



Grief, Loss, and Stigma One Year After May 14th

This past year, Western New Yorkers have experienced extraordinary loss, grief, and trauma, especially the Black community and East Buffalo community.

Traumatic events include the horrific tragedy of May 14th, the death of a beloved pediatrician and his daughters in a fire, a deadly December blizzard, the East Buffalo fire that took the lives of five children (and later their grandmother), and the shocking on-field collapse of Damar Hamlin.

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“Many people in our community were hanging on by a thread, even before May 14,” said Melissa Archer, PMHNP-BC, BSN, Chief Operating Officer, Buffalo Urban League.

“Community conversations about mental health are happening and while we don’t see a complete 180 degree concerning stigma, the needle is moving,” she said. “One of the most important considerations is making sure that we have providers who look like the people they are serving.”

Archer said that there has been a concerted effort to heal our community.

Buffalo Hope, operated by the Buffalo Urban League and a new behavioral health clinic operated by BestSelf Behavioral Health, both located on Jefferson Avenue, are striving to provide mental health care in a manner that helps people to understand that it’s okay to seek help, and professionals providing care at these sites can relate to the community’s trauma.

The Buffalo United Resiliency Center was also created to offer a place of healing and support to individuals and their families impacted by this horrific mass shooting, providing a person-centered, trauma-informed care and a holistic approach tailored to each person’s experience.

The Anti-Stigma Coalition hosts a Facebook Live on Wednesday, May 17 at noon for a discussion about these issues and how to access mental health resources.

The moderator is Karl Shallowhorn, director of youth programs, Mental Health Advocates of WNY, the event is free and open to the public and viewers will have the opportunity to ask questions during the event.

According to Archer of the Urban League, the community goal is to move from surviving to thriving. “Take whatever steps you need to talk to someone. It’s hard and painful to move out of your comfort zone, but it can help you to become the best version of yourself,” she said.



Archer says that peer counselors can be effective for individuals struggling with mental health issues as well as taking the time for self-care.

Mark O’Brien, Erie County Mental Health Commissioner, says the remembrance of the May 14th shooting is a reminder of the devastation that we experience when we lose a loved one suddenly and tragically.

“Compounding that loss is the realization that it was unnecessary as it was caused by the actions of an individual fed by the toxic ideology of others,” O’Brien said. “All deaths are sad, not all are tragic. These losses and their impact on loved ones were both. Knowing that the community targeted has long felt under-resourced and marginalized compounds the trauma for all affected. When reaching out for help is stigmatized or not accepted in a community, the mountain becomes higher.”

According to O’Brien, there has been an outpouring of support and assistance from Federal, State and County government entities as well as community, providers, foundations and faith-based communities to help those individuals affected in ways that are meaningful and helpful. ■



We recently spoke with Julie Rosinski, LCSW-R, PMH-C Co-Director, WNY Postpartum Connection, Inc. about stigma and postpartum mental health concerns.

“There are many systemic barriers to seeking care as well. Financial barriers or difficulty in accessing healthcare coverage. Harmful stereotypes based in systemic racism can also impact mothers of color and prevent access to care. These stereotypes can result in medical harm or neglect, and professionals not effectively screening for PMADS. In our region, the lack of culturally diverse models of care and culturally and racially diverse mental health providers can also be a barrier to care.”

Julie Rosinski

LCSW-R, PMH-C Co-Director
WNY Postpartum Connection, Inc.

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

One of our primary values as an organization is to connect with professionals who share a commitment to helping families in our community and to support the larger community through advocacy, education, and increased access to care for all. Joining a network of other organizations who hold this value helps us help the greater community. We believe that postpartum mental health concerns are very common and very treatable, and no parent should suffer in silence simply because of stigma or a lack of resources. We are committed to helping families access the care they need, without fear of stigma or discrimination. We advocate for equity, inclusion, and access to care for all members of our community and work to remove barriers to mental health services.

How are moms experiencing postpartum depression impacted by stigma?

Stigma can greatly impact moms who are experiencing Postpartum Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADS). Moms are often given well-intentioned but incorrect messages by family, friends, and medical professionals that contribute to their hesitation in seeking help. They might have their concerns dismissed as “just baby blues,” that this should be the happiest time of their lives, that maternity leave is like a

vacation, that they will feel instantly bonded with their baby, and several other myths that are perpetuated in motherhood and parenthood. Moms might hold a lot of shame if they have negative thoughts or feelings about being a mom or about their baby. In some cases, moms have intrusive thoughts about harm coming to the baby. They might feel a lot of shame or fear about this and not tell anyone out of fear of hospitalization or CPS involvement.

Social media can play both a positive and a negative role in maintaining stigma. Sometimes mothers compare themselves to others on social media and feel shame if they are not meeting some perceived standard. On the other hand, many use their social media presence as a platform to share helpful information about PMADs and perhaps their own stories of hope and recovery.

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What is your organization doing to address stigma and enhance mental wellness in the community?

We work to reduce barriers to accessing quality postpartum mental health care by coordinating and maintaining a network of mental health professionals that have specific training and experience treating postpartum mental health concerns. By ensuring that our network members have this specialized training, we avoid harm to parents who might be presenting with symptoms that could be missed or misinterpreted by therapists without the PMAD specialty. We continue to recruit new therapists for our network and are working on bringing additional training opportunities to WNY. PMAD trained therapists reduce stigma by normalizing the experience and helping individuals understand how common it is to experience a postpartum mental health concern.

We have also conducted a Community Needs Assessment to identify gaps in care and guide us in further efforts to close them. We also participate in education and outreach in our community to promote awareness about postpartum mental health. ■

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



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.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



May Is Mental Health Awareness Month

To celebrate, we invite our organizational members to join our “Picture this” challenge to show your support for our Join the Conversation campaign.

Can you picture a day when there is no more stigma associated with having a mental health condition? Can you picture a day when talking about your mental health concerns is as normal as talking about what you had for dinner?

The Join the Conversation (letstalkstigma.org) campaign was created to help those who struggle with their mental health find their voice and feel safe talking about it to get the help they need.

Here’s how to get involved and be in the running for a gourmet coffee break to share with your team:

Take a photo or selfie of a staff member(s) or volunteer(s) enjoying a break with your ASC mug and share it on your social media channels, tag the ASC, and tell people your organization is committed to ending the stigma associated with mental health issues.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Endeavor Health Mental Health Awareness Training Opportunity

Free training for organizations on mental health and suicide prevention.

Training includes: Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), and Behavioral Health Resource Guide.

Mindful Music airing weekly on WBFO

May 6, 4 PM | Buffalo Toronto Public Media

Compeer Niagara Celebration—Volunteer Recruitment

May 20, 12 PM – 6 PM | The Ship Bar and Grill, 5612 Tonawanda Creek Rd., Lockport

Mental Health First Aid

Hosted by WNY Life Coaching | June 1, 9 AM – 3:30 PM

Virtual First Aiders will complete 2-hour, self-paced online pre-work, and then participate in a live 6.5 hour Instructor-led virtual training.

Pride Flag Raising Ceremonies Across Niagara County

June 1, 2023

Climb Out of the Darkness Walk for Postpartum Mental Health

Sunday June 25, 10 AM | Como Lake Park, Lancaster, NY

Raising awareness for the mental health of new families.

NAMI Programs

Various Dates Through April.

Visit namibuffalony.org/programs/calendar.

Endeavor Health Services - Clubhouse

Various Dates Through April. 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