



Mental Wellness During Uncertain Times

Fear, uncertainty, anger, sadness, and loneliness – these emotions are common as our community and country reacts, to the COVID-19 outbreak. If you are feeling overwhelmed, don't let stigma prevent you from reaching out for help.

"The barrier to seek help is a lot lower because everyone is going through the same experience," Ken Houseknecht, executive director, Mental Health Advocates of WNY, said.

"Who isn't experiencing anxiety and depression?"

According to Houseknecht, many more people have joined the conversation about mental health and are sharing their personal challenges. He notes a positive outcome of the crisis may be people more willing to say they are struggling. The current environment is affecting individuals who are already dealing with depression and anxiety and those who are perhaps experiencing the issues for the first time.

"If you need help, get help," Houseknecht said. "While this has always been true, it is especially important now when normal supports are gone."

According to Houseknecht, the mental health community has risen to this challenge by adapting how they deliver services. They are using technology to maintain continuity and people can access virtual counseling, support groups and 12-step programs."

He notes that social media and technology have become lifelines for many people as they seek creative ways to interact with each other.

Lisa Prefontaine, M.S., LMHC shares that being forced to slow down is foreign to us and causes great disruption, but she suggests going back to basics of eating, sleeping, exercise and taking breaks from news and social media.

"As we are quarantined, it's important to prioritize our mental health," Prefontaine said. "People who haven't had depression and anxiety may develop these issues and people who have diagnosed depression and anxiety need to stay proactive and keep taking medication."

She offers a three-prong approach to work through the uncertainty.

"First, acknowledge that you are going to have worry, give yourself permission to be distracted and finally, find a counselor, perhaps online, someone who can work with you remotely," Prefontaine said.

Continued on Page 2



Continued from Page 1

Many agencies have extensive and helpful resource guides on their websites and crisis hotlines are in place to assist those in crisis.

- Crisis Services' 24-Hour Hotline at 716-834-3131
- 24-Hour Addiction Hotline 716-831-7007
- *Mental Health Advocates of WNY Community Resource Guide*

Mental Health Support and Resources:

- *Coping with Disaster or Traumatic Event*
- *Mental Health and Coping During COVID-19*
- *Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks*
- *Talking with your children about COVID-19*

"Powerlessness and loss of control is not easy, but there are still positive things to focus our attention on," Houseknecht said. "Consider reaching out to someone who is living alone, unemployed, sick, struggling with mental health or substance abuse." ■

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBER

Buffalo•Toronto
Public Media



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

Event Update

The member meeting scheduled for **May 19** will be rescheduled for October. Please stay tuned for upcoming Zoom and Facebook live events that will provide information about mental wellness, stigma and self-care during these unpredictable times.

Visit our events page at
LETSTALKSTIGMA.ORG/EVENTS
For updates on local mental Health Events in your community



10 Actions to Improve Your Emotional Health and Resilience

- Get enough (and better) sleep. Most people need 7–8 hours every night. Unplug from technology an hour (or more) before bedtime. Don't sleep with your phone nearby. Try to go to bed and get up at a regular time.
- Eat healthy foods. Replace caffeine, alcohol, and fast food with fruits, vegetables, and healthy proteins. Food affects mood. Small changes can make a big difference.
- Exercise regularly. To boost your energy, help you remain calmer and more focused, lower the symptoms of anxiety and depression, and get better sleep, exercise (even a simple walk) is powerful medicine.
- Be mindful. The past is gone. The future is not yet here. Enjoy the gift of this moment, which is why we call it the present. Dwell on what is right, not what's wrong. Be thankful for all the good in your life.
- Do things you love. Listen to music, garden, paint, or hang out with your cat or dog. Do things that put a skip in your step and a smile on your face.
- Cultivate spirituality. Faith has a positive impact on mood and mental health. It generates optimism, enriches relationships, creates support systems, and improves the quality of life.
- Limit technology. This is a biggie. Watch less TV, limit social media, and spend fewer hours on the phone. You'll feel better – a lot better.
- Invest in relationships. Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Stay close to your friends, especially those who are particularly anxious or isolated right now.
- Get help if you need it. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of humanity. We are meant for community. We need each other.
- Be kind to yourself. Flight attendants tell you to "put your own oxygen mask on first" in an emergency. You can't help others if you're gasping for air. Make your mental health a priority. Be good to yourself!



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.

A Q&A with Restoration Society, Inc.

Restoration Society, Inc. programs are rehabilitation communities founded upon the recovery vision that all individuals can lead active lives filled with hope and satisfaction and make valuable contributions to our community.

We recently spoke with **Nancy Singh, M.A., C.R.C., Chief Executive Officer of Restoration Society, Inc.** about the Join the Conversation campaign.



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

As a peer-operated agency and an agency grounded in recovery principles, we have witnessed the negative effects of stigma as an impediment to recovery while working toward housing, employment, family relationships, community connections, and educational goals with our customers. We have seen first hand the effects stigma has on child custody determinations, legal outcomes, and even counter-intuitive treatment options. Unfortunately, we have also endured the horrific effects associated with isolation, depression, and hopelessness resulting from stigma.

How are the people you serve impacted by stigma?

Stigma stalls or halts recoveries. People with mental health conditions have greater difficulty securing employment, which could lead to economic self-sufficiency, a heightened quality of life, a natural support network, and increased self-esteem. At times landlords are apprehensive to rent to a person with a mental health condition meaning housing options are limited and may result in homeless or extended

periods of homelessness. They may be denied custody of children, when receiving individualized supports may be effective and more appropriate. Due to these impediments, people with mental health conditions are often required to remain financially and emotionally dependent on systems, rather than enjoy the fulfillment and benefits of recovery. Stigma keeps people isolated, oppressed, reluctant to seek treatment, depressed and impoverished.

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

It has given a community wide approach to combating stigma by coming together in a grassroots manner to raise awareness, educate and dispel myths, which will eventually change attitudes. Consumers are very excited about this campaign and comforted knowing they are not fighting this battle alone. I think we are off to a very good start, but there is much more to do to fully evaluate impact. ■

ERIE COUNTY
ANTI-STIGMA
COALITION

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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