



Amid Rising Youth Mental Health Needs, Champions for Children Leads the Charge
Event celebrates community experts, local resilience and partnership, with Bristol Myers Squibb stepping up as lead sponsor.

Washington, D.C. (10/1/2025) – The need for children’s mental health support is urgent: **one in seven adolescents ages 10–19 experiences a mental disorder, and depression, anxiety, and behavioral conditions are leading causes of illness and disability** in young people, according to the World Health Organization. The consequences of failing to address children and adolescent mental health can extend into adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to thrive.

Against this backdrop, Champions for Children—a membership organization of women passionate about children’s mental health—hosted its *Countdown to World Mental Health Day* event on Tuesday, September 30. Sponsored at the Hero level by **Bristol Myers Squibb**, the evening brought together leaders, advocates, and community members to recognize grantees and honorees making a profound impact on children’s mental health. The results are impressive:

- Over \$95,000 raised, providing funding to three organizations (see below), providing direct mental health services to our youth
- 3 honorees leading the way in clinical research, advocacy, legislation, and community outreach
- Our first HERO sponsor, Bristol Myers Squibb leading the way as an example of corporate participation
- Over 34 sponsors, raising critical funds to serve children and families that will be left behind following nationwide cuts in services
- Over 100 attendees gathered for a shared purpose
- Surprise citations from Senator Van Hollen recognizing the amazing work of our local champions

The 2025 event highlighted three grantee organizations:

- **Morgan’s Message** – Founded in honor of Morgan Rodgers, who died by suicide in 2019 at the age of 22, Morgan’s Message works to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health in athletics and to elevate mental health as equal to physical health.
- **The Lourie Center for Children’s Social and Emotional Wellness** – Serving more than 4,000 children and families annually in the Washington metro region, the

Lourie Center provides prevention, early intervention, education, and treatment services to strengthen children's emotional health.

- **Safe Shores—The DC Children's Advocacy Center** – A direct-service nonprofit dedicated to supporting children who are victims of abuse, Safe Shores coordinates medical, mental health, legal, and social service professionals to reduce trauma and promote healing.

The evening also honored individuals and organizations advancing children's mental health:

- **Dr. Joyce Harrison** – A nationally recognized child and adolescent psychiatrist at Kennedy Krieger Institute and Johns Hopkins University, honored for transforming access to youth mental health care.
- **Maryland Delegate Jamila Woods** – Recognized for her legislative leadership ensuring access to responsive mental health care in schools and communities across Maryland.
- **Stroll Magazine** – Celebrated for elevating the importance of children's mental health through storytelling and community engagement.

Special congressional citations were presented from **Senator Chris Van Hollen** in recognition of Champions for Children's honorees and the organization's ongoing commitment to addressing the children's mental health crisis.

"Supporting our children's mental health is foundational to ensuring they can learn and grow with confidence. Champions for Children and its partners are doing vital work to strengthen the communities that care for our kids—connecting them with the behavioral health resources they need to thrive," said Senator Van Hollen.

With government cuts threatening mental health services, Champions for Children President **Paula Widerlite** emphasized the importance of filling critical gaps. She cites the Pew Research Center, which conducted a 2022 survey of nearly 4,000 parents, found that the number one worry is that their kids may be struggling with anxiety or depression...this is above all other worries (bullying, violence, other safety risks).

"So we can't afford to ignore these numbers. "Our grantees are stepping up where resources are being dismantled, and that's why we are proud to stand with them to provide children and families the support they need, right here in our region."

The evening's success was made possible in part by the generous support of lead sponsor **Bristol Myers Squibb**, whose Hero Sponsorship reflects the company's commitment to advancing children's mental health and well-being.

For more information about Champions for Children, membership opportunities, or to learn how to support the mission, visit www.championsforchildrenc.org.

About Champions for Children:

Champions for Children is an organization of women passionate about children's health and wellness. They raise their voices to ensure that every child can access the necessary resources in their communities, schools, and at home. The volunteer Board of Directors coalesces around a common mission of raising awareness and funds to impact the children's mental health crisis. It is committed to moving from awareness to action. We are motivated by a vision of a world where every child has access to the resources they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

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