

## How 5 student entrepreneurs built a mental health tool for their peers



*Mihir C., Priscilla S., Gibby H., Kate M., and Kathleen B., Founders, Communal Mind*  
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COVID led to an increase in student mental health struggles—but this group of students banded together to help their fellow students.

In 2020, the National Council for Mental Wellbeing reported that one in six children under the age of 18 experiences a mental health disorder each year. The pandemic has drastically changed the lives of high schoolers as academic institutions shifted to online or hybrid learning, leading to increased feelings of anxiety, depression, and isolation.

To prove that data point for ourselves, we conducted our own mental health survey, which revealed 100 percent of respondents knew someone suffering from a mental health-related illness. Yes, 100 percent.

That's when we discovered the need to develop a new peer-led support tool for students who are experiencing mental health difficulties. Concerned by watching our peers drown in anxiety and depression, we decided to create an accessible and supportive safe space for our classmates and for our own mental health research.

## **A compassionate business: Meet Communal Mind**

Communal Mind is a social community platform designed for students with mental

health concerns. Visitors to the website will be able to share their journey in a supportive and non-judgmental environment through community forums. Members of the Communal Mind community will also be encouraged to share self-care tips and helpful coping suggestions.

A motivational reminder is posted to the platform each day, and 40-minute live streams led by a variety of mental healthcare professionals and organizations will be hosted weekly on Zoom.

We designed Communal Mind not only to provide support for those struggling, but to bring awareness to mental health so no one feels alone in their situation. In addition, the online platform means anyone, anywhere can access these resources.

## **Collaboration in a digital age**

Once we created the concept behind Communal Mind, we made our pitch to a panel of business professionals, entrepreneurs, and volunteers within our local community. From there, the judges awarded teams funding to develop a minimum viable product (MVP). Working with our MVP over the last few months, we conducted more research and concluded there was a need for our start-up. A final big pitch was made to the judges showing the results from the use of the MVP funding, in addition to a final overview of Communal Mind.

Though our pitch was successful, COVID-19 presented numerous challenges to the traditional collaborative process. Meetings were conducted via Zoom and FaceTime instead of in person. We admit it was difficult to stay motivated when working from home. However, we maintained our forward momentum and now realize the unique circumstances helped us develop skills useful for real-world business situations. With the limits presented by COVID-19, we had to adapt and focus more on time management.

We intend to continue to work together to take Communal Mind to the next level by collaborating with mental health professionals for guidance to ensure authenticity and safety for members. We hope to press on with engineering the mental health-focused social media platform—with the ambitious goal of being up and running by the fall.

## **“Knowing I could start a business as a 16-year-old was always a goal of mine”**

We met in a youth entrepreneurship program offered by our school, Barrington High School in the Chicago suburbs. We were all driven by a passion for entrepreneurship, and the desire to create and run our own company. We credit Shark Tank, the cutthroat television show for inventors and entrepreneurs, as the reason we initially signed up for INCubatoredu, a full-year course providing us the opportunity to develop our own product or service start-up through collaboration and mentorship.

For others, the opportunity for exposure to business was the most appealing aspect. We were interested in the amazing business experience and real-world practice. For Kathleen, the experience confirmed her goals of majoring in business in college. The opportunity to create our own business in high school helped us prepare for college and the real world.

We are in charge of the future of our business. We have investors and cheerleaders. We all look forward to the next phase of Communal Mind and using our skills and knowledge to help others.

*eSchool Media Contributors*

**Mihir C., Priscilla S., Gibby H., Kate M., and Kathleen B., Founders, Communal Mind**

Mihir C., Priscilla S., Gibby H., Kate M., and Kathleen B. are the [founders and creators](#) of Communal Mind and students at Barrington High School. Keep up with the development of Communal Mind on [Instagram](#).