



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 20, 2014

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Patrick Phelan
President/CEO
(815) 284-6611

patrickphelan@sinnissippi.com

Mental Health First Aid Can Save Lives Too

Training of “Mental Health First Aiders” helps identify those in need and direct them to help

(Oregon, IL)

Imagine you are at work and a co-worker is having shortness of breath and chest pains that rapidly worsen. You are trained in first aid and CPR and you quickly determine it’s a heart attack. You call 911 and perform CPR during the short time it takes for paramedics to arrive. Because of your training and quick action you helped save a life.

Now imagine instead of a heart attack, your co-worker has a different disease: Like severe depression, and they are having suicidal thoughts. They are in need of a different kind of first aid, what now? Can you help?

The answer to that question is, **YES**. More and more individuals around the world are receiving training in **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)**. “There are efforts currently underway locally in Ogle and surrounding counties to significantly increase the number of individuals trained in MHFA,” says Patrick Phelan, Sinnissippi Centers’ President/CEO.

There are **two types of MHFA: Adult** Mental Health First Aid and **Youth** Mental Health First Aid. “Either type of MHFA helps trained first aiders and other in the general public identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness,” adds Phelan. First aiders learn how to respond to individuals who are experiencing one or more acute mental health crises (i.e., suicidal thoughts and/or behavior, acute stress reaction, panic attacks, and/or acute psychotic behavior) or are in the early stages of one or more chronic mental health problems (i.e., depressive, anxiety, and/or psychotic disorders, which may occur with substance abuse). The training is usually conducted in a single day.

“It’s an important training that will make a huge difference in getting individuals with diseases like depression, bipolar disorder, and other mental illnesses the treatment and support they need,” adds Phelan. “At the same time Mental Health First Aid efforts will go a long way to showing how all chronic illnesses, like heart disease or depression, need to be treated in virtually the same way by identifying the problem and properly treating it.”

The course also provides an overview of common support and treatment resources that are available in the community for those with a mental health problem so these individuals can seek help following provision of the first aid. Participants also are taught a **five-step action plan**, known as **ALGEE**, for use when providing Mental Health First Aid to an individual in crisis:

- A** Assess for risk of suicide or harm
- L** Listen nonjudgmentally
- G** Give reassurance and information
- E** Encourage appropriate professional help
- E** Encourage self-help and other support strategies

.....more on page 2



After completing the course and passing an examination, participants are certified for 3 years as a Mental Health First Aider.

Sinnissippi Centers, in partnership with the Community That Cares Project and other community partners and service providers have been intensifying efforts to train individuals in mental health first aid. Sinnissippi will **also host a 5-day intensive “Train the Trainers” in June** to provide **instruction for 30 adult mental health first aid trainers** who will then go out into their communities in Ogle and other counties to train numerous “first aiders”

“These individuals will serve as lifeguards, alert to the signs of mental illness and crisis and able to act quickly to get the person to the services they need,” says Phelan. “The interaction can often be brief, but profound in the impact it can have on the individual in need of treatment. It can be life changing.”

There has already been one Youth Mental Health First Aid training in Ogle County that was well attended this past March. More trainings are planned for the future in Ogle County for both Youth and Adult Mental Health First Aid. Also planned is a cross training of instructors so they may offer both Youth and Adult Mental Health First Aid.

For more information about upcoming Adult and Youth Mental Health First Aid trainings, contact Sinnissippi Centers’ President/CEO Patrick Phelan at 815-284-6611.

Sinnissippi Centers is a behavioral healthcare agency serving Carroll, Lee, Ogle and Whiteside Counties and provides substance abuse screening and treatment services.

For more information about programs and services, call Sinnissippi toll-free at 1-800-242-7642. Sinnissippi has office locations in Dixon, Mt. Carroll, Oregon, Rochelle and Sterling.

###