

Somerset County **Stigma-Free** Community Campaign Toolkit



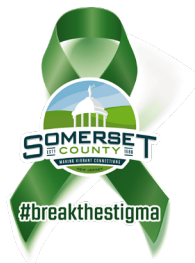
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#breakthestigma



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INTRODUCTION

The **Somerset County Stigma-Free Community Campaign** is a county-wide initiative which aims to eradicate the stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorders. We are dedicated to raising awareness of these conditions by creating an environment where affected individuals are supported in their efforts to achieve wellness and recovery without fear of stigma.

WHAT IS A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION?

Mental health conditions refer to disorders generally characterized by dysregulation of mood, thought and/or behavior. Mental health and substance use disorders encompass a variety of diagnoses ranging from depression and anxiety to substance and alcohol use disorder to bipolar disorder. They can affect persons of any age, race, religion or income.

WHAT IS STIGMA?

Stigma is a mark of disgrace which results from the judgment of others or self. When an individual is labeled by their diagnosis or condition, they experience judgment and prejudice. Stigma brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help.

PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

The World Health Organization ranks mental health conditions, including alcohol and substance use disorders, as the leading cause of disability in the United States and Canada, affecting people of all ages and backgrounds. According to NAMI, 1 in 5 people in any given year are living with a diagnosable mental health condition nationally. That represents 20% of the population and equates to 67k Somerset County residents. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 23 million Americans have a substance use disorder, but only about 25% receive treatment of any kind. These numbers are even higher for non-white residents, LGBTQ populations, and first responders.

In addition, approximately 1-in-5 youth ages 13-18 lives with a serious mental health condition, as 50% of all lifetime disorders onset by age 14. and 75% by age 24. There is an average of 10 years between symptoms showing and seeking treatment. Yet more than half will not seek treatment. **WHY?**

One of the primary reasons individuals fail to seek the help they need is due to the stigma associated with a diagnosis. Main reasons cited are shame and fear of judgment from friends, family and co-workers. Such judgment is often rooted in a lack of knowledge or training. It is our goal to disseminate information and foster a stigma-free environment where people are free from judgment and can get the help they need to recover from disease.

For more information on mental health conditions and substance use disorders, visit www.nami.org.

THE STIGMA-FREE CAMPAIGN INITIATIVE

The Stigma-Free Campaign is an initiative of the Somerset County Department of Human Services to raise awareness about the tangible impact that mental health stigma has in the community. Stigma, the practice of associating negative stereotypes with certain conditions like substance use, or race or social class, creates barriers and challenges that could be eliminated.

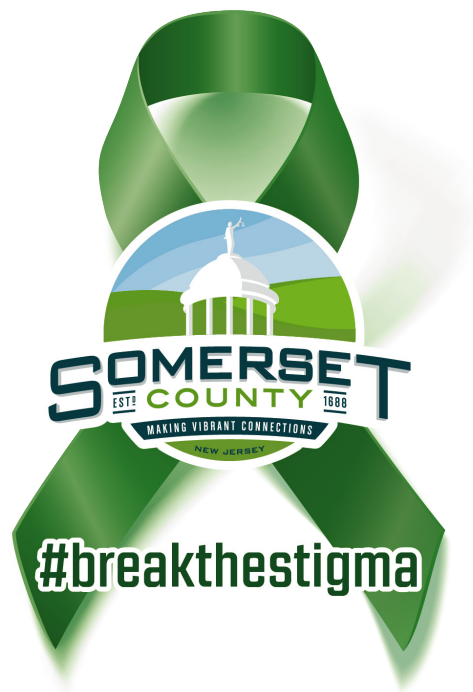
We are Stigma-Free Somerset County. Some of our members live with mental health and/or substance use disorder and some do not, but we all believe that stigma is harmful. Through personal stories and testimonies, we show that a person with a condition is just as valid as someone without. Embracing a stigma free culture encourages dignity and respect for residents of Somerset County, reduces fear of judgment as a barrier, and celebrates the differences that make our community diverse and multi-faceted.

Stigma-Free Communities aim to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma. Somerset County and several of its municipalities have already passed Stigma-Free resolutions.

