

A BRIGHTER Future

Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network brings hope and support to county residents

By Angela Calabrese

The holiday season is supposed to be a time of joy, togetherness with family and peace. There are also some facing loneliness, fear and anxiety – especially given the events of 2020.

But there is hope – a place where someone is ready to help.

For over 50 years, the Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network has been helping residents of Wayne County deal with an array of issues – such as mental health, substance use, intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and more.

Willie Brooks, DWIHN's CEO, has been involved with human services for 40 years – mainly in the health care and finance sectors. He's been with the organization for three years, and before that was executive director and chief financial officer of the Oakland Community Health Network.

Brooks realizes how important DWIHN's services are to the residents of Wayne County, especially now. He points to three factors that affect people during the holidays.

- **Social isolation.** "There is a sense of social isolation during the holidays. It becomes especially prevalent during this season, when so many other people are out and about, enjoying time with family and friends, and doing activities."
- **Financial stress.** "During the holidays, you have to spend money, and if you can't meet the expectations, that brings about stress."
- **Grief.** "Oftentimes, the holidays bring back memories that aren't favorable."



Brooks

To battle those issues, Brooks said DWIHN has an open-door policy. To make sure its message is being heard everywhere, the organization has embarked on an aggressive community outreach campaign.

"We want people to know we're here, and ready to listen so we can help them deal with isolation, stress or grief," Brooks said.

Maybe you've seen DWIHN's many billboards in Detroit, and throughout the county.

To combat the issues above, along with anxiety or fear, Brooks said there are ways people can help themselves as well. They include promoting hope, encouraging people to be active and promoting voluntarism – even among those who suffer from mental illness.

Brooks also said it's crucial that people seek help when they're dealing with stress, and to get past the stigma that's sometimes attached to mental illness.

"Stigma is one of the main enemies we have to combat," he said.

He went on to add that, in Christianity, the word stigma was a derivative of the term "stigmata", which describe the wounds on Jesus's body when he was crucified.

It's also known as a mark of shame or disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person.

"It's a mark that is displayed on a person, so if someone else can see it, they automatically rush to judgment," Brooks said. "Our response is to cover it up, ignore it, or deny it, which makes

things worse."

That's where seeking help with an organization that understands all these issues really makes a difference.

"What we need to do first is let people know that stigma is not something you should be ashamed of," Brooks said. "You shouldn't cover it up. People don't cover up cancer, or heart disease or a wound."

He said that the stigma of mental illness often drives people to stop taking their medications or seeing their therapists.

"It's on my most-wanted list in my office to rid society of stigma," Brooks said.



Changed processes and procedures due to COVID

One service that has come to the forefront during the pandemic has been telehealth.

"This is here to stay," he said. "The technology was already there, but now we are being forced to use it."

He elaborated that, in general, telehealth is a good development. But there are some conditions in which

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telehealth treatment doesn't work as well.

"Some services cannot be provided by telehealth, such as autism," he said. "Substance abuse treatment often requires one-on-one intervention as well."

For those who want to come in and be seen in person, DWIHN has implemented protocols to keep people safe, such as maintaining an empty waiting room by having them stay in their cars until they're called in, etc.

Holistic care/treating the whole person

But for all the focus on mental illness, substance use and the like, the biggest challenge facing many people is meeting basic necessities, like food, clothing and shelter.

"If someone doesn't have a home, nothing else is important until you resolve those issues," he said.

He cites people who are in and out of jail.

"We as a society are ignoring all the things in their lives that are taking up their focus and keeping them from dealing with their mental health," he added. "We focus on their entire holistic care."

He cites five categories of help that DWIHN provides:

- Social
- Spiritual
- Economic
- Mental
- Physical

"We help people get back into society," Brooks said. "We help people with their economic needs."

For anyone who may need a little extra help, or a lot, please call DWIHN at 1-800-241-4949. Trained clinicians will answer your call and be ready to assist.

Brooks also stresses that cost of services is not an issue, and

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should not hinder anyone from reaching out to help.

"We are the Medicaid program for all of Wayne County," Brooks said. "We do not turn you down."

DWIHN also works with many other agencies, and relies heavily on volunteers.

"We work with communities, religious organizations, we connect people with resources and families who can aid in this process," Brooks said. "This is a life-changing event, something they will need for the rest of their life."

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OUTFRONT