

THE STIGMA FREE ZONE NEWS OF NJ

Bringing the Mental Health Conversation to New Jersey

We report on an initiative of volunteers, nonprofits, schools, libraries, hospitals, First Responders, and houses of worship working independently or with local government to make NJ free from the stigma of mental illness. Anyone can form a local SFZ Task Force, no permission required. Just pledge to "do something about mental illness."



CAREPLUS COMBATS SLOWED REHIRING OF DISABLED WITH NEW SERVICES

THE STIGMA HERE IS FEAR

By Cynthia Chazen

Careplus NJ has helped their clients find work for decades. They employ people in all realms, from hourly janitorial and laundry services to white collar office jobs. They operate a Laser Imaging Supply House, selling and shipping toner and inkjet supplies, as well as providing repair and maintenance services. The entire operation is staffed by clients with mental illness. Profits support programs and services at CPNJ; hence doubling the good work they do.

These disabled workers, despite fighting chronic illness, are still educated, talented, and capable people. However, the CPNJ workforce has recently been stressed by lost jobs, the same as everyone else. CarePlus Workforce Solutions was also awarded an important grant titled "Employment Matters" last year, but recipients of its job coaching and development are now also somewhat stalled due to Covid-19. Grant clients are looking for all kinds of work, at all pay grades. Some hold university degrees. But rehiring remains slow. It is a very worrisome time.

But they are fighting back by staying nimble, and offering new disinfection services for schools, group homes, and commercial offices, to help deal with increased demand due to the pandemic.

"Who would have thought overnight some of our workers would become essential?" asked Brigitte Johnson, VP and Executive Director at CarePlus Workforce Solutions. She told The SFZ News her

concern is high. "About 10% of our workers have lost their jobs," she said. "We also had to [recently] stop servicing a sheltered workshop which closed, which affected at least 20 additional clients." Although the rate of unemployment among people with mental illness is always higher than that of the general populations, many people with mental illness find great structure and reward in work, and find it helps manage their illness. They want to work.

"The real stigma here is fear," said Brigitte, referring to a hesitancy some have when considering hiring workers with a mental illness. "Once we hire someone, they submit to the same background checks as anyone else; they are screened and trained, and always supervised. We also carry a bond to insure all of our placements as well," she said. The janitorial group has recently gained new clients Harbor House in Passaic County, and The Paradigm Day School in Midland Park. "Our workers are the most reliable, faithful people," Brigitte said, with laughter in her voice. "They take real pride in their work."

Careplus NJ would like to see more schools and commercial offices hire their clients. They operate in Bergen, Essex, and Union Counties. "But we can expand for larger, or multiple site contracts," Brigitte said. School and business administrators who would like to support disabled workers should reach out to Careplus at [888-362-8700](tel:888-362-8700) or at [the website, below](#).



IT DOESN'T NEED TO BE COMPLICATED

ALPINE'S SFZ AMBASSADOR MAKES HER MARK

By CYNTHIA CHAZEN

Gina Toddings is a stay-at-home mom and lifetime resident of Alpine, and our newest Stigma Free "Ambassador": one of those amazing local leaders who uphold the "do something about mental illness" pledge that every new SFZ undertakes. Alpine had signed the resolution to become Stigma Free some years ago, but needed a volunteer like Gina to really bring the message home.

She called me for help, and I figured the usual bureaucracy would bring results in 6 months or so. She started by reaching out to Alpine Mayor, Paul Tomasko, asking if Alpine could hang the metal Stigma Free Zone road signs she had seen in neighboring towns such as Englewood and Tenafly. She planned to place them on Closter Dock Road, a local road feeding into the Palisades Parkway that sees over 5,000 cars a day. In closer to 6 days, Gina emailed me again, excitedly. The mayor was delighted, and the road signs were already on order!

Gina also wanted to do something for mental health that included a teachable moment for her school-age children, so together they painted some "Kindness Rocks" with SFZ messages of support, and she and her girls deposited them on the grounds at City Hall, and in the yards of a few special neighbors and friends. She got permission to hang lime green ribbons on trees at a City Hall Ceremony to support May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Gina then created Alpine Stigma Free pages on Facebook and Instagram. Now, spurred on by her success, she has asked the Mayor for an Alpine Stigma Free link on the borough hall website.

Thank you Gina, for keeping it simple and for doing so much, so quickly to bring mental health awareness to your town!



QUICKLINKS TO RESOURCES

[Course Hero Virtual: 2020 Education Summit July 29-31](#)

[MindingYourMind Webinar: The Way Forward: Racism & Trauma](#)

[NJ Self-Help Clearinghouse: Find A Support Group](#)

[MHA Essex & Morris: Stop Teen Suicide](#)

[CSPNJ: Free Download How To Plan A HealthFair](#)

CONGRATULATIONS TO NJAMHAA!

**The National Council for Behavioral Health recognized
The NJ Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies
for its extraordinary advocacy work during
the June 23rd Hill Day at Home,
the National Council's annual advocacy event to promote
solutions for behavioral health providers
and the individuals they serve.**

Thank You for Your Advocacy !

NAMI NJ LAUNCHES ARTS CAFE

The virtual Expressive Arts Café is a series of Zoom Meetings featuring poetry, musical interpretations, vision boards, and handmade crafts. We're your café around the corner and we'll get to know your name.

**July meetings on Mon. July 6 & 27,
from 1:00pm – 2:00pm.**

Email ean@naminj.org for notifications!