Who is involved? **Everyone is involved.** This county-wide initiative includes all Somerset County residents, young and old. From bus drivers to school administrators, business owners to law enforcement, every community member is a key stakeholder. We want to link all stakeholders to training opportunities and awareness events aimed at increasing public knowledge about mental health and substance use disorders and knowledge of local resources available to Somerset County residents.

The following pages include a Stigma-Free toolkit for Somerset County towns interested in joining the Stigma-Free Communities Initiative. By passing a Stigma-Free resolution your town will be joining a rapidly growing network of municipalities dedicated to improving the behavioral health of our Somerset County community.

THE STIGMA-FREE CAMPAIGN INITIATIVE



MUNICIPALITIES

SAMPLE STIGMA-FREE RESOLUTION: MUNICIPALITIES

WHEREAS, the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders, along with the Somerset County Department of Human Services, supports the designation of Stigma-Free Communities in every municipality, and;

WHEREAS, at their September 26, 2017 meeting, the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders unanimously passed a resolution supporting the designation of Somerset County as a Stigma-Free Community, and;

WHEREAS, Somerset County recognizes that one in five Americans has experienced mental health and substance use disorders, in a given year according to the National Institute of Mental Health, and;

WHEREAS, mental health problems are more common than cancer and heart disease combined, affecting children and adults, including more than half of our Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans treated at Veteran's Administration hospitals, and;

WHEREAS, given the serious nature of this public health problem, we must continue to reach the millions who need help;

WHEREAS, the stigma associated these conditions is identified as the primary reason individuals fail to seek the help they need to recover from the disease, and;

WHEREAS, Stigma-Free Communities aim to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma, raise awareness of mental health and substance use disorders and create a culture wherein residents feel supported by their community and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment for the disease without fear of stigma and;

WHEREAS, promoting awareness that there can be no "health" without mental health will break down barriers and encourage residents of all ages to be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed, and;

WHEREAS, local resources are available to treat mental health and substance use so no one resident needs to suffer alone or feel hopeless, and;

WHEREAS, establishing Stigma-Free Communities will raise awareness of resources and encourage residents to engage in care as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided, and;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that *[your municipality]* recognizes the community needs and supports the efforts of the County of Somerset in designating *[your municipality]* as a Stigma-Free Community.



FORM A STIGMA-FREE TASK FORCE: MUNICIPALITIES

IDENTIFY A STIGMA-FREE AMBASSADOR

- A Stigma-Free ambassador is any resident who embraces the Stigma-Free Initiative and will help bring your Stigma-Free Communities to life.
- Stigma-Free ambassadors are involved community members who are connected to the community and understand the specific strengths and weaknesses of your municipality.
- Ambassadors do not have to be mental health professionals; they can be individuals who are passionate, interested and energetic. Any proactive community member can become a Stigma-Free ambassador. An ambassador could be a local football coach, board of education member, church leader or simply your next door neighbor. Often times it could be a person who has personally been affected by the mental health or substance use disorder, either directly or through a family member.

EDUCATE, PROMOTE AWARENESS AND GATHER PUBLIC INTEREST

Gather a team of dedicated residents who can help enhance the culture of caring in your community. It would be ideal to include various sectors, including schools, providers, community leaders, church leaders, law enforcement, etc. Host a town-hall information meeting to introduce residents to the Stigma-Free Communities Initiative, educate and promote awareness, and gather public interest.

- Rally local government and business leaders to support the Stigma-Free cause.
 - Municipal Alliance Leaders
 - Mayor
 - Local business owners
 - Directors for the Board of Education, Board of Health
 - Superintendent of Schools
 - Police Chief
- Encourage local community service groups to embrace Stigma-Free Communities.
 - Rotary clubs/ Lions clubs
 - VFW/American Legions
 - Faith communities
 - Senior Citizen Centers
 - Libraries
- Remember the value that our young people can bring.
 - Work with students to promote Stigma-Free
 - Reach out to local Boys and Girls Scouts troops
 - Consider forming a youth task force

STIGMA-FREE ACTION PLAN: MUNICIPALITIES

Below are some ideas to bring your local Stigma-Free Community to life. Feel free to follow these suggestions and plans and add your own that you think will benefit your local municipality.

