can't provide therapy-level assistance to them.

Because of the lack of an Abbe Center therapist, Byers said, "If we are all out of the building, there is no backup person."

Because of this, students do not have a way to gain immediate access to therapy if it is needed throughout the day unless their situation is an emergency. "We don't have a direct contact at the Abbe Center," said Byers. Not having a direct contact means that all student therapy via the Abbe Center must be initiated through the student's parents, or by the student.

Due to legal obstacles, Wash counselors cannot recommend a certain organization for a student to work with. "We'd give them multiple phone numbers, but we can't recommend," Byers said.

Dean Blanchard, Wash counselor, explains that the Abbe Center changes did not benefit the students.

"Not when we lost the program. The program was cut this summer...they lost the grant funding," said Blanchard.

There is a partial solution to emergencies which may arise. Blanchard said, "If there is a crisis...if it's something we can't handle...[we would] call a parent and have them come and talk it through [with the student]."

As far as the aftermath of a crisis, Blanchard said, "There is a crisis team available through the District to come in...[they're] social workers. [But this is] if something has already happened only."

In the end, it seems as if help isn't on the way after all.