One of the newest Shared Interest Groups (SIGs), Harvard Alumni for Mental Health (HAMH), drew about 30 alumni to its inaugural Reunion Weekend Event on May 31, including a member of the fiftieth-reunion class.

Founded last July, the group aims to connect alumni interested personally or professionally in mental health (particularly that of college students and young adults) and mental-health policy, creating a network “to support each other and current Harvard undergraduate and graduate students also interested in the topic.” HAMH is not a therapeutic resource for mental-health care. Instead, it enables students involved with the College’s peer education and counseling groups who want to continue in the field to meet alumni who can mentor and advise them, and keeps older members updated on relevant issues on campus and the concerns of more recent graduates.

For former psychology concentrator Annie Douglas ’12, now a first-year medical student at Penn, organizing HAMH built on undergraduate experiences: as a sophomore, she became a student mental health liaison (SMHL), an early participant in the program (www.harvardsmhl.org) founded in 2008 by concerned students and the Harvard University Health Services (HUHS) department of behavioral health and academic counseling. (Her role in helping residents of her own House cope after the death of a fellow student was recognized with an Aloian Memorial Scholarship.) She spent part of a postgraduate year at UHS setting up the SIG, encouraged by HUHS director Paul Barreira (the former director of behavioral health and academic counseling). Alumni, often former SMHLs, who read articles in the Crimson and elsewhere about students’ mental health tended to contact Barreira, Douglas explains; that prompted the idea of founding a SIG. (Douglas, Barreira, Malorie Snider ’09, who helped found the SMHL program, and Mark Albanese ’83, a psychiatrist affiliated with Cambridge Health Alliance and Harvard Medical School, make up the HAMH board.)

A website is in the works, Douglas reports; meanwhile, the roughly 70 members keep in touch through Facebook and e-mail (harvardmentalhealthsig@gmail.com), sharing articles, for example, that touch on their subjects of concern. The most recent recommended reading is “We Need to Talk,” an op-ed by Lanier Walker ’14 that appeared in The Harvard Crimson in April. After describing her own struggles with anxiety attacks, Walker wrote: “I’m personally terrified of writing this article, of the consequences of putting my life out there for anyone with Google to find. But I think it’s worthwhile. And it’s the only way to get and give the support that we all need.” The responses to her powerful essay from alumni as well as fellow undergraduates suggest HAMH has identified an important role for itself in the community.

For a complete list of SIGS, visit http://alumni.harvard.edu/haa/clubs-sigs/sigs-directory.