



SEPTEMBER IS SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

Stop Stigma: Safe Messaging About Suicide

Words are powerful.

How we talk about a sensitive and complex topic such as suicide can have traumatizing or triggering effects on those who struggle with their mental health or individuals who have lost someone to suicide.

"Fear, shame, and misunderstanding around mental health concerns contributes to keeping suicidal thoughts and behaviors in the dark," said Missy Stolfi, area director, Western & Greater Central New York Chapters, American Foundation of Suicide Prevention.

Learning more about mental health and suicide prevention can help demystify and change misperceptions about suicide. We then can feel more confident in addressing these topics when they appear in our lives, and know where to turn for help.

The language we use when we talk about suicide is extremely important and safe messaging is critical to keep our community safe.

For someone who is thinking about suicide, the words of those close to them and how suicide is portrayed in the media can prevent them from seeking life saving treatment.

If thoughts of suicide are seen as wrong, people who experience these thoughts will not be willing to admit them and get the help they so desperately need.

"They won't talk about it or reach out for help because they think people will look down on them, think poorly of them," Celia Spacone, Ph.D, Coordinator of the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Erie County.

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How to Talk About Suicide

The Suicide Prevention Coalition of Erie County encourages direct and open conversation about suicide.

Here are some suggestions on words to use and words to avoid.

PREFERRED	AVOID
Suicide attempt, suicide death	Failed suicide, unsuccessful suicide, successful suicide, committed suicide
Took their own life	Committed suicide
They are thinking about suicide	Suicidal
Died as a result of self-injury	Chose to kill themselves
Disclosed	Threatened
Rising, increasing rates	Epidemic, skyrocketing

“Encourage people to get help and be hopeful—people can and do get better,” said Spacone. “By using the word suicide calmly and appropriately, they will know you are a safe person.”

Depicting suicide in graphic, detailed, sensationalized, or romantic ways have been shown to be harmful to those vulnerable to suicide. Additionally, by neutralizing our language around suicide such as avoiding phrases like “committed suicide” or “successful attempt” we can reduce the feelings of guilt, blame, or shame that are often associated after a loss or attempt.

Raising Awareness

According to Stolfi, Suicide Prevention Month shines a spotlight on the issue of suicide, provides information about

local resources, reinforces the message that suicide can be preventable, and that we each can take steps in our personal and professional lives to help reduce this leading cause of death in the U.S.

National Suicide Prevention Month also highlights the many barriers that exist to access to quality mental health care for all communities, and is a call to action to address this important work at local, state, and national levels.

The Western New York Community will come together on September 10, World Suicide Prevention Day, to raise the Flag of Hope at the Rath Building. Coordinated by The Suicide Prevention Coalition of Erie County elected officials and community members will proclaim that there is hope and help available. A video to raise awareness of means reduction—restricting access to firearms—will be released the day of the event.

According to Spacone, more people die by suicide by firearms than homicide by firearm, and the highest rates of suicide are men in their middle years. These individuals are often the least likely to reach out for help and those who use the most lethal methods. Research indicates that approximately 90 percent of individuals who survive a nonfatal attempt will not go on to die by suicide thereafter.

Another event to create awareness is the *Out of the Darkness Buffalo Walk* on Saturday, September 18 at Canalside Buffalo. Sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the walk provides community, connection, healing, and hope for survivors of suicide loss and those with lived experience. ■

CRISIS SERVICES

Crisis Services is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 716-834-3131 and a Crisis Counselor will speak with you. Send a text to 741741 and a Crisis Counselor will respond to you quickly via text.

24-HOUR CRISIS HOTLINE:
716-834-3131

TEXT LINE:
716-300-2338

CHAT ONLINE:
CRISIS SERVICES.ORG

Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Elects New Leaders

Melinda DuBois, *Executive Director, Mental Health Advocates of Western New York* has been named Chair of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition; Cheri Alvarez, MS, *Chief Operating Officer of Compeer* has been appointed Vice Chair and Molly S. Carr, Ph.D., *Chief Executive Officer, Jewish Family Services*, has been named Secretary.



DuBois has over 25 years of experience managing multidisciplinary health and human service organizations, is a respected administrator with a reputation for building relationships and coalitions and has served as an advocate in Albany and Washington D.C.

She is a current board member of Horizon Human Services, vice president of the Care Management Coalition, a member of the Health Leadership Fellows Cohort 6, past president of the Crisis Services Board of Directors, and is a 200-hour registered yoga instructor trained in trauma sensitive yoga and meditation.

DuBois is a graduate of State University of New York Buffalo with a bachelor of arts in psychology and a master's in social work.

