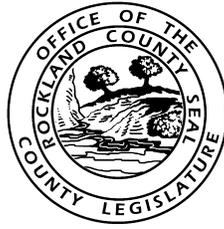


Press



Release

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For Immediate Release

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In Proclamation of Mental Health Awareness Month

A Message Of Help & Hope In Effort To Raise Awareness, Reduce Stigma & Promote Compassion While Encouraging Treatment

New City, NY (May 6, 2016) – Rockland County Legislature Chairman Alden H. Wolfe is standing with members of NAMI Rockland and other care providers this May to celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month.

NAMI Rockland is an Affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one of the largest grassroots mental health, self-help and advocacy organizations in the country. NAMI members and volunteers consist of individuals living with mental illness, relatives, friends and advocates working together to improve the lives of people affected by mental illness.

This year, for the first time in Rockland, the local NAMI affiliate is participating in the statewide ribbon campaign, placing special ribbons at locations around the county to show support, including on the doors to the Legislature's New City office.

“We join with NAMI Rockland to fight the stigma that discourages people from seeking the help that they need,” Wolfe said. “We want to bring awareness that through education, we can reduce the stigma, we can promote compassion, and we can bring about more understanding while encouraging treatment.”

Rena Finkelstein, NAMI Rockland’s Executive Director, said in just the last year, the organization has assisted more than 3,000 individuals and families through its help line, courses, support groups and educational programs - the tools and resources that families need to cope with serious mental illness, and to help their loved ones reach full recovery.

“We know - we understand - what mental illness is because we’ve walked in the shoes of the people we serve,” Finkelstein said.

As part of Mental Health Awareness Month, Finkelstein is also calling upon the Rockland community to join in the battle for more funding for treatment and support services for those struggling with mental illness, as well as their families.

She said changes are also needed to attain true parity regarding insurance coverage and to address the government regulations and policies that create barriers to treatment. Additional challenges are the need for safe, affordable, supportive housing; and the importance of supporting alternatives to incarceration so that if individuals living with a mental health concern come to the attention of law enforcement for non-violent offenses, communities can create options to divert them to treatment and services—before arrest, after arrest and at all points in the justice system, she said.

“Without appropriate housing it’s very difficult to provide these other services,” Finkelstein said. “Mental illness is very prevalent. It can be treated, but everybody has to be involved.”

Rockland County Sheriff Louis Falco III said the prevalence of those struggling with mental illness continues to increase when it comes to people in the county jail.

In 2011, 52 percent of the inmates had some type of mental illness, drug or alcohol dependency, or were suppressing their mental illness through drugs or alcohol, according to information from the psychiatrists providing treatment, Falco said.

In 2015, that number had increased to 67 percent, Falco said, with similar patterns of increase being experienced at jails across the state. He said the closure of mental health facilities often means families don’t have a resource for their loved ones.

“I’m not saying that’s the whole problem,” Falco said. “But throughout the state, the closure of so many mental health facilities has pushed things down to us being mental health facilities as sheriffs and local county jails.”

Inmates receive care while in jail, but once they get out, often stop taking their medications or don’t have insurance allowing access to treatment, and many end up back in jail, Falco said, a situation that also highlights the need for proper housing options.

When it comes to mental health, the statistics are sobering: 1 in 5 Americans experience mental illness in a given year. That’s the equivalent of about 60,000 residents in Rockland who may be ill, or have a relative, friend or co-worker who is suffering.

Help is available and no one should ever lose hope, said NAMI Rockland volunteer Jacqui Drechsler, who sought help from the organization in 2012.

“I needed serious help for a family member who was suffering the effects of her mental health condition, as well as needing serious support for myself as a caregiver,” Drechsler said. “Although my situation was not as tragic as many other people’s, it was headed that way.

“Thanks to early interventions with concrete help, referrals to appropriate providers, education and hands-on support for me, I was able to become an even better advocate for my sister... The help that is available through NAMI and that was offered to me - support, education and advocacy – allowed us to ward off the worse scenario.”

Finkelstein said that mental health needs to be a priority not just during May, but throughout the year, and looks forward to working with family members, care providers, elected officials and others to make Rockland a model for compassionate and effective care for all the state.

A list of events follows below

CELEBRATING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

The kick-off event included a news conference Monday to call attention to the month and was hosted by Legislator Alden H. Wolfe, who proclaimed May as Mental Health Awareness Month in Rockland County. Other participants included Finkelstein, Falco, County Legislators Harriet Cornell and Aney Paul; Assemblymember Ellen Jaffee; and Child Psychiatrist Dr. Susan Hoerter of the Rockland County Department of Mental Health.

COMING UP

Saturday, May 7: NAMIWalks NYC in partnership with NAMI Rockland Across the Brooklyn Bridge. Free.

Mental Health Film Series:

May 18: Infinitely Polar Bear, 1:30 p.m., New City Library. About a man with bipolar disorder who decides to move back home to care for his children. Free.

May 25: Frankie & Alice, 1 p.m., Finkelstein Memorial Library in Spring Valley. About an African-American go-go dancer with multiple personalities. Free.

May 25: Krisha, 8 p.m., at the Nyack Center, in partnership with Rivertown Film. About a family and one woman's return to it at Thanksgiving. General admission \$12; Rivertown members, \$9.

GET HELP

For more information about NAMI Rockland's programs for people with mental illness and their families, call 845-359-8787 or visit <http://namirockland.org/index.html>

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