- Run a town-hall meeting about your local Stigma-Free resolution and efforts.
- Hold a public Stigma-Free forum to discuss your community's Stigma-Free goals and gather input for community events.
- Promote Mental Health First Aid Training for municipal employees, residents and community groups. (For more information on Mental Health First Aid, see page 9)
- Host a Stigma-Free or Recovery Walk.
- Set up a Stigma-Free booth at town-wide events and community days.
- Host a Stigma-Free poster contest within local middle schools.
- Have educational events for pre-school and elementary students.
- Develop a website (or extension of your municipality website) with Stigma-Free information and local mental health resources.
- Encourage student Stigma-Free afterschool clubs.
- Collaborate with local community service groups and your local Municipal Alliance leaders to host a town-wide Stigma-Free celebration.
- Distribute Stigma-Free promotional materials to community members to place on their private lawns and vehicles.
- Host a Stigma-Free/Recovery awareness town concert.
- Collaborate with NAMI and other mental health awareness groups to provide community education and awareness events.
- Develop a media campaign and put out press releases for your Stigma-Free efforts.
- Collaborate with recovery groups to promote their efforts and promote recovery activities and recreational events.
- Promote personal stories of wellness and recovery.

Remember that Stigma-Free is a community effort; think about the strengths of your individual municipality and encourage local residents to take initiative in your Stigma-Free Community. .

TAKING ACTION SAMPLE FOR MUNICIPALITIES

TAKING ACTION SAMPLE FOR MUNICIPALITIES

Wondering how your town can be stigma free? Here are some ideas from North Plainfield!



HOME SECTIONS OPINION EVENTS MILESTONES CLASSIFIEDS

HEALTH & WELLNESS

North Plainfield Becomes First Somerset County To Stigma Free Zone

By VICTORIA CARUSO
March 8, 2017 at 8:00 AM



NORTH PLAINFIELD, NJ – Back in January, resident Mark T. Williams addressed the council proposing launching a Stigma-Free Zone initiative 'to reduce the stigmas typically associated with mental illness through education, open conversation and advocacy.' The idea was well received by the seven-member council with a resolution to create a North Plainfield Stigma Free Zone approved unanimously at a public meeting last month.

"Our goal is for residents to feel more comfortable, and for them to know that they are safe from judgment, can get the services they need and that we, as a community, have a better understanding of mental illness and how it affects our residents," said North Plainfield Council President Larry La Ronde.

According to Williams, the development of a Stigma-Free Zone is a testament to the town's compassionate and knowledgeable community.

The North Plainfield Stigma-Free Campaign

Stigma-Free Zones seek to inspire public interest and open dialogues about mental health stigma. The Community of North Plainfield passed a Stigma-Free resolution in 2017, establishing the first Stigma-Free Zone in Somerset County. Our aim to raise awareness of the local mental health resources available so no resident needs to feel hopeless or alone. The North Plainfield Stigma-Free Zone has encouraged residents to break down barriers and be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed. Mental health has the potential to worsen if left untreated and complications arise when individuals do not seek help. It is essential that residents engage in care as soon as the need is identified, so recovery can begin, hope is inspired, and tragedies are avoided.

Click to read the entire TAPinto article or visit the North Plainfield Facebook Stigma-Free Zone page below

Like Share Suggest Edits ... Send Email Send Message

All Photos

SAVE THE DATE
MAY 6, 2021
Presented by: ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS THE HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Join the online discussion
Breaking the Barriers of Mental Health Therapy for African American Men
WEDNESDAY April 21, 2021 7-8:30PM
REGISTER

COVID-19 UPDATE
MEMBER: YOU ARE NOT ALONE
Text Line: Text "NJ" to 741741
Helpline: 1-800-843-5437
Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-572-7373
Mental Health Hotline: 866-202-4357

SAVE-THE-DATE!
Monday, September 18, 2017
AACT-ADW (African American Community Outreach) in partnership with the Center for Jersey Community Coalitions Presents:
Multicultural Mental Health in our increasingly Diverse Society
Mental Health Stigma: Community Dialogue
Location: 100 East 20th Street, Somerset, NJ
Time: 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

TAKING ACTION SAMPLE FOR MUNICIPALITIES

TAKING ACTION SAMPLE FOR MUNICIPALITIES

And some ideas Bernards Township!

Community Corner

Basking Ridge To Host Stigma Free Town Hall

Speakers will present at the meeting in hopes of making Bernards Township a Stigma Free town.

Bernards
Town Hall
Meeting

Let's talk
about
Mental
Health!

