

# FY25 Annual Report to Stakeholders



**Naomi Ruth Cohen**  
Institute for Mental Health Education



**TheChicagoSchool®**





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# Letter From the Executive Director

Dear Friends, Partners, and Supporters,

My last few years with the Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute for Mental Health Education (NRCI) at The Chicago School have been an incredible time of remarkable growth. I'm thrilled to share with you what we've accomplished together and where we're headed next.

With your support, we've expanded our reach, connected with new audiences, strengthened partnerships, and continued to break down the stigma surrounding mental health and suicide. Through mental health education in schools (including K-12 and higher ed), community organizations, and professional settings, we are creating lasting change.

At NRCI we believe in showing up with knowledge, compassion, and practical tools. Whether training youth, facilitating professional development programs, hosting conferences, or building community resilience through Mental Health First Aid and QPR suicide prevention offerings, our goal is the same: help people to better support one another and make mental health part of everyday conversations.

This year, we celebrated an exciting milestone: welcoming Tunisha Potter as our first full-time Training Coordinator. I was also honored to be appointed to the board of the Illinois Department of Public Health Suicide Prevention Alliance, an important role that allows us to contribute more directly to statewide suicide prevention strategy. Together, these developments expand our impact even further.

Finally, we continue to walk in solidarity. NRCI and The Chicago School proudly joined the AFSP Chicago Out of the Darkness Walk in 2024, and we've already registered our team for 2025. We join our partners to walk for hope, healing, and change.

Thank you for being part of NRCI's journey.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tracy M. Levine".

Tracy M. Levine, MSW, LCSW  
Executive Director  
NRCI at The Chicago School





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# Summary Report: Year In Review

**June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025**



# Partnerships That Matter

We're proud to be connected with 40 external partner sites across sectors—and even prouder of the diversity of those partnerships:

- 42% Community-based organizations
- 26% K-12 schools
- 24% Higher Education
- 8% Corporate partners

This year, we welcomed **nine new partners to our network**, including four K-12 schools, four community organizations, and one corporate partner. A highlight: our partnership with **Chicago District Council 15** in Chicago's Austin neighborhood, led by Councilman Deondre' Rutues, an alum of The Chicago School.

In exciting news, the City of Evanston officially named NRCI as its lead Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) provider and community coordinator for 2025–2026. This recognition, made possible through \$50,000 in ARPA funding, reflects years of shared commitment and opens new doors to mental health training for the local community. In just the first three months, 68 City of Evanston employees, Emergency Volunteers and Library staff jumped in to pursue their certification. Participants shared, *"This course was extremely beneficial and, based on its value, I hope to continue with additional courses and resources learning necessary tactics in helping members of my community"* and *"Everyone should take this course!"*

MHFA is an evidence-based course that teaches people how to recognize and respond to signs of mental health or substance use challenges. Just like physical First Aid or CPR, it helps you support someone in crisis until professional help is available or the situation resolves. Participants learn a simple 5-step Action Plan to guide them in offering care and connection.

Plenty of opportunities are coming up for Evanston residents and organizations to get involved. Not living or working in Evanston? For more information or to schedule MHFA or other trainings for your group, organization or community, please contact us at [NRCInstitute@thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:NRCInstitute@thechicagoschool.edu).

Trainings are available in person and/or virtually and CEUs are available.





# By the Numbers: Events & Impact

**60**  
**Events**

**1,739**  
**Participants**

**107**  
**Sessions**

We held or participated in **60 events** in FY25, facilitating **107 training sessions** reaching **1,739 participants**, and we're not slowing down. Our events included:

- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for adults
- Youth MHFA (YMHFA) for adults interacting with youth
- Teen MHFA (tMHFA) for teens 14-18 in grades 9-12
- Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training
- Presentations on important topics like:
  - Safety Through De-escalation
  - Cultural Perceptions of Mental Health and Suicide
  - Mindfulness and Self-Care
  - Mental Health in the Workplace
  - Neurodiversity

Evidence-based MHFA training programs continue to deliver strong outcomes across youth and adult audiences. Participants report increased knowledge, confidence, and a greater willingness to act in support of mental health. **Across all program formats, over 90% of respondents rated the training as helpful or useful**, with participants describing the experience as meaningful and relevant.

The QPR training demonstrates strong immediate outcomes in awareness, confidence, and preparedness to act in a suicide crisis. Participants leave training with life-saving knowledge and a readiness to intervene with **95.3% of participants reporting feeling confident asking someone directly about suicide** and **100% feeling comfortable referring someone to mental health services/resources**. NRCI will be offering several virtual training options this September in honor of Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.





# Stories That Stay With Us

One of our most impactful initiatives this year has been supported by the W.P & H.B. White Foundation, bringing Mental Health First Aid into Chicago area high schools. From February 2024 to May 2025, we've trained 398 unique participants across 22 schools, including 185 teens and 213 adults.

