

Big Daddy Tazz brings mental health message to Altona high school students

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The Altona Elks' annual Teen Mental Health Workshop came back bigger and better than ever on Friday as students from W.C. Miller Collegiate crowded into the school's gym to hear comedian and motivational speaker, Big Daddy Tazz in a presentation hosted by the local service club.

The workshops started four years ago after a few members of the local Elks lodge had children that were struggling with mental health issues, explained member Colleen Mullen, who says she has dealt with her own mental health struggles.

Only about a dozen kids showed up to the inaugural workshop that was held on a Saturday afternoon, which Mullen believes is due to the obvious stigma attached to

mental health. By bringing Big Daddy Tazz into the school, that created a captive audience, and Mullen feels they likely will have helped a lot more kids. The group used funds raised from its regular Chase the Ace event to pay for the session. "I'm glad we invested the money," noted Mullen.

"I thought it was very good. Bringing comedy into it, I think helps the kids. I was very impressed how engaged he is. He knows what he's talking about. He's been there, he's had issues. I think he did an excellent job and I'm very happy."

A driving force behind Friday's presentation was 17-year-old Aria Ginter. She joined the Altona Elks when she was 16 after her grandma persuaded her. They now attend regular meetings together.

Ginter was inspired to take action after participating in the Elks leadership program.

"One of the things we talked about was, what can we do to help in our community? Right after, this popped up. I went to my school, and I talked about it with my Principal and Miss Tonna (the school's guidance counsellor). They were really hands-on and on board with this talk about mental health in our school, especially that we have mental Health Week, which was this week for us."

"I think it's really good just seeing someone else who's able to talk about it," added Ginter following Friday's presentation. "Especially with a lot of people in our school were even interacting, which we don't really get often when we have public speakers."

Following his presentation, Big Daddy Tazz took a few minutes to answer questions that had been previously submitted by students. He also hung around to snap pictures with the students and even personally follow up with a few of them.