



Patients Adapt to Telemedicine Counseling

The coronavirus lockdown has disrupted most facets of everyday life, including mental health counseling and support services. Mental health providers that are members of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition quickly adapted to video technology platforms to continue essential services for new and existing patients.

According to Heather Mendyk, program director for Horizon Health Service's Transit Family Recovery Center, patients are able to receive counseling, psychiatric and other support services from the safety of their home or another remote location.

"During this sensitive time, there has been an increased need for people of all ages to reach out, connect with others, and receive help and support," Mendyk said. "We are experiencing an increased need for mental health and substance use support across the board, including an increase in healthcare and frontline workers seeking support as they work hard to keep us all safe."

Horizon Health Services provides treatment to patients ages 13 and up, and operates family recovery services, for new and existing patients. The agency provides specialized mental health and substance use counseling and psychiatric services for adolescents and their families with a focus on early intervention, education, skill development, improved communication and more.

"Telehealth services, including assessments for new patients are being offered through a safe and confidential video telehealth platform, as well as telephonically," Mendyk said.

Existing patients have been supported by their current treatment team in determining their personalized method for receiving services and for technological support. All new and existing patients are encouraged to prepare for their sessions by ensuring that they can participate from a quiet, private and confidential location.

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BryLin Behavioral Health Services transitioned to telehealth appointments on March 23 and is utilizing HIPAA-compliant technology to provide counseling services.

According to Lindsay Herndon, BryLin's director of outpatient services for mental health and substance use, the move to telemedicine was very smooth.

"Most clients have been happy to meet with their counselors via webcams," Herndon said. "These sessions are very similar to in-person appointments, and counselors can see body movement and facial expressions and can still measure progression."

Stigma continues to be prevalent during the lockdown and Herndon encourages anyone who is struggling to reach out and seek help.

"If you are struggling, it's highly likely everyone else is struggling, too," Herndon said. "Now is a great time to arrange an online session, find a quiet corner and talk to a counselor online."

The focus on mental health counseling is on overall wellness with counseling centered on symptom reduction and management; skill building; coping skills development; and support. Through their Child and Adolescent program, BryLin is now also accepting patients between the ages of 5-17 for telehealth sessions.

BryLin can also accommodate individuals in crisis and has beds available if hospitalization is necessary.

Many organizations are providing support by using technology to remain connected. Parent Network of WNY is hosting [online chat sessions](#) for parents of children with developmental disabilities.

Mental Health Advocates of WNY (MHA) employs several credentialed Youth Peer Advocates who facilitate peer support groups and provide 1:1 mentoring throughout WNY in schools and hospitals as well as for individuals and families. The use of online video and phone conferencing has kept this critical connection going during the stay-at-home order.

One-on-one student mentoring continues by phone. Support groups are held via Zoom and are a safe place for

teens and "20 Somethings" to discuss their concerns, work on their mental health and/or substance use struggles, and build skills to maintain their wellness and self-care.

For more information about MHA youth peer support groups and other youth peer services, contact peersupport@mhawny.org or call 716.886.1242 x 345, or call/text 716.245.5339.

MHA has published an [extensive resource guide](#) for the community including how to access mental health and grief support.

Jewish Family Services (JFS) is using technology for mental health clients including school-based youths normally served through the KidSuccess program. JFS is also offering telehealth counseling services to any individuals in the community that may be impacted by the stress of COVID-19. Call 720.248.4701 or email centralintake@jewishfamilyservice.org. ■

CRISIS SERVICES

24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 716-834-3131

Anyone of any age who is experiencing a personal, emotional or mental health crisis can call 24 hours a day. We provide crisis counseling, suicide prevention, support, information, and referral. We triage each call in order of emergency, so please be patient and stay on the line, your call is very important to us.

24-Hour Addiction Hotline: 716-831-7007

The Addiction Hotline is available for people living in Erie County. The Addiction Hotline delivers immediate engagement, assessment, and referral services for people suffering from a substance use disorder.

Kids' Helpline: 716-834-1144 or 1-877-KIDS-400

The Kids Helpline is a part of the Crisis Counseling Program. These services are 24/7 and offer immediate response and information on a variety of issues related to youth and their families.

Chautauqua County Hotline: 1-800-724-0461

24 Hour Erie County Domestic Violence Hotline: 716-862-HELP

For Shelter: 716-884-6000

24 Hour NYS Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline: 1-800-942-6906

Hearing Impaired? Use 711 (National Relay Service)

English Not Your First Language?
We have instant access to interpreters, 24 hours a day.

