



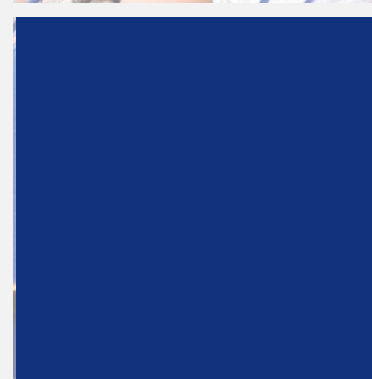
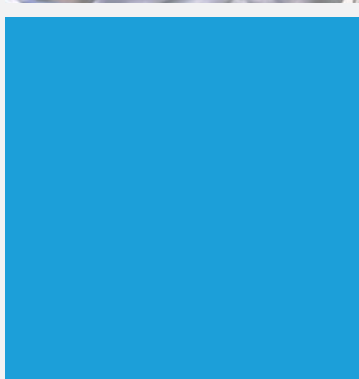
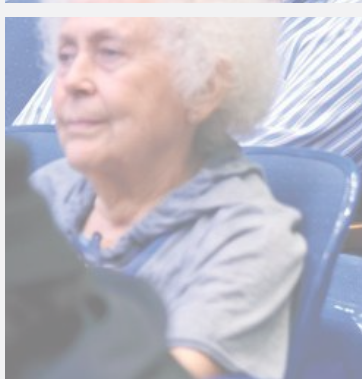
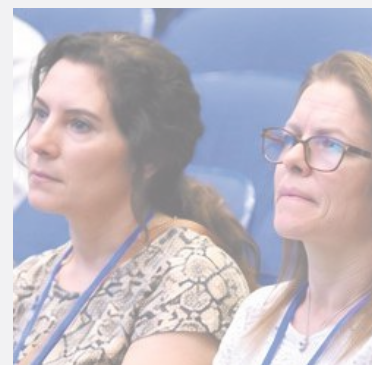
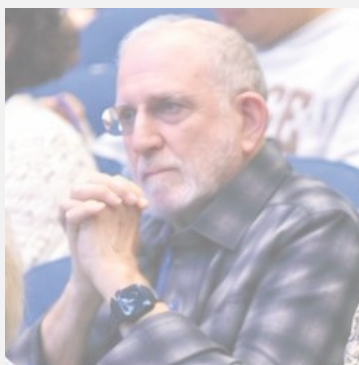
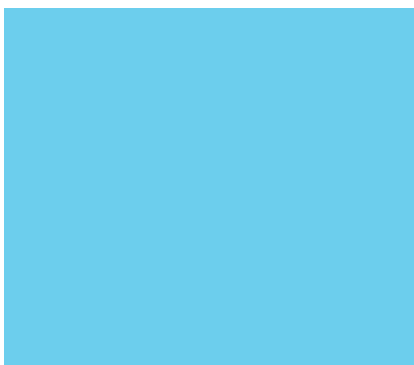
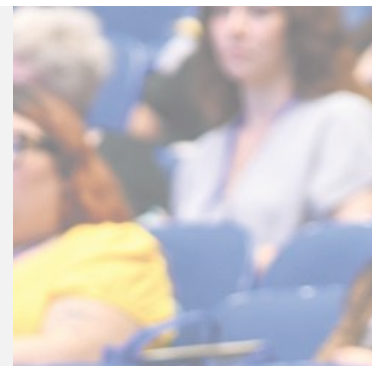
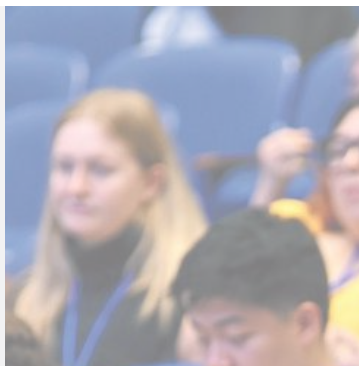
Naomi Ruth Cohen
Institute for Mental Health Education



TheChicagoSchool®

Annual Report

2025-2026



Dear Friends, Partners, and Supporters,

As I look back on the past five years in my role as Executive Director of the Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute for Mental Health Education (NRCI) at The Chicago School, I find myself reflecting not only on how much NRCI has grown, but on how much our work has deepened.