*"Loved this course!"*



*"I think y'all really helped me."*

Teen participant surveys showed:

**98%** were glad they had the training; **96%** felt confident in supporting a peer

**97%** believed they could connect someone to help

**As of the last day of training more than 50% reported already using skills they learned**



Adults also showed powerful outcomes:

**85%** confident responding to substance use crises

**98%** likely to use what they learned to support youth

**4 out of 5** felt confident directly asking a youth if they're thinking about suicide

"So grateful we had the [YMHFA] training. I had a student who came in and their behavior was concerning. I recognized signs and took them to the office for support instead of sending them to Discipline. Turns out they had a traumatic experience."

- High School Head of Security

"Youth Mental Health First Aid has been a powerful resource for staff across our Options Schools. It equipped educators with practical strategies and a shared language to better recognize and respond to students in emotional distress, which is something our schools urgently need. The training helped shift mindsets and strengthened our commitment to building trauma-informed, student-centered environments."

- Brigitte Swenson, Deputy Chief of Options Schools, CPS



# Voices From the Field



We're humbled by the kind words from those who've participated in our trainings and partnered to advance our mission:

"I'm pleased to share the positive outcomes of previous mental health trainings for students, staff, and faculty... These workshops are a meaningful step toward prioritizing student well-being campus wide."

- Mayra Salgado, Roosevelt University

"This domain of life is one which is often not comfortably discussed... we need all the mitigation of myth we can muster."

- JA, MHFA Training Participant

"Cover My Mental Health's opportunity to present at the NRCI 2024 community mental health conference provided important momentum for our reaching patients and clinicians facing insurance obstacles to care. That CE-accredited workshop paved the way for more than a dozen follow-on presentations to clinicians at psychiatric and mental health programs around the country."

- Joe Feldman, Cover My Mental Health





# Conferences & Community Events



Larry Cohen

Since the first conference was held nearly a quarter century ago, the focus of the annual community mental health conference has been on bringing together mental health and other professionals, those with lived experience, and the public into timely, meaningful discussions about mental health issues that affect them, their families, and their friends and neighbors. In June 2024, our 22<sup>nd</sup> annual conference on **Mental Health in the Workplace** brought together 151 participants and earned stellar feedback - 100% of evaluations rated it "excellent" or "very good"! Conference attendees shared,

*"The theme... was right on target after the trauma of the pandemic... all afforded great chances to share experiences."*

*"Brilliant event! Looking forward to next year already."*

On May 17, 2025 we hosted our 23rd annual conference, **"Neurodiverse Brains: Understanding Differences, Empowering Potential"**. Approximately 165 people participated in person or virtually, and 98% indicated they would attend/recommend future NRCI conferences.

*"I have been attending the NRCI Conferences for almost 10 years. Each year it has gotten more enlightening. Keep up the great work!"*

*"Best conference! So well organized - interesting timely topics - plenty of helpful staff - affordable"*

*"Excellent event; current topics; knowledgeable speakers. Overall wonderful!"*

Our 24th annual conference will take place on **Saturday, May 16, 2026**, with a focus on **Loneliness**, a timely and vital topic. We hope you'll join us to connect, learn, and build community.

*Learn more and experience our conferences virtually at  
<https://naomicoheninstitute.org/conferences>*

Members of our team routinely present at the annual Illinois Association of School Social Workers conference as well as at other online and in person events. On the national stage, our Executive Director, Tracy Levine, co-presented a breakout session, "Breaking Down Barriers, Adapting and Addressing Challenges While Instructing a Course" at the Mental Health First Aid Summit in Philadelphia, PA on May 4, just ahead of NatCon25, the country's largest behavioral health conference.



