



Dear Friends,

I grew up before the advent of the internet and social media- a time where certain topics were not discussed at the dinner table, in the media, and rarely in private conversations. Mental illness was one of those topics. Although I had extended family members who struggled with mental illness, it was clear questions about “what was wrong” were off limits. It wasn’t until I was in high school the words “bi-polar disorder” were used in my presence. In college and beyond I more intimately experienced the challenges surrounding those with mental illness and the impact on family members supporting them.

Decades later mental illness remains a topic of discomfort for many. The stigma that you are “less than” if you experience a mental illness unfortunately still lingers - and helps maintain a code of silence and shame- often resulting in reluctance to seek support and treatment.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a perfect time for each of us to reflect on how we can contribute to the compassion and care surrounding those struggling with mental illness and widen the path to recovery and wellness. We each have a responsibility to remove the stigma, shame and avoidance associated with mental illness. We need to lean into each other with hearts open to listen to family members, friends and colleagues and acknowledge the challenges they face, without devaluing them as people. We need continued advocacy for more robust systems of support, enhanced community education, and understanding and empathy. Individually and organizationally our advocacy and actions can make a difference.

I am proud to be part of an organization that focuses on the health and wellbeing of our stakeholders and community members. Over a decade ago Hope Community Resources created a Director of Spiritual Wellness position out of recognition of the critical importance of supporting the essence of each stakeholder. While spirituality is expressed in a variety of ways, tangibly acknowledging its importance was a step in our path to honor both individual and organizational wellness. Our Behavioral Health Clinic is devoted to providing the highest quality treatment to Alaskans in need of support. We have encouraged and supported staff to attend Mental Health First Aid training and several staff have become instructors as a result. We intentionally work to create a culture where stakeholders are supported to actively take care of their physical, emotional, and mental health without judgement.

As an organization we want to be part of the community conversation offering solutions and support for those who may be struggling. While layers of complexity can surround the topic of mental health, a simple contribution can be to deepen relationships with those in your circle- at home, at work, in the communities you are involved in. Stop using language/labels that result in another person feeling devalued. Be willing to ask the question, “How are you doing?” and then really listen to the response. Be kind to yourself and compassionate with others. Become knowledgeable about community resources to support those in need. The actions we take to value and support each other will contribute to wellness and will strengthen our communities.

Regards,

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Executive Director

Additional Information:
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