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#StandUpToStigma

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Eau Claire, WI, May 15, 2017—Disgrace. Shame. Guilt. Mistrust. These are just a few of the words that go hand in hand with stigma. Many people continue to view mental illness through a distorted lens as a weakness or flaw in a person’s character. The Eau Claire Healthy Communities Mental Health Action team encourages you to *dust off that lens* and to stand up to stigma in our community!

“Together we can stand up to, and reduce stigma and create a positive change,” says Shae Havner-Sierer, Healthy Communities Mental Health Action Team Co-Chair and Social worker with Eau Claire Department of Human Services. “Standing up to stigma can encourage people who need help to seek it without shame or fear. It will also increase the empathy and understanding of mental illness in our communities.”

Stigma toward mental illness has several outcomes including silence and isolation. This results in people to not talk about their pain for fear of being judged. As their isolation grows, the people in their lives become less willing to ask what’s wrong. This cycle continues and prevents people from seeking the one thing that will help the most—treatment.



Eau Claire Mental Health Action team organized a flash mob on 5/10/17.

The 2013 Community Health Assessment found that 75% of the people in Eau Claire County with Mental Health conditions received no treatment. Mental illnesses are real medical illnesses, just as heart disease, cancer or diabetes. In fact, unmanaged mental health problems are linked to physical health problems and increased risk factors like substance abuse, smoking, physical inactivity and obesity.

“Standing up to stigma will open the door for people to seek the care that they need in a non-judgmental way. The earlier we seek treatment, the better we are able to manage our illness,” says Smith.

Below are tips on how we, as a community and individually can stand up to mental health stigma:

- **Get the facts.** Stigmas are based on myths. Studies show that many people who experience these problems are productive members of society who can benefit from treatment.
- **Share the truth.** Share the realities with friends, family members.

- **Choose your words well.** Words matter. Think about the terms used to describe people. Never reduce people to a diagnosis. Engage in respectful dialogue with others who may use hurtful language.
- **Offer support.** Always be willing to listen, drive someone to appointments, make a phone call with them, etc.
- **Use your influence.** We're all connected to one another. Be the voice for fairness and truth with your friends, family members and the young people in your life.
- **Know the resources.**
 - If you or a loved one is struggling with a mental health concern, talk to your/their primary health care physician to get connected to other professionals.
 - If you need someone to talk to and prefer texting.
 - Wisconsin HOPELINE. Text HOPELINE to 741-741
 - If you or your loved one is having thoughts of suicide.
 - Northwest Connections Crisis Line at 1-888-552-6642
 - National Suicide Prevention Line 1-800-273-8255
 - If there is an *immediate risk* for harm call 911.

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