



Mental Wellness of Service Providers & Families of People with Developmental Disabilities

March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. The goal is to raise awareness about the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities and address the barriers that those with disabilities face. On March 21, World Down Syndrome Day, individuals with Down syndrome and those who live and work with them raise public awareness and create a single global voice advocating for the rights, inclusion, and well-being of people with Down syndrome.

These commemorations also provide an opportunity to focus on the family members and direct care employees who care for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the importance of their physical and mental health.

How do direct service employees, working in a stressful environment, maintain their mental wellness? How can family members seek help and take care of their mental well-being while caring and advocating for their loved ones?

Continued on Page 2

The Anti-Stigma Coalition hosts a **Facebook Live on Wednesday, March 15** at noon to discuss these issues and share mental health resources. We'll hear from provider agency representatives and family members who will talk about everyday stress and long-term challenges along with coping strategies.



Panelists are **Stacey Book**, self-direction specialist coordinator, People Inc., **Max Donatelli**, community advocate, and **Renee Filip**, CEO, Aspire. The moderator is **Frank Cammarata**, executive director, Erie County Office for People with Disabilities. The event is free and open to the public and viewers will have the opportunity to ask questions during the event.

The People Inc. admissions team indicates that families experience a lot of stress, anxiety, and depression along with hopelessness of never getting what is needed. There is also great confusion of where to start and who to contact to get things started to help process and navigate the system of service delivery. The People Inc. team provides reassurance to help them and reminders that they are not alone in this process (in hopes to help minimize the above emotions/feelings).

The People Inc. team also shared that some parents who have a child with an intellectual or developmental disability are often given the “hero/angel” label, so when they have a potential mental health issue or medical concern that affects them or the care of their loved ones, this may be easily explained and understood, but then lose their status as “hero/angel” and are “human like everyone else.”

Families that also struggle financially and/or have limited education and/or do not have strong English language abilities—this adds a new level of stress and may add to the issues of navigating the system, which may lead to mental health concerns.

Donatelli is a community advocate and parent of an adult child with a developmental disability. He said that a significant challenge is the not-for-profit agencies that provide 85% of services for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities have not received cost of living adjustments in over ten years. As a result, as the minimum wage has gone up in New York State, the heretofore decent paying jobs in the field are closer now to minimum wage jobs.

“Most of these jobs require caring, committed and compassionate staff who are willing to take specialized training and be responsible for the quality of lives for people in their care,” Donatelli said. “Due in part to the substandard pay, more entry level applicants look to easier jobs with less responsibilities and comparable pay.”

As a result, it is more difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. With growing staff vacancies, those that are working can burn out and, in some situations, must do mandatory overtime, which effects personal and family time, and some end up leaving all together.

According to Donatelli, as it is becoming more difficult to recruit and retain an adequate workforce, everyone suffers including

Continued on Page 3

those with people with an intellectual or developmental disability that New York State is charged to support.

“Families experience more pressure and worry as a result, as do staff members that can’t provide adequate support due to short staffing,” he said. “Emotionally, the person with the disability, family members, and staff are all affected. All can need help.”

People Inc. offers support to its 4,000 staff members with access to its Employee Service Line, where staff are provided with various referral sources. The agency also offers an Employee Assistance Program through Child and Family Services Employee Assistance Program, which provides staff with extra support to help with a variety of issues.

Child and Family Services Life Assistance Program offers services designed to help reduce stress, balance work and family responsibilities and improve the quality of your life. The program consists of resources and referral services, counseling and support services, online information, and interactive tools. All services are free, confidential, and accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Families can request help from care coordination organizations, service providers, and the Developmental Disability Alliance of WNY Family Committee (ddawny.org). Each of these organizations have professionals to help as well as other families who can offer ideas and resources that might be helpful.



As it is becoming more difficult to recruit and retain an adequate workforce, everyone suffers including people with an intellectual or developmental disability that New York State is charged to support. Families experience more pressure and worry as a result, as do staff members that can’t provide adequate support due to short staffing. Emotionally the person with an intellectual or developmental disability, families, and staff are all affected.

Max Donatelli
Community Advocate



WHAT DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

Is there a topic that you’d like us to cover in an upcoming newsletter or Facebook Live? Let us know!

Email info@letstalkstigma.org to start the conversation.



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

As a peer-run mental health organization we recognize the need to address stigma at every level. We believe that aligning ourselves with The Anti-Stigma Coalition is a powerful opportunity to stand with other like-minded individuals to advocate against stigma.

How are people with mental health challenges impacted by stigma?

Stigma can influence our participants' willingness to seek treatment for mental health concerns, as well as their comfort level in sharing their own lives experience which can negatively impact their mental health recovery. Breaking down these barriers supports better access to and engagement in positive recovery supports.

What is your organization doing to address stigma and enhance mental wellness for employees, volunteers and clients?

At Recovery Options, we provide a peer-centered, recovery-focused environment to address stigma. We offer extensive opportunities for training in personal advocacy, trauma-informed care, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue, and evidence-based wellness and recovery tools to support both staff and participants in maintaining mental wellness. Our agency supports significant schedule flexibility and generous time off for staff, as well as the opportunity to engage in statewide advocacy surrounding mental health.

“Breaking down these barriers supports better access to and engagement in positive recovery supports.”

Shannon Higbee
CEO, Recovery Options Made Easy

Please consider becoming a member of our Coalition at letstalkstigma.org/membership.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

1

SHARE EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

Share the monthly newsletter to your team via email or print the PDF.

2

SHARE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Share posts to your professional and personal networks and help promote Facebook Live events.

@talkstigma

3

REQUEST MATERIALS TO DISTRIBUTE

Brochures, Conversation Starter Cards, Counter Displays, Pop-up Banners, Add logos and graphics to your website or other collateral.

✉ karen@LetsTalkStigma.org



UPCOMING EVENTS

Writing & Well-Being Workshop

Saturday, March 18 | 10 AM – 12 PM

Mental Health Advocates of WNY

Free and open to everyone. We use writing prompts to express ourselves, increase socialization and self-esteem, and support our mental health recovery. For more information or to RSVP, contact Bridget at bmcnally@mhawny.org or 716-886-1242 x347.

WNY LGBTQ+ Health & Wellness Fair

Saturday, March 25 | 9 AM – 12 PM | NCCC Main Gym

NCCC is once again the proud host site for this event! The 2023 LGBTQ+ Health and Wellness Fair coincides with National LGBTQ+ Health and Wellness Week.

Mental Health First Aid Training with Compeer Buffalo (Adults 18+)

Thursday, March 30 | 8:30 AM – 4:30PM

1179 Kenmore Ave, Buffalo

An 8-hour evidence-based class, that teaches effective ways to talk to someone struggling with mental health and connect them to resources. Contact: Katie Walsh, Director of Mental Health Education katie@compeerbuffalo.org.

#wearehope: A discussion about Community Trauma

Wednesday, March 29 | 3:00 PM – 5:00PM

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of WNY

Our community has experienced multiple traumatic events this past year. What have we learned? What do we need? Join us for a roundtable discussion.

Endeavor Health Services - Clubhouse

Various Dates Through March. Visit ehsny.org.

Visit letstalkstigma.org/events for more.

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