



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
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Ramapo College Hosts *Send Silence Packing* Event

Exhibit of 1,100 backpacks represents college students lost to suicide each year

MAHWAH, N.J. -- Each year, approximately 1,100 college students lose their lives to suicide. On Wednesday, September 20, members of the Ramapo College of New Jersey campus and health and wellness organizations hosted a powerful event to raise awareness for mental health issues among young people who suffer from their effects.

Send Silence Packing is a traveling exhibit of 1,100 backpacks representing college students lost to suicide each year. Many of the backpacks were displayed with photos and personal stories of those affected by suicide. In recognition of its commitment to mental health awareness and suicide prevention, Ramapo College is one of only 17 institutions across the country selected to host the exhibit. The College also hosted the event in 2011.

Among the guest speakers was New Jersey State Senator Sandra Cunningham, Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee.

“When we send our young people to college, we send them with a sense of hope and an opportunity to find who they want to be and what they can accomplish,” said Senator Cunningham. “We often don’t think about the other side—the stress and the inability to feel part of a larger group of people. When we look at each backpack, we are reminded that it isn’t just a number but it represents a young person who may have been searching for help. This exhibit is so powerful; it’s an opportunity to see the reality.”

Ramapo College Board of Trustees Chair George C. Ruotolo, Jr. set his prepared remarks aside and offered emotionally charged words. “I didn’t know what to expect when I arrived. I am overwhelmed,” he told the large crowd, recounting his own experiences with young people who took their own lives. “I am thankful for all your efforts in caring for yourselves and for others... I’m inspired by the work you’re doing.”

Send Silence Packing is a trademarked program of Active Minds.

Co-sponsors for the event were The Wellness Coalition, The Center for Health and Counseling, The Center for Student Involvement, Mahwah Stigma Free Task Force for Mental Health, and the Community Health Improvement Partnership of Bergen County.

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Ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the top in the Best Regional Public Universities North category, Ramapo College of New Jersey is sometimes viewed as a private college. This is, in part, due to its unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its size of approximately 6,000 students and its pastoral setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include nursing and social work. In addition, Ramapo College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels. The College also offers eight graduate programs as well as articulated programs with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New York Chiropractic College, New York University College of Dentistry, SUNY State College of Optometry and New York College of Podiatric Medicine.