



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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May is Mental Health Awareness Month

This year Sinnissippi is conducting a campaign to #EndTheStigma

(Dixon, IL)

May is Mental Health Month: It was first designated in America in 1949 by Mental Health in America. **This is the 75th year we have celebrated Mental Health Month.** During this 75th year of Mental Health Month, we recognize that the awareness around our mental wellness has improved, but we also recognize that more needs to be done.

"One in five adults in the U.S. has a mental illness," says Stacie Kemp, Sinnissippi Centers' President/CEO. "Yet, fewer than half of those individuals receive the treatment and support they need," adds Kemp. "There are several reasons, but one of the biggest reasons is stigma. Stigma is a powerful negative or discriminatory barrier that can lead people with mental illness to avoid or delay treatment," says Kemp. "During this Mental Health Month, we are focusing our awareness efforts on reducing the stigma that surrounds mental illness and is still a barrier to treatment," adds Kemp. Sinnissippi is joining efforts with KSB Hospital and the Partnership for a Healthy Lee County workgroup to conduct an #EndTheStigma campaign. One of the ways to fight stigma is talking about mental illness and learning more about it.

Sinnissippi Centers' Recovery Support Specialist James Shover puts it this way, "Mental health issues can range from anxiety, depression, to some of the more extreme cases, such as schizophrenia or psychosis. We need to understand that all these are an illness, and no one chooses to feel that way," says Shover. "That is the biggest part of the stigma in my opinion. We do not judge someone if they have diabetes or cancer, because they are an accepted illness, whereas mental health illnesses are still frowned upon," adds Shover. "The irony is that these illnesses, like many others, can be helped with therapy and/or medications." The fact is that mental illnesses are chronic diseases of the brain, just like heart disease is part of the cardiovascular system.

Shover has lived experience with mental illness and stigma. He says, "Another part of the stigma comes from the movies or television where people lie on a couch, with their hand on their head, and blame everything on their parents. Counseling or therapy sessions are nothing like that," says Shover. "The easiest way to explain what a regular session is like, is sitting in a room, on a chair and venting to someone about your problems who will never judge you, or maybe more importantly, never repeat what you have said to anyone else. That is the part I have always appreciated, the anonymity of therapy," adds Shover. "There are also some clinicians who will have your session outside at a picnic table, or go on a walk, or even on the telephone. Whatever the client is comfortable with."

"The last stigma that I will touch on is that some people think therapy is for the weak minded," adds Shover. "Another falsehood that has been proven wrong many times over. Modern day NFL, NBA and MLB teams have therapists on staff that even travel with the teams," says Shover. "These are people who are at the pinnacle of their jobs and have a very strong mental fortitude to reach that plateau and sometimes they need help as well. If million-dollar athletes who are consistently in the public spotlight rely on the help of mental health professionals, why can't anyone?"

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www.sinnissippi.org



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If you want to learn more about mental illness, there are a wealth of resources available. You can start with Sinnissippi Centers' website where we have links to our social media and YouTube channel that have regular posts and videos about mental illness and other behavioral health topics, and where we also have an extensive links page.

Mental Health in America offers a website with more information about Mental Health Month and mental wellness (www.mentalhealthamerica.net). Here, you can take a free, confidential, online screening for yourself or someone you are concerned about.

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