Vermont Department of Mental Health

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

May 2021 — Week Three

Many Factors Support Mental Wellness

"Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community."

World Health Organization.

The Vermont **Adult Mental Health** system of care offers services and supports that help individuals and families promote mental, physical, and social well-being. It is recognized that an array of services are necessary to improve mental wellness and enhance recovery from mental health problems.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration describes 8 dimensions of wellness that influence one another and affect a person's overall health and quality of life:

1. **Emotional:** Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships.
2. **Environmental:** Access to a stable and safe place to live, stimulating environments.
3. **Financial:** Satisfaction with financial situation.
4. **Intellectual:** Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills.
5. **Occupational:** Satisfaction and enrichment from one's work or meaningful activity.
6. **Physical:** Maintaining physical wellbeing including physical activity, healthy foods, and sleep.
7. **Social:** A sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system.
8. **Spiritual:** A sense of purpose and meaning in life.

For help please contact your local community mental health center.

For more information see:

Promoting Wellness for Better Behavioral and Physical Health: https://mfpcc.samhsa.gov/ENewsArticles/Article12b_2017.aspx

Creating a Healthier Life, A Step-by-Step Guide to Wellness: https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma16-4958.pdf

Recovery from Mental Health Conditions is Possible

The National Consensus Statement defines recovery as *"Mental health recovery is a journey of healing and transformation enabling a person with a mental health problem to live a meaningful life in a community of his or her choice while striving to achieve his or her full potential."*

Millions of people with psychiatric diagnoses are living full and satisfying lives. There is no one-size-fits-all path to recovery. What works for one person may not work for another. Recovery depends on your unique needs, desires, and ideas about life and wellness.

Recovery in Vermont:

In addition to the clinical services at the community mental health centers, there are opportunities to work with people with lived experience of mental illness including one-to-one support (Intentional Peer Support). Peer support services have been shown to improve quality of life, decrease hospitalizations, and improve overall health.

Vermont Programs That Offer Recovery Services:

- Vermont Psychiatric Survivors
- Another Way
- Vermont Support Line
- The Copeland Center (Wellness Recovery Action Planning)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness — Vermont
- Pathways Vermont Community Center
- Alyssum
- Vermont Association for Mental Health & Addiction Recovery

Employment Helps Our Mental Health

Several areas of life contribute to our overall wellness and employment is one of these. Specifically, employment has many mental health benefits such as providing a person with a sense of purpose and meaning, facilitating social connections, offering a sense of routine or stability, providing intellectual stimulation, and contributing to one's overall financial security. Even a stressful job is better than no job due to the deleterious health effects that unemployment can cause. For many, a good job is one that is safe (both physically and emotionally), offers a livable wage, engages our interests, has a good working environment, promotes a work-life balance, and offers opportunities to progress. Vermont's Community Mental Health Centers provide evidence-based supported employment services to assist people who want to work with finding a decent job of their choosing. For assistance finding employment, call 211 or visit Vermont211 or check out these self-guides from Columbia and Temple University that have great tips.

Self-Care and Self-Compassion

Alex Lehning, Executive Director of VCPI writes: "Busyness was the first unwritten workplace rule I encountered in mental health. When your mission is healing and helping, often it feels there is little time for much else. During May, let us explore a new form of community and self-care. Rest is not radical, it is compassionate and restorative. There will always be more projects and pivoting. What is finite, however, is the gift we each offer in this field. When we talk about capacity, let us count ourselves as a resource that needs mindful tending to grow and flourish, every day."

The following poem by Brittin Oakman has helped others challenged with busyness and anxiety and inspired Alex's comments

"I was busy taking deeper breaths.
I was busy silencing irrational thoughts.
I was busy calming a racing heart.
I was busy telling myself I am okay.
Sometimes, this is my busy —
and I will not apologize for it."

by Brittin Oakman

Vermont Cooperative for Practice Improvement & Innovation (VCPI) is a non-profit organization funded by members and is supported by DMH. Its mission is to work with Vermont's mental health and substance use disorder workforce to promote collaborative, innovative thinking and continuous learning and improvement to provide the highest quality of services. VCPI's newsletter offers a variety of resources including links to explore on the topics of self-care, wellness, and self-compassion.

VCPI Vermont Cooperative for Practice Improvement & Innovation

Hope Can Make a Difference

Many of us may be feeling overwhelmed, anxious, and unsure of how to keep going especially when things may feel impossible. Taking deep breaths and slowing down can help. Some days something more may be needed to keep hope alive. Here are five key strategies to cultivate hope developed by Dr. Jacqueline Mattis:

1. Start with goals
2. Harness the power of uncertainty
3. Manage your attention
4. Seek community
5. Look at the evidence

Read the full article to understand each strategy and how it might help in your life.

Family Support and Connection is Important to Healing

The Collaborative Network Approach (CNA) is used by agencies throughout Vermont to offer individuals and families an opportunity to talk with service providers about their concerns and problems in an open, non-judgmental setting. Individuals and their social network are seen as essential participants in the recovery process. The practice has been shown to be particularly beneficial for individuals first experiencing problems/distress from a serious mental illness.

CNA is Vermont's version of the international practice called Open Dialogue, which is an evidence-based practice that has been shown to decrease hospital stays and improve community living in people experiencing psychosis.

The Department of Mental Health funds the continued development and implementation of CNA through its Early Episode Psychosis Initiative, a federally funded project that is focused on developing and implementing early intervention strategies for individuals first experiencing symptoms of serious mental illness.

The Importance of Housing

It is very difficult to maintain good mental wellness if your housing is insecure or unsafe. And it is very difficult to get and keep housing in Vermont on disability income alone - as is the experience of some Vermonters with a serious disabling mental illness.

DMH has some housing supports for people experiencing serious mental illness who are enrolled in community mental health programs. The community mental health centers have funds that can assist with rental and utility costs. DMH also helps people with serious mental illness who are hospitalized and experiencing homelessness to get affordable housing upon discharge.

DMH also funds the Housing First Program offered by Pathways Vermont in six Vermont counties. Pathways helps Vermonters with serious mental health conditions who are experiencing homelessness to secure permanent, independent apartments in the community. Pathways staff work in partnership with local housing authorities to access affordable housing. Once housed, the individuals work with the Pathways staff on their recovery goals including improved mental and physical health, education, employment, recreation and community.

Resources

- **The Happiness Lab:** "You might think more money, a better job, or Instagram-worthy vacations would make you happy. You're dead wrong. In "The Happiness Lab" podcast, Yale professor Dr Laurie Santos will take you through the latest scientific research and share some surprising and inspiring stories that will forever alter the way you think about happiness."
- **Ten Percent Happier:** (Podcast is always free, for MH Professionals, right now, 1-year is free)
- **How to deal with loneliness by Headspace:** "It's normal to feel lonely. It's okay to feel the indescribable sadness that accompanies this feeling, too. And as isolated and disconnected as you might feel, the experience of loneliness doesn't mean you have to be cut off from the world. There are ways to feel less alone."

Workforce Appreciation Spotlight

For the past year, people who work in the mental health field have had to cope with the tremendous impact of the pandemic on their own lives while also supporting others through their programs, agencies or practices. We want to recognize and thank all the mental health staff and peer support workers for everything they have done and continue to do to improve the lives of Vermonters.