During that time, we have expanded our reach, strengthened partnerships, and created more opportunities for people to talk openly about mental health and suicide. At the heart of this work is NRCI's mission to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and suicide through education, conversation, and community engagement. We bring that mission to life by showing up with knowledge, compassion, and practical tools people can use in their schools, workplaces, campuses, and communities.

This year, that commitment was reflected in the continued growth of our education and training programs, our work with community and school partners, and NRCI's expanding role within The Chicago School. I am especially proud of the ways we are contributing to suicide prevention education and preparing students and professionals to recognize when someone may be struggling, respond with greater confidence, and connect people to support.

Our growth has also reinforced something I have come to appreciate even more during my time in this role: impact is not only about how many people we reach. It is about what happens afterward. It is reflected in the educator who responds with greater understanding to a student in distress, the participant who feels prepared to ask a difficult question, or the person who starts a conversation because they now have the knowledge and confidence to do so.

As we look ahead, we are focused on strengthening our strategic direction, expanding accessible and scalable programming, deepening high-value partnerships, and ensuring NRCI remains responsive to the communities we serve.

Reaching the five-year mark has given me an opportunity to appreciate how far we have come while recognizing how much opportunity lies ahead. I am grateful to our partners, supporters, colleagues, and participants who make this work possible.

Thank you for being part of NRCI's continued growth and impact.

Warmly,



Tracy M. Levine, MSW, LCSW
Executive Director





Impact at a Glance

June 1, 2025 - May 31, 2026

1,500+

Participants reached
across NRCI trainings,
events, and
educational programs

170

Participants at the 24th
Annual Community
Mental Health Conference
in person and online

440

Enrollments in NRCI's
Canvas Resource Course
*The Chicago School students,
staff, and faculty*

75

Training sessions delivered

62

Events hosted or participated in

20

Participants earned the
full Comprehensive
Suicide Prevention and
Intervention
microcredential

*176 individual course
sessions completed*

455

QPR Suicide Prevention
Gatekeeper Training
Participants
including 31 teens

353

Mental Health First Aid,
Youth MHFA, and Teen
MHFA Participants
including 15 teens



"This was a GREAT webinar/training! I felt empowered and moved, and I certainly feel much more confident in my ability to make a difference for someone who is feeling suicidal."

QPR Gatekeeper Training participant

"These skills will serve me well as an educator, neighbor, parent, and engaged member of my community."

Mental Health First Aid participant



Partnerships in Action

NRCI continues to deepen partnerships that extend mental health education into the communities, schools, and professional settings where people live, learn, and work.

EVANSTON: A PARTNERSHIP WITH MEASURABLE IMPACT

NRCI continued its two-year partnership with the City of Evanston to expand Mental Health First Aid education across the community. Running from January 2025 through December 2026, the initiative strengthens community capacity to recognize and respond to mental health and substance use challenges and connect people with appropriate support.

During the partnership's first calendar year (2025), NRCI delivered **14 Mental Health First Aid trainings**, reaching **227 participants**. Follow-up data showed impact beyond the classroom: 74% of respondents had used at least part of the Mental Health First Aid Action Plan, 98% reported improved ability to respond to mental health situations, and 88% had shared what they learned with others.

"Their expertise, responsiveness, and commitment to equity make them an ideal partner in expanding mental health resources... NRCI is an incredible asset to our community. We look forward to continuing and deepening our collaboration for years to come."

