Celebrating Success with our 6th Annual Member Breakfast

Community members celebrated the success of the Join the Conversation campaign at a member breakfast on June 7 at WNED studios. The event focused on workplace wellness and encouraged companies and organizations to continue working to eliminate the stigma of mental illness. Krizia Williams of WKBW-TV served as emcee.

County Executive Mark Poloncarz talked about the tragic year that Erie County residents endured in 2022, and said the network for mental health support was already in place.

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Mark Poloncarz
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Melinda DuBois, chairman of the Coalition and Executive Director of Mental Health Advocates, provided highlights of the campaign since its launch in 2017. Today, the Join the Conversation campaign website has nearly 120,000 users. In the last twelve months we’ve had more than one half million Facebook impressions and 90,000 video views.

The Coalition has grown from 16 organizational founding members to 108 organizational members in 2023 and, as of today, 4,011 individuals have taken our online pledge to end stigma.

“Because of campaigns like ours, it’s more common—more open—to speak publicly about mental health issues, but we still have a long way to go,” she said. “We all recognize there will be many more challenges ahead that will impact the mental well-being of our Western New York Community and beyond. The Anti-Stigma Coalition is ready to face these challenges—with your support—by continuing the conversation. The goal remains—eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illness.”

Featured speaker Chelsea Frank, Human Resource Director at Tops Markets, shared how Tops supported their associates after the horrific mass shooting at the Jefferson Avenue store.

“Tops provided a safe space for associates at the Merriweather Library and provided counselors and other services,” she said. “Being together and sharing stories provided a way for associates to move forward in healing.”

Frank shared that no company can ever prepare for a tragedy like this, so they created their own playbook. They focused on talking about it together and establishing community partners to assist in the process.

A panel discussion moderated by Karl Shallowhorn focused on workplace wellness, how companies can meet the needs of staff, and maintain a high performing organization.

Panelists included Megan Andrews, Director of Child & Family Services Employee Assistance Program; Sarah Rey, Corporate Wellbeing Consultant, Walsh Duffield Companies, Inc; Pete Rizzo, Vice President, GEICO Insurance Agency, and Katie Spillman, Principal, Mount St. Mary Academy.

Each panelist shared that mental health has become a critical component and talking about it is now acceptable. “It is physically and mentally healthy to be employed successfully,” said Andrews.

According To Rey, it is great to see that talking about mental health issues is happening, and recognizing that you are a more productive employee if you are not struggling with multiple health issues.

Special thanks to WNED for hosting the event and Deaf Access Services.
Expanding into Chautauqua County

The Anti-Stigma Coalition’s Join the Conversation awareness campaign is expanding to Chautauqua County with a $7,000 grant from the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH). The Coalition’s campaign promotes mental health awareness and fights the stigma surrounding mental illness, which can be a barrier preventing people from seeking the help and treatment they need.

“The more that we can make opportunities to educate and inform about mental health, to keep it in our conversations, and to meet our community members where they are receiving their information is vital to overcome any misconceptions or negative perception that exists about it,” said Carmelo Hernandez, Chautauqua County Director of Mental Hygiene Services and Commissioner of Social Services. “We welcome this initiative and look forward to the positive results seen in other counties here.”

The decision was made to expand the campaign into Chautauqua County to reach its 53,000 households. The Coalition will use the grant funds to increase digital and social media, include Chautauqua County resources on the website, produce county specific materials, and conduct outreach and other events in the county.

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

Congratulations to our Show Us Your Mug giveaway winners!

Show Us Your Mug Winner: Gerard Place

Show Us Your Mug Quantity Award: HOME

Show Us Your Mug Creativity Award: EPIC

UPCOMING EVENTS

20-Something Support Group
July 14, 6 PM – 7:30PM | Restoration Society Inc
Open to transition-age youth ages 18-28. Youth Peer Advocates facilitate this strength-based and recovery centered group to provide validation and support to emerging adults facing mental and/or substance use struggles. Zoom meetings available for those unable to attend in person.

Mental Health First Aid
Hosted by WNY Life Coaching | June 1, 9 AM – 3:30 PM
Class Format Options: 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
Exact times and locations will be posted on Niagara Pride’s Facebook.

Climb Out of the Darkness Walk for Postpartum Mental Health
Sunday June 25, 10 AM | Como Lake Park, Lancaster, NY
Climb Out of the Darkness for perinatal mental health awareness presented by WNY Postpartum Connection, Inc. Raising awareness for the mental health of new families.

NAMI Programs
Various Dates Through April.
Visit namibuffalony.org/programs/calendar.

Endeavor Health Services - Clubhouse

Visit letstalkstigma.org/events for more.