



## Pandemic Impacts Mental Health of Frontline Workers

Registered nurse Karen DiLiberta has constant worry that she will be exposed. A wound care nurse at Eastern Niagara Hospital, she and her coworkers quickly adapted to extensive PPE requirements and patient care protocol, which she describes as exhausting. She also has a personal routine to keep herself and her family safe.

When she returns home from her shift, she leaves her shoes in the garage, quickly showers and washes her uniforms immediately.

*"I don't have a lot of anxiety while I'm doing my job because I'm focused on my patients but coming home to my family is when the anxiety kicks in," she said.*

In the early days of the pandemic, community members dropped off countless pizzas, dinners, and treats to the hospital

which lifted the spirits of employees. DiLiberta relies on exercise for stress relief as well as talking with her coworkers. "We are our own support system because we are going through it together," she said.

A study conducted by Mental Health America (MHA) revealed that 93% of healthcare workers were experiencing stress; 86% reported experiencing anxiety; 77% reported frustration; 76% reported exhaustion and burnout; and 75% said they were overwhelmed.

Slightly more than three-quarters say they were worried about exposing their child to COVID-19, nearly half were worried about exposing their spouse or partner and 47% were worried about exposing their older adult family members.

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*We all know, as professionals, that we should take care of ourselves so we can help others, but we often are the first to throw that rule out the door when jumping to a crisis,” said Molly S. Short Carr, chief executive officer, Jewish Family Services of Western New York. “For frontline and hospital workers, we want it to be more than just a good idea to seek out self-care. We want to change the narrative so we know it is a part of our own professional responsibilities to care for ourselves. To seek out help and support when we feel overwhelmed. To make sure we are the best we can be for ourselves, our families, and the communities we serve.”*

## Mental Health Support for Catholic Health Associates

To address the mental health challenges of their associates, Catholic Health created two new resiliency resources to help them cope with the stress of the pandemic and encouraged use of supports already in place.

“Listening Hearts” are new and specialized counselors hired to supplement staff already working in the Spiritual Care Department. When the pandemic hit the west coast, Catholic Health prepared by hiring specialized counselors with experience in grief counseling, crisis management, critical incident stress debriefing, trauma-informed care, mental health, and substance abuse. The counselors offer individual and group listening and processing sessions, meditation sessions, prayer services, and workshops on coping, grief and loss, solution-focused and trauma care.

Catholic Health also has nationally certified chaplains on staff, representing a wide variety of denominations and backgrounds, with many of the same skill sets.

New for associates who need mental health support is CredibleMind, an online mental health and emotional well-being platform with access to evidence-based resources to support resiliency. CredibleMind is focused on prevention and early intervention and is available 24/7.

Catholic Health also created a Wellbeing and Resiliency Apps resource list to share with associates. Suggested apps include Anxiety Coach, Relax & Sleep Well, Self-Help for Anxiety Management, and many prayer and meditation apps.

## It's Ok Not to be Ok

Some concerns of first responders and essential workers during COVID-19 are shared on the Erie County website:

- *“Others doing the same job have become seriously ill.”*
- *“I’m concerned I will carry the virus home and infect my family.”*
- *“My friends and family are urging me to stop going to work because of the risks.”*
- *“Social isolation and imposed restrictions eliminate the ways I would usually handle stress.”*

The Erie County Department of Mental Health offers information and services [www2.erie.gov/mentalhealth/index.php?q=covid-19-resources-0](http://www2.erie.gov/mentalhealth/index.php?q=covid-19-resources-0).

Endeavor Health Services is offering specific evidence-based practice dedicated to helping people involved in this pandemic, called the COPE model. One such resource is offered by Endeavor Health Services. For frontline workers, the force and need to continue working can be extremely stressful while feelings of isolation, distraction, helplessness, and fear can be increased.