*Ike C. Ogbo, MPH, LEHP, Director,
City of Evanston Health & Human Services*

"NRCI's work reflects a broader commitment to making behavioral health knowledge practical, accessible, and actionable. It is not just education - it is empowerment."

Dr. Deondre' Rutues, 15th Police District Councilor

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP: CHICAGO'S AUSTIN COMMUNITY

NRCI's partnership with The Chicago School alumnus Dr. Deondre' Rutues continued to bring suicide prevention and mental health education directly into Chicago's Austin community. During the year, NRCI provided QPR Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training, participated in a community mental health awareness event, and helped connect a community-based grant opportunity with The Chicago School.

SUSTAINED HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

NRCI continued its multi-year relationships with Roosevelt University, Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, and Oakton College. At Rosalind Franklin, NRCI's mental health and suicide prevention education supports future healthcare professionals and strengthens campus capacity to recognize and respond to mental health concerns. At Oakton, repeat engagement reflects continued demand for practical mental health education. Together, these partnerships demonstrate NRCI's role as a trusted higher education partner and its ability to sustain relationships beyond a single training or event. NRCI training builds evidence-based skills and increases participants' confidence in responding to mental health concerns.

"The work of NRCI strengthens not only individual learners, but the culture of medicine we are striving to cultivate."

Shelly Brzycki, MS, Dean of Students, Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science



Education, Connection, & Visibility

24TH ANNUAL COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CONFERENCE

On May 16, 2026, approximately 170 participants joined NRCI in person and online for the 24th Annual Community Mental Health Conference, *Alone Together: Confronting Loneliness Across the Lifespan*. Through plenary discussion and 11 breakout sessions, the conference brought together mental health professionals, students, community members, and people with lived experience to explore loneliness, connection, and mental health across the lifespan, while advancing NRCI's mission to reduce stigma through education and open conversation.

FROM LEARNING TO ACTION

94% of this year's evaluation respondents reported being able to apply evidence-informed strategies to promote belonging, resilience, and meaningful connection in professional and community settings.

As NRCI approaches the conference's 25th anniversary, the event continues to provide an important forum for timely mental health education, lived experience, open dialogue, and community connection.

On May 15, 2027, NRCI plans to bring together voices from past conferences alongside new perspectives to reflect on progress in reducing stigma, explore what has changed, and consider the work still ahead.

EXPANDING NRCI'S VISIBILITY

NRCI expanded its external visibility this year through media outreach and conference promotion. Conference webpages drew more than 4,700 views, while spring 2026 radio interviews introduced broader audiences to NRCI and its work.

On WGN Radio, Tracy Levine joined Lisa Dent to discuss loneliness, meaningful connection, and the ways technology can both support and complicate human relationships. On WBBM Newsradio's *At Issue*, she joined Rob Hart for a broader conversation about NRCI, stigma, social media, mental health, and recognizing when someone may need support.

These interviews created new opportunities to raise awareness of the Institute, its annual conference, and its commitment to reducing stigma through mental health education.

"There's something very empowering in hearing someone say out loud what you've been thinking privately."

— Tracy Levine, WGN Radio, April 2026



Advancing NRCI's Next Chapter

NRCI'S 2026 – 2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

Developed with input from stakeholders, university partners, and NRCI's founders, the new strategic plan provides a framework for NRCI's next phase as a community-facing institute embedded within The Chicago School.

The plan advances a vision for NRCI to become a **trusted regional leader** in mental health education and suicide prevention through three strategic priorities:

BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO REDUCE STIGMA AND PREVENT SUICIDE

Deliver high-quality education, deepen sustained partnerships, engage students, and use outcomes data to strengthen impact.

ADVANCING REGIONAL LEADERSHIP IN MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Strengthen NRCI's visibility, credibility, and role as a trusted resource for applied mental health education across Chicagoland and The Chicago School community.

STRENGTHENING THE FINANCIAL FOUNDATION THAT FUNDS THE FUTURE

Develop sustainable funding, pricing, and partnership models that support accessibility and responsible growth.