"It is my honor to serve as the new Chair of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition," says DuBois. "The Coalition's efforts over the last five years have done such great work in combating the stigma that surrounds mental illness in our community. MHA is pleased to work side-by-side with our coalition partners to reduce stigma and raise awareness of mental health resources and services for the people of Erie and Niagara counties. I look forward to this leadership role as we continue our collective mission to end stigma."

Cheri Alvarez is Chief Operating Officer for Compeer, responsible for the day-to-day operations of Compeer Buffalo's programs as well as supporting the over 40 Compeer affiliates internationally. She graduated from Canisius College with her master's degree in Counseling Education and proceeded to commit her career to working in the Western New York non-profit community for the past 25 years.

A Business First "40 Under 40" awardee (2015), Alvarez is a graduate of the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York Leadership Fellows program as well as a graduate of the University at Buffalo's Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership Core Program.



Dr. Molly Carr is Chief Executive Officer of Jewish Family Services of Western New York. She has a Ph.D. in Leadership and Policy from Niagara University, with her dissertation titled US Refugee Resettlement Policy: A Study Regarding the Intersection of Early Self-Sufficiency and Integration. Carr also holds a MAOL with a focus on Organizational Behavior. She was born and raised in Buffalo and has more than twenty years of experience in refugee resettlement. ■

A Q&A with Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities of Buffalo is a Catholic-sponsored human service agency serving anyone in need in the eight counties of Western New York. Believing all persons are created by God, they empower individuals, children, and families to achieve and maintain meaningful, healthy, and productive lives. Catholic Charities advocates for those in need – particularly those who are poor and most vulnerable.

We recently spoke with **Megan F. Lostracco-Reed, BS, MHA**, who shared her insight about Catholic Charities, stigma, and mental health.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Q: Why did you become a member of the Coalition?

As a large human services provider in Western New York, Catholic Charities provides an array of services to the community addressing social determinant of health needs and providing mental health and substance abuse services. Catholic Charities aims to be a Beacon of HOPE for all those in need—not only for people on their worst day, but to be there along the road to recovery, whether that’s regarding mental wellness, food or housing insecurity, education, or joining the workforce! Catholic Charities strives to meet people where they are at and hold out a warm welcoming hand, just like the Anti-Stigma Coalition. We want to reach those in need directly and advocate for breaking down those barriers to care, including Stigma and misunderstandings associated with Mental Health.

Q: Does stigma prevent people from seeking help for mental health challenges?

In my opinion, yes, absolutely. It is difficult to erase the idea of “mental illness” and what that looked like less than a century ago and transform it into what it truly is today: “Mental Health” or “Mental Wellness.” We’ve made huge strides already as a community, country, and world, and I truly believe we are moving in the right direction. The more we can talk about mental wellness and speak as openly about things like depression and schizophrenia as we do about diabetes or heart disease, the more people we realize how important it is to not just “treat an illness,” but to BE mentally well.

Q: What impact is the campaign having?

We just joined the coalition, so I don’t really feel equipped to answer that question in detail, but I am looking forward to being more involved in efforts to open discussions about mental health and break down the stigma so everyone can get the help they need. ■



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.

Upcoming Events

SEPTEMBER 10

World Suicide Prevention Day
Raising the Flag of Hope - Rath Building

SEPTEMBER 18

Buffalo Out of the Darkness Walk
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

SEPTEMBER 23

LGBTQ+ Mental Health: What We All Need to Know
Presented by Buffalo Toronto Public Media

SEPTEMBER 30

Cannabis and the Adolescent Brain
Horizon Health Seminar

SEPTEMBER 29, OCTOBER 6 & OCTOBER 13

Back to School: Navigating a New Normal
WBFO 3-part Series

OCTOBER 2

EPIC's Annual Buffalo Baby & Toddler Expo
EPIC - Every Person Influences Children

More Events & Information: Visit letstalkstigma.org/events

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS



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

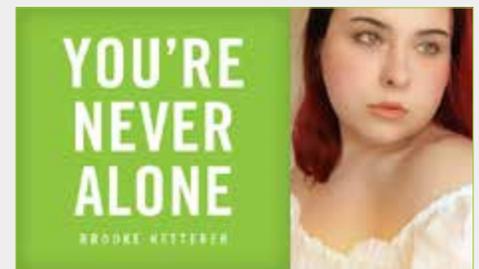
Is it common for college students to struggle with mental health challenges?

How can parents and family help their college student get the help they need?

Are you concerned about your college student's mental well-being?

Join us for a **FACEBOOK LIVE on **SEPT. 15, 12-1PM.****

The State of Stigma & Mental Health:
Back to College - Supporting Your Student's Mental Health



Brooke Ketterer is a panelist for our Facebook Live. She is graduate of the Niagara Falls Culinary Institute in Pastry Arts and is diagnosed with anxiety and OCD.

Learn about Brooke's College Success Story:
letstalkstigma.org/youre-never-alone-brooke-ketterer

For more information:
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