The Centers of Psychiatric Excellence (COPE) model for COVID-19 is a six session, individual telehealth intervention based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to address mental health consequences. The goal of ACT specifically designed to help individuals adapt to the negative emotions and behaviors. Learn more by calling Endeavor Health Services at 716-895-6701.

*The Western New York Trauma Recovery Network* is available to Buffalo Police Department and other first responders and health care providers responding to traumatic events of COVID-19.

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## “Everyone is Suffering”

The Mental Health Peer Connection is a peer-driven advocacy organization dedicated to facilitating self-directed growth, wellness and choice through genuine peer mentoring. Services include peer counseling, advocacy, independent living skills, information, and referral. All employees experience behavioral health issues.

While supporting their clients' mental health, employees are also dealing with their own challenges during the pandemic.

Maura Kelly, executive director, said it was a challenge of working remotely from her kitchen table during the early days of the pandemic. She struggled being apart from human contact and feared getting sick.

It was difficult helping clients while she herself was struggling, but family who encouraged her to continue with her current regimen of therapy changed everything.

Kelley has noticed a shift in the stigma of mental illness.

*“People are more willing to reach out, and people are finally listening,” she said. “No one is asking why anymore – they are asking how they can help,” she said. “No one has been chastised for dealing with mental challenges. Everyone is suffering and we are getting through it together.”*

Anyone overwhelmed with COVID-19 is urged to call the New York State Emotional Support Helpline at 1-844-863-9314 from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week. ■

Hospital and frontline workers are at the forefront of coping with the trauma of the pandemic. The longer hours and added stress can have a compounding effect on both physical and mental health. The pandemic threw everyone's lives into a spin. During times like this it is important to ensure we can be compassionate and empathetic to each other to keep moving forward every day. Frontline workers need a safe space to help debrief, destress, and feel supported so they can be prepared to continue to provide vital services. JFS' goal is to make sure support is easily available, both long and short-term.

MOLLY S. SHORT CARR, PH.D.

Chief executive officer, Jewish Family Services of Western New York

## How to Build Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Communicate with your coworkers, supervisors, and employees about job stress.
  - Talk openly about how the pandemic is affecting your work.
  - Identify factors that cause stress and work together to identify solutions.
  - Ask about how to access mental health resources in your workplace.
- Remind yourself that everyone is in an unusual situation with limited resources.
- Identify and accept those things which you do not have control over.
- Recognize that you are performing a crucial role in fighting this pandemic and that you are doing the best you can with the resources available.
- Increase your sense of control by keeping a consistent daily routine when possible — ideally one that is similar to your schedule before the pandemic.
  - Try to get adequate sleep.
  - Make time to eat healthy meals.
  - Take breaks during your shift to rest, stretch, or check in with supportive colleagues, coworkers, friends and family.
- When away from work, get exercise when you can. Spend time outdoors either being physically active or relaxing. Do things you enjoy during non-work hours.
- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting and mentally exhausting, especially since you work with people directly affected by the virus.
- If you feel you may be *misusing alcohol or other drugs* (including prescriptions), ask for help.
- Engage in *mindfulness techniques*, such as breathing exercises and meditation.
- If you are being treated for a mental health condition, continue with your treatment and talk to your provider if you experience new or worsening symptoms.

# A Q&A with Explore & More-The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Children's Museum

Explore & More-The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Children's Museum is a world-class children's museum that celebrates the power of child-led play. With four floors of fun to explore, the 43,000 sq. ft. museum sits at the crossroads between replica canals and bridges that have become year-round community destinations. The museum reflects that sense of place with thoughtfully crafted exhibits that help children develop a deeper sense of our world, our community and their place in it in a fun and engaging way for children and adults alike. We recently spoke with **Michelle Urbanczyk, chief executive officer**, about the importance of children sharing their feelings and providing resources to parents and caregivers.



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

*Explore & More-The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Children's Museum became a part of the Coalition because we believe that our children deserve a strong foundation and mental health is a part of that foundation. We are a community-based museum where we welcome all children and their caregivers to a non-judgmental place where they are free to learn and play. Since the pandemic, we have seen first-hand and have listened to our parents discuss their concerns, stresses and restlessness caused by Covid-19.*

*Families have said that they are experiencing an increased level of stress, anxiety, conflict, depression, and hopelessness since the pandemic. Being aware that our families and children can openly talk about their feelings is a wonderful first step, the next is understanding the network of community resources that families can turn to. Therefore, we are a part of this Coalition.*

*We will continue to be a place that was specifically designed for and built for children. A place where children feel safe, free to explore and express themselves through play.*

## How are people with mental health challenges impacted by stigma?

*We all need to be able to express our feelings, this especially relates to children. Ending the stigma is critical for our children to grow up healthy and strong, being able to openly share how they are feeling and seek help when needed without fear of being shamed. For too long, we have not talked about Mental Health out of fear*

*that we will appear weak, that we will be judged or simply trying to ignore it by thinking that everything is fine.*

*For our parents and caregivers, it is increasingly hard as many are coping with their own mental health struggles while raising children. We have learned that many of our parents/caregivers have simply been at a loss of how to recognize a mental health issue their child is experiencing and how to start the discussion. In many situations, parents/caregivers thought that their child would grow out of it. Ignoring, denial and fear is never the answer. Parents and caregivers need to understand that it starts with them. Being unafraid to seek resources, find the words and be a supportive adult is what children need to gain coping skills to navigate their mental health journey.*

## What impact is the Campaign having in the community?

*The impact is simple, yet life changing-just talk about it! Let others know your story, educate, and discuss and there will be less isolation. For our children, simply talk openly that mental health is just as important as physical health. Just like physical health and getting your checkups throughout your life, you will need to have your mental health checkups too.*

*We are proud to be a part of an amazing network. Since we started partnering with the Coalition, we have had age-appropriate curriculum through Storytime, hands-on activities and educational programs that focus on mental health issues that our children experience.*

*Through this collaborative effort, we can change the path and make it acceptable and, in some ways, expected to openly talk about our mental health. ■*



## 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](http://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](mailto:kshallowhorn@chcb.net).

## March Events

**MARCH 8-12**

Advocacy Days for Students  
*Mental Health Advocates of WNY*

**MARCH 12**

Guided Night Hike at Fort Niagara  
*Veterans One-stop Center of WNY*

**March 13**

Trip to the Movies  
*Veterans One-stop Center of WNY*

**March 14**

Operation COM Adventure to Explore & More Museum  
*Veterans One-stop Center of WNY*

**March 15**

Military Miles Fitness Challenge Wrap Up  
*Veterans One-stop Center of WNY*

**March 16**

Veteran Coffee Hour  
*Veterans One-stop Center of WNY*

**March 24**

Paint Your Pet Paint Night  
*Veterans One-stop Center of WNY*

**More Events & Information**

Visit [letstalkstigma.org/events](http://letstalkstigma.org/events)

## WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBER



Visit [letstalkstigma.org/current-members](http://letstalkstigma.org/current-members) for more information on our current members.

## Support Groups

**March 10, 17, 24, 31**

Teen Peer Support Group  
*Mental Health Advocates of WNY*

**March 19**

20-Something Online Support Group  
*Mental Health Advocates of WNY*

**March 11 & 25**

Online Family Support Groups  
*Mental Health Advocates of WNY*

## PEOPLE, INC. PROGRAMS

Senior Companion "Phone Connection" Program Accepting Recipients  
*Mental Health Contact: 716.768.2381*

Affordable Apartments Accepting Applications  
*Contact: Email [housing@people-inc.org](mailto:housing@people-inc.org) or call 716.880.3890*

Senior Living Apartments Accepting Applications  
*Contact: Email [Seniorliving@people-inc.org](mailto:Seniorliving@people-inc.org) or call 716.817.9090*

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