A public forum to discuss the topics of mental health and substance use and the pursuit of Stigma Free status in Bernards Township

Thursday, December 7th 2017

7:00 - 8:30 PM

Bernards Town Hall— Warren Craft Room
1 Collyer Lane, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920

BERNARDS TOWNSHIP
PROUD TO BE
STIGMA-FREE

For more information and to RSVP, please visit
www.bernardsalliance.org or call (908) 204-2523

Municipal Alliance
Promoting Public Health
Bernards Township Health Department

Editor

Bobbie Peer

908-279-0303

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HOME SECTIONS OPINION EVENTS MILESTONES CLASSIFIEDS REAL ESTATE DIRECT

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Ridge Students Showcase "Stigma" Art Show at Local Gallery Unit July 14

By CHELSEA GUIDA
June 20, 2017 at 2:28 AM



Credits: C.Guida

GRAIN & CANE

BAR AND TABLE

ORDER
ONLINE

250 Cornell Drive
Berkeley Heights

BERNARDSVILLE, NJ- The Alhambra Art Gallery held the opening of its latest exhibit, "Stigma," showcasing original work by Ridge High School students, with an opening on June 13. The show aims to bring awareness to mental illnesses and addiction by offering a lens into the world of someone who's suffering.

In light of past community events and tragic deaths in the past year or so, neurologist and Alhambra Art

Bernards Township passed a Stigma Free resolution in May 2018. Since that time, as part of the Stigma Free Initiative, members of the Municipal Alliance have sponsored and presented educational programs to the community to help lessen the stigma associated with mental health issues and disorders. For example, we screened the documentary, *Angst*, designed to help people identify and understand the symptoms of anxiety and encourage them to reach out for help.

We also held several Youth and Adult Mental Health First Aid courses which provided training to hundreds of members of our community including the Bernard's School District's administration and many teachers.

While we were looking forward to hosting our first Stigma Free Concert at Ross Farm this May to recognize Mental Health Month, we remain hopeful we will be able to reschedule for next May.

-Councilwoman and Stigma Free Chair Joan Bannan Harris

The Bernardsville News

Ridge High School student honored for anti-stigma club

Jun 19, 2018 0

Anti-Stigma Club Award Recipient



From left: Anti-Stigma Club Advisor, Kathleen Dusebort, Award Recipient, Ise Fleischer, and 2018 Faculty Club Advisor, Sarah Mueller.

On Wednesday, May 16, Ridge junior, **Ise Fleischer**, was awarded by the New Jersey State Board Recognition Program for her contribution to the school community, particularly for her outstanding leadership in creating the Anti-Stigma Club.

The Anti-Stigma Club seeks to provide students with a platform to discuss mental health in the district. At the club, students seek and implement solutions to improve mental health and make the Ridge High School stigma-free. The Anti-Stigma club has been supported by Ridge High School Principal, Drew Krause, who attended meetings, as well as the RHS Assistant Principals and Jillian Stadis, the Director of School Counseling, Assistant Principal, Kathleen Dusebort, and Faculty



From left: New Jersey State Board of Education member, Gov. Phil Murphy, Attorney General, and State Treasurer.

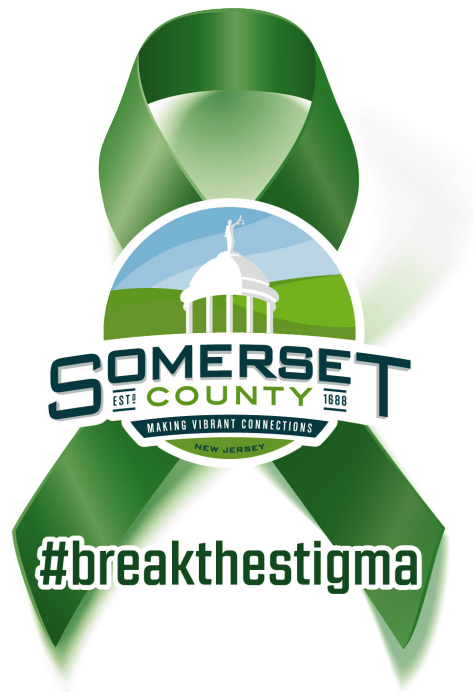
Advisor, Sarah Mueller, accompanied Ise and her father at the New Jersey State Board Recognition Program award ceremony in Trenton on May 16. Ise has educated her club members, the current Freshmen Health Classes, and faculty and administrators about mental health, stigma, and advocacy, and has used her knowledge and research to create the following initiatives for the school and community:

