



Join the Conversation Campaign Expands Into Niagara County

More friends, family members, neighbors and co-workers will have the opportunity to Join the Conversation to end the stigma of mental illness.

The Join the Conversation campaign will expand into Niagara County with a \$45,000 grant from the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH). Recognizing the success of The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition's efforts in Erie County, activities will build awareness of mental illness to encourage people to seek the help and treatment they need.

The Coalition's work in Erie County began in 2017 and has used a comprehensive, multi-media campaign, including broadcast, website, social media, digital advertising, email and grassroots tools to get the message out. A total of 62 organizations and businesses have joined the Coalition and more than 3,240 individuals have taken the pledge to end mental illness. The pledge seeks to eliminate harmful labels like "crazy" or "nuts" in everyday language and is found on letstalkstigma.org.

"We feel very fortunate to have received funding from the New York State Office of Mental Health to expand the Join the Conversation campaign into Niagara County," said Karl Shallowhorn, chair, Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition.

"This is a very logical step in the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition's goal to eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness. By partnering with the Niagara County Department of Mental Health, as well as other agencies and organizations, more people will hear our message, seek help and live healthier lives," he said.



"As a founding member of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition, I am energized to learn of the NYS Office of Mental Health's announcement to provide funding to the Erie County Anti Stigma Association's Join the Conversation campaign," said John Grieco, acting Commissioner of the Erie County Department of Mental Health.

"Stigma knows no boundaries and this funding will allow us to further our reach by expanding the coalition's campaign into Niagara County. I am proud of the work and commitment of the coalition's dedicated membership to end the stigma associated with mental illness and grateful to the NYS Office of Mental Health for their continued support and leadership," he said.

Continued on Page 2

According to Grieco, Niagara County is the next most populated county in WNY and being contiguous to Erie County, expanding the Coalition's efforts into Niagara County was a natural fit.

Niagara County has 87,000 households. Grant funds will be used to increase digital and social media advertising, produce Niagara County specific materials, conduct outreach and host other events in the county.

Polling in Erie County found the awareness campaign increased people's comfort level in talking to their friends and family members about mental health issues. In 2016, before the Coalition launched its awareness campaign, 52 percent of respondents said they would be comfortable talking to family members if they felt they had a mental

health issue. That figure increased to 66 percent by 2018.

Laura J. Kelemen, LCSW-R, Director of the Niagara County Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, said, "We are very grateful to the Office of Mental Health for the grant funding that will allow the expansion of the Join the Conversation awareness and anti-stigma campaign. It is critically important that we let people across all of our communities know that there is help, and there is hope. The Join the Conversation campaign facilitates this awareness."

Letstalkstigma.org and social media platforms engage the public and encourage people to learn about mental health and take the pledge to end the stigma of mental illness.

Mental health resources are available here. ■

ARE YOU CONCERNED THAT YOU OR A LOVED ONE HAS A MENTAL ILLNESS? EACH ILLNESS HAS ITS OWN SYMPTOMS, BUT COMMON SIGNS OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN ADULTS AND ADOLESCENTS CAN INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable "highs" or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality)
- Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality ("lack of insight" or anosognosia)
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing "aches and pains")
- Thinking about suicide
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance

IF YOU, OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW, ARE SUICIDAL PLEASE CALL:

Crisis Services at 716-834-3131

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (toll-free) at 1-800-273-TALK

A Q&A with Horizon Health Services

Horizon Health Services, Inc. is a not-for-profit corporation that provides hope and healing for individuals and their families dealing with substance use and/or mental health disorders. Established in 1975, Horizon is the largest provider of outpatient mental health and substance use treatment in Western New York. We recently spoke with **Taylor Trusso** about Horizon's commitment to ending the stigma of mental illness.

Why did your organization choose to become a member of The Anti-Stigma Coalition?

Horizon is proud to be a member of The Anti-Stigma Coalition. This is a vital resource for our community that emphasizes the need to continue to build local networks, cultivate community relationships to share resources and provide education and access to support our community and those struggling with mental health disorders.

How does the campaign align with your work?

As we know, millions of people in the U.S. are affected by mental illness each year. At Horizon, it's important for us to measure how common mental illness is and how we can provide continued services and treatment resources for our patients and their families. We know that effective treatment makes recovery from behavioral health disorders possible. The Anti-Stigma campaign

has continued the conversation around mental illness in our WNY community and because of this, more community members are bringing their concerns to the forefront, reaching out for help and becoming more open to having these conversations due to the visibility of this campaign.

What impact is the Campaign having in the community, in your opinion?

The disease of mental illness presents an urgent public health crisis and impacts families in every neighborhood of our community. Education, prevention, and treatment are the most effective weapons. This campaign brings the availability of education and support to our community members and we are beyond lucky to have this collaboration and awareness as we work together to provide hope and healing to those in need each and every day. ■

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS



Visit letstalkstigma.org/current-members for more information on our current members

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE ERIE COUNTY ANTI-STIGMA COALITION

Does your organization, church, temple, or community group want to combine forces with our organization? Do you individually want to engage with us to stop the stigma of mental illness? Please consider becoming a member of our Coalition by completing our membership form at letstalkstigma.org/support/pledge.

It is going to take a massive community effort to move the needle on stigma, please become a part of the solution. Questions? Please contact Karl Shallowhorn, Chairperson, at kshallowhorn@chcb.net.

Visit our events page at

LETSTALKSTIGMA.ORG/EVENTS

For a list of local mental Health Events in your community

ERIE COUNTY
ANTI-STIGMA
COALITION

Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Founding Members:

BryLin Behavioral Health System • Children's Mental Health Coalition of Western New York, Inc.
Community Partners of Western New York • Compeer • Crisis Services of Erie County
Erie County Department of Mental Health • Erie County Office for People with Disabilities
Fellows Action Network • Fuerst Consulting Corporation • Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County
The Mental Health Advocates of WNY • Millennium Collaborative Care • Patrick P. Lee Foundation
Preventionfocus, Inc. • Telesco Creative Group • The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation