



# How Faith Communities Respond to Stigma

According to the American Psychiatric Association, people experiencing mental health concerns often turn first to a faith leader. These leaders, as well as fellow community members, can play an important role in encouraging people to reach out for help and talk about their mental challenges. Churches, mosques, synagogues and other places of worship are where people feel connected and safe. Providing resources and guidance about treatment and working with families in crisis are common roles clergy and religious leaders take on every day.

Mental Health Ministries ([mentalhealthministries.net](http://mentalhealthministries.net)) is an interfaith web-based ministry to provide educational resources to help erase the stigma of mental illness in our faith communities. They report that one in four persons attending a religious service has a family member struggling with mental health issues.

**ONE IN FOUR PERSONS ATTENDING  
A RELIGIOUS SERVICE HAS A  
FAMILY MEMBER STRUGGLING  
WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.**

*Mental Health Ministries*

On Wednesday, June 23 at noon, The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition will host a *Facebook Live event titled State of Stigma and Mental Health: Proactive and Progressive Ways Religious Communities are Addressing the Mental Health Crisis.*

The event is free and open to all community members.

“The leadership of our faith communities have a major responsibility to actively create a climate where members can feel okay about seeking help for mental health issues, especially with us having gone through this pandemic,”

Max Donatelli, Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition founding member, said. “Thankfully we know of some who are, and we will be featuring them during the Facebook Live session.”

The regular Facebook live events bring together experts from the mental health field and broader community to share information and about mental health topics and efforts to reduce stigma.

Rabbi Alex Lazarus-Klein of the Congregation Shir Shalom said people are still reluctant to discuss mental health openly and faith communities can reduce the stigma by talking more about it and normalizing it.

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"I just provide them an opening to come forward to discuss it with me," Rabbi Alex said. "We also have the aid of our Jewish Family Services with a whole complement of counselors." He suggests people can support each other with mental health issues by treating it like any health ailment.

*"A congregant recently told me they were considering saying they had a medical ailment and not a mental health challenge," Rabbi Alex said. "They felt they would be treated with more sympathy if they did so. This comment said it all."*

St. Joseph University Parish in Buffalo established a Mental Health Committee in 1998 when several parishioners said in a survey that those with mental illness were not being assisted by current ministries. The mission of this committee is to create an environment of hope, understanding, welcome, and compassion to increase the acceptance of all individuals and families affected by mental health concerns. Members work to reduce the stigma of mental illness, educate about mental health and services available in the community, provide an alternative prayer service, and advocate for systemic change and legislation.

"We have had educational presentations, educational inserts for the bulletin and we offer a monthly service to those who may not want to attend the large church service or the longer service." Kathy Aman, a representative of the Mental Health Committee, said. "The service we offer is a Faith Sharing and Eucharistic Service and the group has become regular and beneficial to all attendees."

For faith communities looking to expand their outreach and education, resources are available to assist religious leaders and congregations help individuals and families receive mental health support. Training and education can encourage people to talk about mental illness and guide family and friends to treatment.

Mental Health First Aid is a public education program that can help individuals in the community understand mental illnesses, support timely intervention, and save lives.

Offered by several Anti-Stigma Coalition member agencies, this eight-hour course teaches individuals how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training provides skills needed to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis.

Visit [letstalkstigma.org/events](http://letstalkstigma.org/events) to learn about local training opportunities.

Another resource is NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) FaithNet, ([nami.org/Get-Involved/NAMI-FaithNet](http://nami.org/Get-Involved/NAMI-FaithNet)) an interfaith resource network of NAMI members, friends, clergy and congregations of all faith traditions who wish to encourage faith communities to welcome and support persons and families living with mental illness.

NAMI FaithNet strives to encourage welcoming, caring congregations and to promote the vital role of spirituality in the recovery journeys of many who live with mental health conditions, especially those for whom faith is a key component of their lives.

Through this website and through efforts nationally and in local communities, NAMI and NAMI affiliates encourage an exchange of information, tools, and other resources which will help educate and to inspire faith communities to take action, and the vital role spirituality can play in recovery for many. ■

*"Talking about mental health issues openly in and of itself allows people to feel less stigmatized by having a diagnosis. I think education is also critical for people to understand and have less fear (for themselves or of others).*

**KATHY AMAN**

*St. Joseph University Parish,  
Mental Health Committee*

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# A Q&A with People Inc.



This month, we feature People Inc., the leading non-profit human services agency serving Western New York and the Greater Rochester region. Through a variety of services including residential, employment, community outreach, health care and recreation programs, we help older adults, families and people with disabilities live more healthy, independent and productive lives.

People Inc. is working toward a future where all persons whose needs limit their integration into the community can reach their highest level of human potential as responsible members of society. It is hoped that these individuals will, to their potential, be contributing and active members in their communities, enjoying the greatest possible degree of independence and acceptance, in all aspects of their lives.

### Why did People Inc. become a member of The Anti-Stigma Coalition?

*We saw a natural alignment with its mission and ours at People Inc. Creating awareness and acceptance is at the core of what we do. We're proud to partner as a member.*

### Do you see progress in reducing stigma in your organization and in the community?

*One of our core values is focused on inclusion, so we aim to be very aware of this within the organization. We've invested a lot of attention to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) on a range of issues. As we continue to work within our communities, we're seeing more acceptance and understanding, and that's promising. ■*

## WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS



Visit [letstalkstigma.org/current-members](http://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](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).



## FACEBOOK LIVE: MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

As part of Mental Health Awareness Month, The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition hosted a Facebook Live event on Friday, May 21 to discuss *The State of Stigma and Mental Health: What Has Changed During the Pandemic*.

### Panelists included:

Alana Chazen, Community Engagement Coordinator, Compeer; Lindsay Herndon, LMHC, Associate V.P. Outpatient Services, BryLin Behavioral Health System; Sarah Lanzo, Director, Independent Living of Niagara County. The panel was moderated by Karl Shallowhorn, Chair, Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition.

A positive change has been easier access to mental health services "The pandemic opened doors for people to seek help," said Herndon. "It is a way to end stigma, with just a click of a web cam. Telehealth helped a lot."

During the past year, people reporting anxiety symptoms have tripled and depression symptoms have quadrupled. Mental health challenges are expected to continue as people return to work and activities, yet may still face financial, employment and health concerns. The experts spoke about the increase in mental health challenges and offered resources and encouragement.

You can view this session and other sessions presented on a variety of mental health topics at The Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition's [Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/talkstigma) at [facebook.com/talkstigma](https://www.facebook.com/talkstigma).

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

# June Events

June 1 & 15  
Headway's Virtual Peer and  
Caregiver Support Group

June 23  
The State of Stigma and Mental Health:  
Proactive & Progressive Ways Religious  
Communities are Addressing the  
Mental Health Crisis  
*Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Facebook Live*

More Events & Information:  
Visit [letstalkstigma.org/events](https://letstalkstigma.org/events)

## MHA OF WNY SUPPORT GROUPS

June 9, 16, 23 & 30 Teen Peer Support Group  
June 4, 18 20-Something Online Support Group  
June 10, 24 Online Family Support Groups

## PEOPLE, INC. PROGRAMS

Senior Companion "Phone Connection"  
Program Accepting Recipients  
*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*