- Attending Board Meetings to discuss mental health
- Selling Candy Canes with words of affirmation during the holiday season - all proceeds were donated to

- NAMI NJ (The National Alliance on Mental Illness for New Jersey)
 - Hosting a presentation for faculty, staff, and administration in the RHS Media Center to review the district-wide mental health statistics and discuss and propose effective solutions
 - Hosting a table at the Bernards Township Library's "Pathways to Mental Health" community resource fair
 - Working with the Athletics Department to have student representatives from the Anti-Stigma Club come speak in Freshmen Health Classes about mental health, stigma, and advocacy

Together, Ise and her club are promoting the district-wide goal for social and emotional health by educating their peers, and promoting advocacy, and encouraging partnership between students, teachers, and administrators.

THE STIGMA-FREE CAMPAIGN INITIATIVE



SCHOOL / SCHOOL DISTRICT
COLLEGE / UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

SAMPLE RESOLUTION: SCHOOLS / COLLEGES / UNIVERSITIES

WHEREAS, the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders, along with the Somerset County Department of Human Services, supports the designation of Stigma-Free *[School / School District / College / University Campus]*, and;

WHEREAS, at their September 26, 2017 meeting, the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders unanimously passed a resolution supporting the designation of Somerset County as a Stigma-Free Community, and;

WHEREAS, Somerset County recognizes that one in five Americans has experienced mental health and substance use disorders, in a given year according to the National Institute of Mental Health, and;

WHEREAS, mental health problems are more common than cancer and heart disease combined, affecting children and adults, including more than half of our Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans treated at Veteran's Administration hospitals, and;

WHEREAS, given the serious nature of this public health problem, we must continue to reach the millions who need help;

WHEREAS, the stigma associated these conditions is identified as the primary reason individuals fail to seek the help they need to recover from the disease, and;

WHEREAS, Stigma-Free *[School / School District / College / University Campus]* aim to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma, raise awareness of mental health and substance use disorders and create a culture wherein residents feel supported by their community and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment for the disease without fear of stigma and;

WHEREAS, promoting awareness that there can be no "health" without mental health will break down barriers and encourage residents of all ages to be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed, and;

WHEREAS, local resources are available to treat mental health and substance use so no one resident needs to suffer alone or feel hopeless, and;

WHEREAS, establishing Stigma-Free Communities will raise awareness of resources and encourage residents to engage in care as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided, and;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that *[School / School District / College / University Campus]* recognizes the community needs and supports the efforts of the County of Somerset in designating *[School / School District / College / University Campus]* as Stigma-Free.



FORM A TASK FORCE: SCHOOLS / COLLEGES / UNIVERSITIES

IDENTIFY A STIGMA-FREE AMBASSADOR

- A Stigma-Free ambassador is any school community member who embraces the Stigma-Free Initiative and will help bring your Stigma-Free Campus/School/School District to life.
- Stigma-Free ambassadors are involved school/college community members who are connected to the school/school district/college community and understand the specific strengths and weaknesses.
- Ambassadors do not have to be mental health professionals; they can be individuals who are passionate, interested and energetic. Any proactive school/college community member can become a Stigma-Free ambassador. An ambassador could be a student, professor, counselor, coach, or faculty member of any kind. Often times, it could be a person who has personally been affected by a mental illness or substance use disorder, either directly or through a family member.

EDUCATE, PROMOTE AWARENESS AND GATHER PUBLIC INTEREST

Gather a team of dedicated Stigma-Free ambassadors who can help enhance the culture of caring in your community, this will be your Stigma-Free Task Force. You can choose to invite task-force members directly, or begin by holding an interest meeting to inform college community members about the Stigma-Free Initiative, educate and promote awareness, and gather public interest.