Mike Billoni Shares his Stigma Story



The following is an excerpt from Michael Billoni's acceptance speech for the Courage to Come Back Award from the Mental Health Advocates of Western New York on March 11, 2020:

I thank God and my angels every day for the miracles since my near-fatal bicycle accident nearly 30 years ago. Today, I look upon that life-changing day with appreciation and thanks. It truly opened my eyes to a much greater chapter in my journey.

The miracle surrounding the comeback from my physical injuries has been well chronicled. What has not been public is the comeback from the traumatic brain injury I suffered as a result of the accident.

ECMC and a multitude of prayers saved my life after surviving 17 hours of trauma surgery on September 17, 1992. When I was discharged after 44 days in the hospital, the doctors said I should take the year off from work to rest my brain injury.

I did not follow his suggestion and challenges continued when I suffered a mental breakdown a few years later that led me to being diagnosed with bipolar disorder. When the doctor said it was "a mental illness," I did not hear another word as I remember thinking "you will never mention this to anyone."

My wife and family, close friends and spiritual advisors knew some of what I was going through, especially the bouts of depression. What they did not know about were my suicidal thoughts and even an attempt nearly 10 years ago.

At this point, Jody Lomeo, CEO of Kaleida Health introduced me to Dr. Mark LiVecchi, DMD, MD, MBA Chief of Service for the Department of Rehabilitation at ECMC. After a series of tests, he said I had a traumatic brain injury, not bipolar and if I followed his direction and continued to pray, I would live a life I only dreamed of.

He was so right and today I plan to use these experiences to help the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition and provide hope to those struggling with depression, mental illness or thoughts of suicide.

All of us can help by not being afraid to reach out and talk to someone who has suddenly gone quiet or would rather stay under the covers than be up and around. Sometimes they just need someone to talk with.

On this journey, I will not be happy until society, the medical profession, and the media treat mental health like physical health.

Michael J. Billoni

Michael J. Billoni, managing partner of Billoni Associates. Billoni Associates is the newest organizational member of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition. Mike can be reached at mike@billoni.com.

"All of us can help by not being afraid to reach out and talk to someone who has suddenly gone quiet."

Michael Billoni

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight: A Q&A with The Community Health Center of Buffalo, Inc. (CHCB)



Since 1999, the Community Health Center of Buffalo, Inc. (CHCB) has been one of the leading health care providers in Buffalo, dedicated to providing a safety net to the uninsured and under insured by offering comprehensive primary care services in medicine and dentistry to a diverse population.

We recently spoke with **LaVonne Ansari, PhD, CEO, Community Health Center of Buffalo, Inc.** about the Coalition's efforts to eliminate stigma.

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

The leadership of the Community Health Center of Buffalo Inc. realizes the role we play in the communities we serve and how important it is to develop and maintain networking relationships with others serving those challenged by stigma and other mental health issues.

We are proud to have Karl Shallowhorn as our mental health educator. He is an excellent addition to the Anti-Stigma Coalition team!

How are the people you serve impacted by stigma?

Ninety percent of our patients live life everyday dealing with some form of stigma. Stigma knows no mercy to color, gender, socioeconomic level, LGBTQFI, or physical challenge. Anyone can be a target and most people are at some point in their lives.

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

Our patients are relieved and grateful to know they are not alone. Our counselors are able to help with referrals that aide with all types of issues, many of which are the collateral damage of some type of stigma – housing discrimination, employment, health insurance enrollment, and access to quality health care without regard for ability to pay. ■



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.

WELCOME TO OUR
NEWEST MEMBER

**Families
Together**
in New York State



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

Events

MAY 7 | Children's Mental Health Awareness Day

MAY 27 | Fathers Mental Health
& Wellness Virtual Summit

MEMBER MEETING | Our May 19th event
will be rescheduled for October

JUNE 4 | Foundations in Working with LGBTQ Persons

Resources

MUSEUM OF DISABILITY HISTORY,
A PROJECT OF PEOPLE INC.

Online Educational Resources & Lesson Plans

LOTHLORIEN THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTER,
AN AFFILIATE OF PEOPLE INC.

Fun Horse Videos, Activities, Pictures and Facts

**MAY IS NATIONAL MENTAL
HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH**

Stay tuned for upcoming Zoom/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



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