STRENGTHENING NRCI WITHIN THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

NRCI deepened its integration across The Chicago School, expanding mental health and suicide prevention education for students and employees, supporting Student Wellness Week, and strengthening collaboration with university partners. The Canvas Resource Course reached 440 enrollments, while emerging collaboration with the Illinois College of Osteopathic Medicine created new opportunities to bring NRCI's expertise into healthcare education and workforce development.

STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

NRCI advanced a more diversified funding model through grant development, annual giving, sponsorship, fee-for-service programming, and partnership-based support. These efforts strengthened readiness for future growth while maintaining a focus on accessibility and mission alignment. A grant from the Megan Butz Foundation was secured for programming beginning in the coming year.



Looking Ahead

With the 2026–2030 Strategic Plan now in place, the year ahead shifts the focus from planning to implementation.

PUT STRATEGY INTO ACTION

Establish baseline measures, identify high-impact priorities, and create a consistent process for assessing progress and using data to guide decisions.

SCALE WHAT WORKS

Expand accessible, evidence-informed mental health and suicide prevention education while deepening sustained partnerships, strengthening student engagement, and increasing opportunities for scalable learning.

STRENGTHEN CAPACITY FOR GROWTH

Advance financial sustainability, resource planning, data and impact reporting, and the operational systems needed to support quality and continuity as NRCI grows.



SCALABLE SUICIDE PREVENTION EDUCATION

NRCI developed and launched the Comprehensive Suicide Prevention and Intervention Training, a six-session microcredential created in collaboration with The Chicago School's Office of Continuing Education. Supported by research and content development from a doctoral student fellow, the curriculum, initially delivered live, is now available as a six-hour asynchronous learning opportunity. During the year, 176 individual course sessions were completed, and 20 participants completed all six sessions and earned the full microcredential. The initiative provides a scalable way to extend suicide prevention education to current practitioners and the behavioral health workforce of the future.

LOOKING FORWARD

As NRCI enters its next phase, the goal is not simply to do more. It is to be increasingly intentional about where the Institute can create the greatest value: deepening partnerships, expanding access to practical mental health education, measuring meaningful outcomes, and building the capacity needed to sustain that impact.



Naomi Ruth Cohen

Institute for Mental Health Education



TheChicagoSchool®

400 S. Jefferson St

Chicago, IL 60607



With Gratitude

2025-2026 DONOR AND SPONSOR LIST

DONORS

Ana Friedrich
Anonymous
Anuradhika Roy
Daniel Madock
DaVel Kent
Diana Goldstein
Eli Cohen & Rachel Fleishman
Emily E. Holland
Felicia Bloom
Guy & Joan Gunzberg
Husani Hill
Ira & Nacy Sussman
Jennifer Kelber
Jessica D. Noesen
Joel M. Wineberg
Jonathan Singer
Kathleen Loomos Ostry

Laury P. Franks
Lawrence & Marilyn Cohen
Mark Pietz
Maura & Paul O'Connor
Monique Edwards
Mort & Reva Denlow
Noah A. Finkel
Paulette Dodson
Rachel Wolfson-Kahn
Robert & Linda Finkel
Robert H. Oldershaw
Sanford & Fern Finkel
Susan W. Melczer
Todd & Amy Steenson
Toi Houston
Vashti Horvat

SPONSORS

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention- Illinois Chapter
Ascension Saint Joseph - Chicago
Center for Thriving Schools
Endeavor Health
Erie Family Health Centers
Impact Behavioral Health Partners
Institute for Therapy through the Arts
Living Well Psychotherapy
Mental Health America Illinois
Rogers Behavioral Health
Simply Bee Counseling
Skyway Behavioral Health
Thresholds
Trilogy Mental Wellbeing
Turning Point Behavioral Health
Wolcott College Prep
Yellowbrick Foundation