Who to invite to join the Stigma-Free Task Force:

- Dean/Academic Chairperson
- Teacher/Professor
- Health Services Coordinator
- Staff or students from department of Psychology/Sociology
- Public Safety/Campus Security
- Campus life/Residence Life
- Counselors/Counseling Center representatives
- Committee chair/co-chair
- Club members- any club on campus
- Athletics Representative
- SGA Representative
- Honors Society
- Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF)
- Board of Trustee

STIGMA-FREE ACTION PLAN: SCHOOLS / COLLEGES / UNIVERSITIES

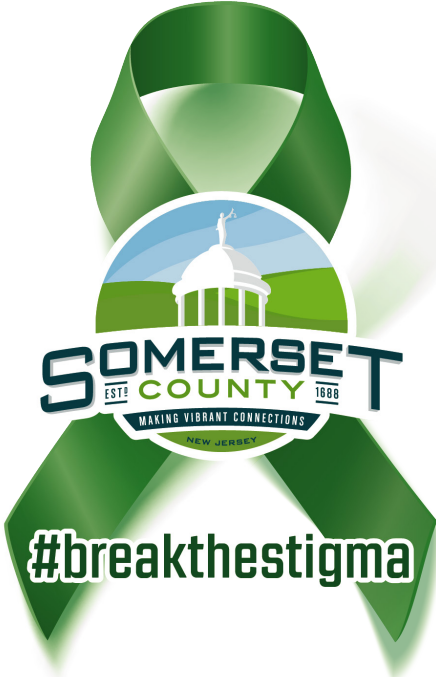
Below are some ideas to bring your local Stigma-Free School Community to life. Feel free to follow these suggestions and plans and add your own that you think will benefit your school. Also, keep in mind that you do not have to do all of these tasks. Any steps you take to decrease stigma are steps in the right direction. If you are already hosting similar events that other groups are too, you may include them to the Stigma-Free Initiative by simply rebranding the event as “[Event name]: A Stigma-Free Event” and including the welcome message below.

- Participate in a college council meeting (i.e. Inter Club Council, Student Government Association)
- Host a stigma free event (i.e. De-stress Fest, Wellness Forum, Stigma-Free Walk, Recovery Concert)
- Set up a Stigma-Free information booth at other campus events (i.e. orientation)
- Promote personal stories of wellness and recovery (i.e. guest speakers, open mic for students)
- Collaborate with local non-profits and recovery groups to support their efforts.
- Offer Mental Health First Aid training for staff and/or students.
- Advocate for inclusion of a Stigma-Free assignment in the curriculum of an art or performing art class.
- Youth outreach through specific programs (i.e. Education or Social Work Majors interning at schools, summer camp on campus)
- Develop a Stigma-Free Website with local mental health resources and information or add a Stigma-Free link to an already existing website.
- Promote Stigma-Free through the student newspaper or a local newspaper (i.e. provide an announcement about the Stigma-Free Initiative or a Stigma-Free Event, provide a monthly Stigma-Free update)
- Distribute Stigma-Free promotional materials (i.e. Lawn signs, decals, pens)

EXAMPLE STIGMA-FREE WELCOME MESSAGE:

“Hello, and welcome to the *[insert event name]*. In line with our new Stigma-Free Initiative in our school/on campus, this event will be a Stigma-Free event. *Stigma is a mark of disgrace which results from judgment by others.* Stigma brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help. As part of a county-wide initiative, *[insert school name here]* is acting to disseminate information and foster a stigma-free environment where people are free from judgment and can get the help they need to recover from mental illness and substance use disorders. We’d like to open this event by reminding you that everyone has the power to break through stigma. We encourage you to support one another, seek the services you need, and do not judge. Together we can decrease stigma to create a culture of caring on campus. Please contact *[insert contact person]* for more information.”

THE STIGMA-FREE CAMPAIGN INITIATIVE



FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION

SAMPLE RESOLUTION: FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION

WHEREAS, the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders, along with the Somerset County Department of Human Services, supports the designation of Stigma-Free Communities in every municipality, and;

WHEREAS, at their September 26, 2017 meeting, the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders unanimously passed a resolution supporting the designation of Somerset County as a Stigma-Free Community, and;

WHEREAS, Somerset County recognizes that one in five Americans has experienced mental health and substance use disorders, in a given year according to the National Institute of Mental Health, and;

WHEREAS, mental health problems are more common than cancer and heart disease combined, affecting children and adults, including more than half of our Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans treated at Veteran's Administration hospitals, and;

WHEREAS, given the serious nature of this public health problem, we must continue to reach the millions who need help;