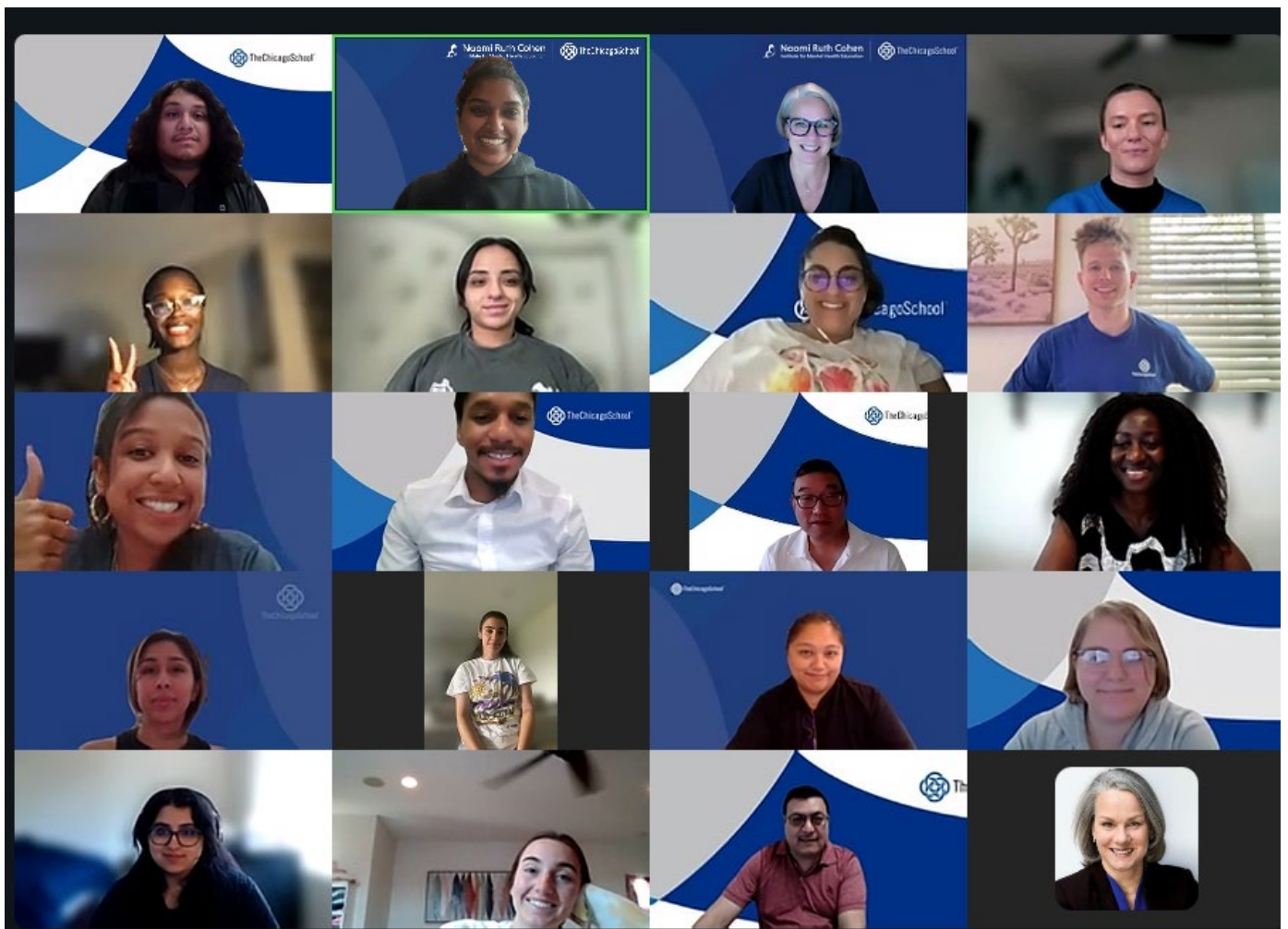
Tracy Levine



# Strengthening University Partnerships

We've also expanded our programming and impact within The Chicago School. This includes:

- Offering Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper training sessions to our students, staff, and faculty across all campuses.
- A six-course **Suicide Awareness, Assessment, and Intervention Micro-credential**, developed with the Office of Continuing Education and launched in June 2025. We're working with faculty at our Dallas and LA campuses to research program efficacy and potential publication.
- A new collaboration with the **Illinois College of Osteopathic Medicine**, scaling our training to bring QPR and Mental Health First Aid certification to incoming faculty, staff, and students – our integrated health providers of the future.





# Donor & Sponsor Recognition

We are deeply thankful to the individuals and organizations whose generosity fuels our mission. Their support helps expand our reach, reduce stigma, and bring vital mental health education to the community.

- Elizabeth Brown
- Doralu Chanen
- Lawrence and Marilyn Cohen
- Judith S. Cottle
- Mort and Reva Denlow
- Noah and Linda Finkel
- Robert and Linda Finkel
- Sanford and Fern Finkel
- Martin and Martha Fleishman
- Laury P. Franks
- Guy and Joan Gunzberg
- Tom and Nancy Hanson
- Joan and Josh Holleb
- William and Stacy Iannessa
- Garon J. Jones-Brown
- Jay and Judith Kopstein
- Tracy and Mark Levine
- Dan and Carol Madock
- Susan W. Melczer
- Sarah J. Miller
- Maura C. O'Connor
- Mark and Sandy Pietz
- Kimberly D. Ramsey
- Nancy and Michael Schwartz
- Joel and Lenore Wineberg
- Belmont Dental Care, PC
- SBB Research Group Foundation
- Anonymous (3)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention-Illinois
- Authentically You Eating Disorder Counseling
- Clarity Clinic
- Community Counseling Centers of Chicago
- Compass Health Center
- Corner Bakery Cafe
- Endeavor Health
- Erie Family Health Centers
- Impact Behavioral Health Partners
- Institute for Therapy through the Arts
- Mental Health America Illinois
- PEER Services, Inc.
- Plena Mind Center
- Prospect Music Therapy
- Relief Mental Health
- Riveredge Hospital
- Rogers Behavioral Health
- Starbucks
- The Schools We Need Now
- Thresholds
- Trilogy Inc.
- Turning Point Behavioral Health
- Wolcott College Prep
- Yellowbrick Foundation



