



16 Year Old Hosting Fundraiser to Benefit NAMI MN

Mental Illness affects 1 in 5 teenagers



S. ST. PAUL, August 29, 2016 – Emma Lewis, 16, decided to have fundraiser to raise awareness about mental illness and help stop the stigma for her 10th grade project in 2015. While others were making jam or redecorating their bedrooms for their projects, Emma stepped out of her comfort zone to share about her personal journey with depression with other teens, hoping that she could lessen the struggles for others and let them know they weren't alone.

Emma's project, MN Singing for Smiles, was created with the encouragement of family, teachers, classmates, and many S. St. Paul residents. If you ask Emma why she chose MN Singing for Smiles as the name she will tell you "Singing increases the endorphins which help the brains' 'feel good' chemicals. That is why I wanted a karaoke and lip sync fundraiser."

Francene Niemiec attended last year's event and offered to partner with Emma to help make MN Singing for Smiles an annual event. Francene lost a daughter to mental illness in 2008 and feels Emma's story is a great way to help raise awareness so teenagers and young adults felt ok reaching out for help.

Francene speaks out about mental illness publically because she has lost multiple family members to suicide due to the stigma around mental illness. She says "1 in 5 teenagers are affected by mental illness; most don't reach out to get help. It should be easy to seek treatment for a mental illness. You wouldn't choose to have diabetes, cancer or heart disease just like you don't choose to have a mental illness."

MN Singing for Smiles had over 300 participants, raised \$1700 in 2015 and has set a goal of \$4000 for 2016. This year's fundraiser is being held on September 18, 2016 from 2-6pm at the Gallagher Hanson VFW, Post 295 located at 111 Concord Exchange, S. St. Paul, MN. All proceeds will be donated to NAMI Minnesota on September 24th through NAMIWalks Minnesota, the largest event raising awareness about mental illnesses in the state. Visit www.namiwalks.org/team/MNSingingForSmiles to donate or join our Walk team.

MN Singing for Smiles is a group of individuals raising funds to support NAMI Minnesota (National Alliance on Mental Illness). Please go to www.namihelps.org for more information.

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