

# Community comes together to support recovery, health & wellness

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**ALTON – Say It Out Loud**, coordinated by **AJ French**, is a community gathering to proactively address mental health and addiction recovery by hearing and validating individuals who live with mental health conditions. This unique recovery education forum has support from city, county and state government; as well as churches, nonprofit organizations and the local school district.

Mike Varner, with the Alton Community Relations Commission, sought out Ms. French after learning of her consulting work in Minnesota. Mr. Varner recognized the need to proactively address mental health and addiction recovery. He saw this as an excellent

opportunity to do so while advancing the Commission's commitment to cultivating inclusive communities.

The Madison County Mental Health Board and the Madison County Public Health Department were quick to co-sponsor Say It Out Loud. Like many counties throughout Illinois, the Madison Health Department County has identified mental health as a priority area in the Illinois Project Assessment for Local Need (IPLAN).

The State of Illinois, Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health will be represented by Director Diana Knaebe who is delivering the keynote address. Her remarks will be followed by a panel of speakers who will share their experiences of overcoming poverty, racism, trauma, homelessness, addictions, incarceration and more. They are living proof of the reality of recovery.

However, mental health and addiction challenges are sometimes present in more subtle ways. According to Cathy Contarino, Executive Director of IMPACT Center for Independent Living, "Mental health and addictions are often 'invisible conditions' and it's important for our community to proactively have these kinds of conversations and support one another."

The health of both individuals and communities are directly intertwined. "The Say It Out Loud event is an important way to dignify our neighbors who face mental health challenges by giving them a voice, or perhaps more accurately giving our community an opportunity to listen to their voices. It's a chance to hear one another's stories and bear one another's burdens on the way to becoming a healthy community together." said Pastor Peter Hough, Leader of the Riverbend Ministerial Alliance.

One organization that has been particularly supportive is the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Southwestern Illinois. "NAMI Southwestern Illinois is honored to be supporting the Say It Out Loud conference. Our Board of Directors and General Membership celebrate the conference's focus on recovery and empowerment. We look forward to an inspiring, successful event!" stated Executive Director Jessica Gruenich.



Special thanks goes to the Madison County Mental Health Board for financially supporting this community education forum.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please register online at [EventBrite](http://EventBrite) or you can complete and mail this registration form to:

IMPACT Center for Independent Living  
2735 E. Broadway, Alton, IL 62002  
Attention: Cathy Contarino



## Say It Out Loud

This forum is designed to encourage attendees to proactively address mental health in a manner consistent with how we address physical health, spiritual health, financial health, etc. We hope that by "saying it out loud" we will destroy shameful silence which negatively impacts individuals, families and communities; for darkness cannot exist in light.

### Speakers:

DHS/DMH Director Knaebe  
James Bobo  
Gloria Centeno  
Trenda Hedges  
Cindy Mayhew

### Questions:

Contact Event Coordinator  
AJ French at 618-792-2049  
[aj.french@giftofvoice.com](mailto:aj.french@giftofvoice.com)

### When:

Friday, March 11, 2016  
Doors Open at 6:00pm  
6:30pm – 9:00pm

### Where:

Alton High School Auditorium  
4200 Humbert Road  
Alton, IL 62002