Donations



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# Looking Forward: The Year Ahead



# Our Mission

As we move into FY26, we've refreshed our mission to reflect the organization we've become - deeply rooted in relationships, guided by lived experience, and grounded in our commitment to reduce stigma through community-driven mental health education and support.

The Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute for Mental Health Education at The Chicago School is committed to ending the stigma surrounding mental illness and suicide. We empower individuals, families, and communities by fostering understanding, expanding access to support, and encouraging honest conversations about mental health.

Through community outreach, training programs, and events, we provide education, elevate lived experiences, and inspire hope. Our work amplifies voices too often unheard, creating a more compassionate, informed, and stigma-free world.





# FY26 Goals

## **Goal 1: Develop and Launch a Multi-year Strategic Plan**

Advance NRCI's mission and increase visibility in alignment with The Chicago School's 2030 Strategic Vision. Highlight the four core elements—education, innovation, community, and impact.

### *Key Objectives:*

- Engage stakeholders in a collaborative planning process
- Define vision-aligned strategic priorities, initiatives, and success indicators with clear implementation timelines
- Elevate NRCI's presence within and beyond the university

## **Goal 2: Expand Mental Health Education Through Scalable Programs**

Enhance NRCI's impact by offering additional accessible, scalable training programs that reach diverse audiences. Focus on creating and developing standardized, adaptable curricula that can be delivered across multiple platforms to increase mental health literacy while maximizing resource efficiency.

### *Key Objectives:*

- Expand delivery of both NRCI developed and proprietary content with new and existing partners, in the community, and at local, regional and national conferences
- Drive scalable programs by reaching the practitioners of tomorrow at The Chicago School (future psychologists, physicians, etc.)

## **Goal 3: Strengthen Community Engagement Through Annual Conference & Strategic Program Partnerships**

Build deeper, more impactful community relationships by elevating the annual conference and developing a provider of choice model focused on quality sustained engagement.

### *Key Objectives:*

- Elevate annual conference as a premier forum on mental health in the Chicago area, increasing reach and driving impact
- Develop and add to existing partnerships; identify and define quality benchmarks for engagement (e.g., satisfaction, relevance, repeat partnerships)
- Increase NRCI/The Chicago School visibility by leveraging representation with community partners (LAN40, Healthy Minds/Healthy Lives, Mental Health Summit, Illinois Suicide Prevention Alliance)



# Resources to Know & Share

As we continue to raise awareness and build skills through our trainings and events, we want to ensure that everyone knows where to turn when support is needed. Mental health challenges can affect anyone, and help is always available. There are several free and confidential resources to support individuals and families:

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text **988** any time for 24/7 support from trained crisis counselors. (*Press 1 for Veterans, 2 for Spanish*)
- **Illinois Warm Line:** Call **866-359-7953** (Mon - Sat, 8am – 8pm) for emotional support from peer specialists who've lived through mental health challenges. Text TALK to 552020.
- **24/7 Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741/838255 for Veterans
- **311:** In Chicago and other local communities, dialing 311 can connect residents to mental health services and non-emergency assistance.
- **Living Rooms:** Walk-in centers that offer calm, supportive spaces for individuals in crisis or emotional distress. No appointment needed.
- **Mobile Crisis Response Units:** These teams provide on-site mental health support, often in collaboration with law enforcement or schools.

Check the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) website, Division of Behavioral Health & Recovery to locate services near you.

Please share these resources widely, they save lives. Additional resources can be located on our website: <https://naomicoheninstitute.org/>.

Please feel free to reach out by calling us at 312-467-2552 or emailing [NRCInstitute@thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:NRCInstitute@thechicagoschool.edu)







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The Naomi Ruth Cohen Charitable Foundation was established in 2000 by Lawrence and Marilyn Cohen to honor the memory of their daughter, Naomi, who lived with bipolar disorder and died by suicide. In 2002, the first annual community mental health conference was held, highlighting the essential role of lived experience and community in healing, connection, and raising awareness.

In 2008, the foundation became part of The Chicago School, evolving into The Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute for Mental Health Education (NRCI) at The Chicago School. This transition strengthened our platform and extended the reach of our longstanding commitment to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illness and advance suicide prevention.



**NRCI**