WHEREAS, the stigma associated these conditions is identified as the primary reason individuals fail to seek the help they need to recover from the disease, and;

WHEREAS, Stigma-Free Faith-Based Organizations aim to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma, raise awareness of mental health and substance use disorders and create a culture wherein residents feel supported by their community and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment for the disease without fear of stigma and;

WHEREAS, promoting awareness that there can be no "health" without mental health will break down barriers and encourage residents of all ages to be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed, and;

WHEREAS, local resources are available to treat mental health and substance use so no one resident needs to suffer alone or feel hopeless, and;

WHEREAS, establishing Stigma-Free Faith-Based Congregations will raise awareness of resources and encourage residents to engage in care as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided, and;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that *[Faith-Based Organization name]* recognizes the congregation needs and supports the efforts of the County of Somerset in designating *[Faith-Based Organization name]* as a Stigma-Free Congregation.



FORM A TASK FORCE: FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION

IDENTIFY A STIGMA-FREE AMBASSADOR

- A Stigma-Free ambassador is any faith-based organization member who embraces the Stigma-Free Initiative and will help bring your Stigma-Free Congregation to life.
- Stigma-Free ambassadors are involved community members who are connected to the community and understand the specific strengths and weaknesses of your congregation.
- Ambassadors do not have to be mental health professionals; they can be individuals who are passionate, interested and energetic. Any proactive congregant can become a Stigma-Free ambassador. An ambassador could be an individual congregant, congregation nurse, secretary, music director, youth director, camp counselor, teacher, study leader, faith organization leader or a faith organization member of any kind. Often times, it could be a person who has personally been affected by a mental illness or substance use disorder, either directly or through a family member.

EDUCATE, PROMOTE AWARENESS AND GATHER PUBLIC INTEREST

Gather a team of dedicated Stigma-Free ambassadors who can help enhance the culture of caring in your community, this will be your Stigma-Free Task Force. You can choose to invite task-force members directly, or begin by holding an interest meeting to inform college community members about the Stigma-Free Initiative, educate and promote awareness, and gather public interest.

Who to invite to join the Stigma-Free Task Force:

- Your designated Faith Leader
- Associate / Assistant Faith Leaders
- Staff of the congregation
- Volunteer leadership / head of ministries
- Youth groups / Women's groups / Men's groups
- Congregation Nurses
- Committee, Session or other governing body chair/co-chairs
- Club members
- Athletics Representative
- Other stakeholders and involved congregants
- Board members

STIGMA-FREE ACTION PLAN: FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION

Below are some ideas to bring your Stigma-Free Congregation to life. Feel free to follow these suggestions and plans and add your own that you think will benefit your congregation. Also, keep in mind that you do not have to do all of these tasks. Any steps you take to decrease stigma are steps in the right direction.

If you are already hosting similar events, you may include them to the Stigma-Free Communities Initiative by simply rebranding the event as “[Event name]: A Stigma-Free Event” and including the welcome message [detailed on the following page] or simply add an activity that educates or increases awareness.

Action Plan suggestions:

- Participate as Stigma Free Ambassadors in any leadership meeting (i.e. Council, Sessions, Committee, any Faith Based Organization internal governance meeting)
- Participate in your Counties Stigma Free Communities Initiative
- Host a stigma free event (i.e. Prayer and awareness event, De-stress Fest, Wellness Forum, Stigma-Free Walk, Recovery Concert)
- Set up a Stigma-Free information booth at other events (i.e. orientation)
- Promote personal stories of wellness and recovery (i.e. guest speakers, publications in bulletins, emails, coffee houses or open mic nights)
- Collaborate with local non-profits and recovery groups to support their efforts.
- Offer Mental Health First Aid training for staff and/or congregants.
- Advocate for inclusion of a Stigma-Free activity in groups or at events.
- Youth outreach through specific programs (i.e. collaborate with local non-profits to help educate)
- Develop a Stigma-Free page on your Website with local mental health resources and information or add the Somerset County Stigma-Free Communities Initiative link to an already existing website.
- Promote the Stigma-Free initiative through your organization’s newspaper, bulletin or other mailing (i.e. provide an announcement about the Stigma-Free Initiative or a Stigma-Free Event, provide a monthly Stigma-Free update)
- Promote your involvement through press release to local newspapers
- Distribute Stigma-Free promotional materials (i.e. Lawn signs, decals, pens)

