

Making a splash with Wave of Support

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Dr. Kathy Fields and Dr. Garry Rayant committed to an additional \$3 million endowed fund to support Wave of Support, a campuswide, collaborative program that supports students' mental and emotional health at Tulane. (Photo by Dominic Scott, Gigsy)

Amid an epidemic of mental health issues among college students and young people nationwide, Tulane University is emerging as a leader in confronting this crisis. Wave of Support is a campuswide, collaborative program that supports students' mental and emotional health at Tulane. In 2021, Dr. Kathy Fields and Dr. Garry Rayant generously contributed their support, guidance and leadership to our university to help conceive and provide a pilot of the program with an initial gift of \$750,000. After this successful pilot, Tulane launched the full Wave of Support in August 2022

as a partnership between Newcomb-Tulane College and the Division of Student Affairs. The program found instant success and has already engaged with thousands of Tulane students through its highly interconnected array of student support offices. These departments stand united in their goal of building a healthier campus by enhancing the holistic experience of our students in the realm of wellbeing.

Using the Eight Dimensions of Wellness as a foundation, Wave of Support facilitates a wide variety of initiatives, including providing the campus with a suicide prevention tool called Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Training, the GydEd Chatbot, Faculty Advocates, Tulane's Active Minds Chapter and more. In September of this year, Drs. Fields and Rayant committed to an additional \$3 million endowed fund to support the initiative long-term, and they invite other donors to contribute to this essential and impactful program.

In one of its most successful ventures, Wave of Support brought to life the Mentor Institute, which serves over 600 students in 18 mentoring roles across 10 campus offices. The institute provides a universal, consolidated training program for all student mentors and supports them throughout their mentoring experience. Over 400 students have already completed the 2023-24 Mentor Institute course, learning about mentorship, cross-cultural communication, campus resources, suicide prevention, their responsibilities related to Title IX and bias response and more. Whether a student is serving as a Resident Adviser, a Newcomb Peer Mentor, a First-Year Seminar Peer Mentor, or all three, the Mentor Institute prepares them to care for their own wellness while also supporting their peers.

By empowering Tulanians to define and foster their own wellbeing, Wave of Support creates a community that is prepared, encouraged and confident in supporting oneself, one another and the broader Tulane community. Wave of Support utilizes innovative, theory-backed practices to build a pathway to individual and collective mental wellbeing through a campuswide commitment to self-care and empathy. The initiative enhances self-advocacy, positive skill building and a culture of deep attention to mental health as it pertains to all practices of the university.

"Tulane University is profoundly appreciative of Dr. Fields and Dr. Rayant for their outstanding support of our student body. The positive impact of their generosity — and how it positions Tulane to become a leader in mental health support for students — will make this program a template of excellence for similar programs at other universities worldwide. We simply couldn't be more grateful," Tulane President

Michael A. Fitts said.

Each department within Newcomb-Tulane College plays a critical role in fulfilling this mission. As crucial support providers, NTC staff members are often the initial touchpoint for students when they need assistance or additional support. Staff members work with students to provide individualized support, as well as connect them directly with the appropriate support offices to meet their unique needs. Wave of Support further empowers our staff members with special training and access to research-based resources to foster connection and meaning within their student relationships. Asking for help can be hard, but these relationships make students feel more comfortable opening up to staff members, which increases their access to mental and emotional health resources and improves the overall health of the Tulane community.

“It is incredibly important for colleges and universities to support the mental health of their students, and Wave of Support engages the entire Tulane community in this effort,” said Sam Bruce, program manager for Wave of Support. “This program is creating a space for deeper conversations and action around mental wellbeing, and that’s the foundation for meaningful, long-lasting change.”