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Mental health initiatives join forces to reach tri-city area

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This time last year, Gerda Klein was focused on starting the [Boynton Beach](#) Mental Health Initiative.

After a successful first year for Klein and her co-founder Lorraine Michaelis, the focus this year is to start the South County Mental Health Coalition and team up with other cities to focus on breaking the stigma of mental illness.

Klein lost her son, David, four years ago in April to suicide after he had been dealing with bipolar disorder all his life.

In the past year, Klein has helped to bring informational sessions to venues like the Hagen Ranch Branch County Library, the [Boynton Beach](#) City Library and in [West Boynton](#) at **Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations**.

"The first year has been great," Klein said. "With the **COBWRA**, they cover 88 communities and are an important group. That meeting was on teen issues and early signs of depressions in youth."

Klein is all about helping parents to discover the signs of depression or bipolar disease early in their child's development. She often wonders what could have happened to her son if he had been diagnosed early.

Klein said once Rita Thrasher of the Boca Promise Alliance for Youth saw that her [Boynton Beach](#) project was clicking, she decided it was time to unite the cities through the South County Mental Health Coalition.

Thrasher said the idea behind the South County initiative is to gain information about how each other is doing and take the best from each of the cities, including [Delray Beach](#), [Boynton Beach](#) and [Boca Raton](#).

"The time is now that the community should get info for all ages, even seniors on mental health," Thrasher said.

She said mental health could correlate and be responsible for even the most serious issues, including school drop-out rates and overcrowding in jails.

As for the youth, one in eight adolescents may suffer from depression. Of all the teens struggling with mental and emotional behavior problems, 70 percent go without any sort of treatment, so the county initiative aims at treating teens with mental illness early and often to avoid the school dropouts Thrasher spoke about.

Klein said the first annual meeting of the new county group would be in May and then the group would meet quarterly to discuss how each city is working.