EXAMPLE STIGMA-FREE WELCOME MESSAGE:

“Hello, and welcome to the *[insert event name]*. In line with our new Stigma-Free Initiative, this event will be a Stigma-Free event. *Stigma is a mark of disgrace which results from judgment by others.* Stigma brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help. As part of a county-wide initiative, *[insert name here]* is acting to disseminate information and foster a stigma-free environment where people are free from judgment and can get the help they need to recover from mental illness and substance use disorders. We’d like to open this event by reminding you that everyone has the power to break through stigma. We encourage you to support one another, seek the services you need, and do not judge. Together we can decrease stigma to create a culture of caring in our congregation and to be carried out into the community. Please contact *[insert Stigma Free Task Force contact person]* for

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID?

Mental Health First Aid is a public education program that introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems, builds understanding of their impact and overviews appropriate supports. This 8-hour course uses role-playing and simulations to demonstrate how to offer initial help in a mental health crisis and connect people to the appropriate professional, peer, social and self-help care. The program also teaches common risk factors and warning signs of specific conditions like anxiety, depression, substance use, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and schizophrenia.

WHAT DO YOU LEARN?

Just as CPR helps you assist an individual having a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid helps you assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use-related crisis. In the Mental Health First Aid course, you learn risk factors and warning signs for mental health and addiction concerns, strategies for how to help someone in both crisis and non-crisis situations, and where to turn for help. It teaches about recovery and resiliency – the belief that individuals experiencing these challenges can and do get better and use their strengths to stay well.

TOPICS COVERED

- Depression and mood disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Trauma
- Psychosis
- Substance use disorders
- Assess for risk of suicide or harm
- Listen nonjudgmentally
- Give reassurance and information
- Encourage appropriate or professional help
- Encourage self-help and other support strategies

THE ACTION PLAN

You could be the help that someone needs. Get trained today!

If you are interested in attending a training, hosting a training course for your organization or would like more information contact **Meg Isbitski**, Assistant Mental Health Administrator at isbitski@co.somerset.nj.us



SAMPLE PRESS MATERIALS

[TOWN/SCHOOL/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION] DECLARES MUNICIPALITY A STIGMA-FREE ZONE

One in five adults experience a diagnosable mental health condition *every year* and many of these individuals do not seek help because of fear of shame or judgment from friends, family and coworkers.

On [DATE] [TOWN/SCHOOL/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION] made the first steps towards eliminating the stigma associated with mental health. The elimination of mental health stigma will allow residents to get the resources they need without judgment.

[TOWN/SCHOOL/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION] representatives passed a resolution designating the [TOWN/SCHOOL/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION] a Stigma-Free Zone in order to create an environment in which residents will feel free to seek treatment for mental health and substance use without the fear of being stigmatized.

[TOWN/SCHOOL/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION] joins the County of Somerset in declaring a Stigma-Free Zone.

[TOWN/SCHOOL/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION] hopes to raise awareness of mental health and substance use disorders, provide an effective way to reduce the stigma associated with the disease and encourage those who are affected to seek services and feel supported. The establishment of this Stigma-Free Zone will raise awareness of local [TOWN/SCHOOL/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION] mental health resources so no one resident needs to feel hopeless or alone. The elimination of stigma will enable residents to ask for help when needed so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided.

[TOWN/SCHOOL/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION] urges anyone who would like more information on the Stigma-Free Campaign to contact _____ and to help us to eliminate stigma and promote wellness amongst all [at/in] [TOWN/SCHOOL/FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION] and Somerset County residents.

BE AN AGENT OF CHANGE!

JOIN THE STIGMA-FREE MOVEMENT!

It takes a lot of work to live a Stigma-Free life, so we need to anticipate that many, if not all people, will not be successful on the first day of taking their Stigma-Free pledge. We are all raised within different cultures and learn stigmatizing attitudes from our parents, peers and community.

It is understandable that many of you may already possess stigmatized perceptions, but there is still great hope that all people are able to empower themselves. We encourage you to create and sustain Stigma-Free environments that instill **awareness, understanding and acceptance**, by taking **ACTION!**

**TAKE THE STIGMA-FREE
PLEDGE NOW!**

