



OSF St. Anthony's Introduces New Support Groups

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - From grief to anger management, OSF St. Anthony's has several new support groups available for community members no matter what issues they are facing.

Staci M. Knox, LCSW, is the Manager of Psychological Services at OSF. She explained that support groups can be especially beneficial for people when combined with individual therapy. These groups allow people to discuss issues, role-play new behaviors and share what worked for them.

“We all are social beings, and we all really benefit from being in an environment where you feel safe and you feel supported,” Knox said. “A therapeutic educational group led by a mental health professional is a perfect place to have these skills introduced — whether we’re talking about conflict resolution or skills for anxiety and depression and bullying — to have these skills introduced for specific conditions and then practice. Or perhaps there might be someone in the group that has had an experience and they can relate to the person who is sharing the struggles they’re having, or perhaps even successes with the struggles and share them as well.”

OSF offers support groups for a variety of issues and age groups. For kids and adolescents, there are groups for ages 7–17 that address problem-solving and conflict resolution, social skills, communication skills and coping mechanisms for anxiety, depression, bullying and other common issues.

After receiving positive feedback from the older age groups, OSF most recently started a group for children ages 7–8. Knox, who was a child and adolescent therapist before she took on her current role, has been excited to see so many people benefitting from the younger support groups.

“It is an excellent opportunity for children to learn coping skills, to be able to practice out social skills that are introduced in the group. It’s a safe place to try out and role-play new behaviors,” she explained. “And so far, we’ve been very successful with our existing groups for 9 and 10-year-olds, 10 to 12-year-olds, 13 to 14-year-olds and 15 to 17-year-olds.”

The open adult group is similar to the children’s groups, with a focus on general problem-solving, conflict resolution and coping skills. Newer groups include a caregivers group and grief group. The neurology group caters to people who are stroke survivors or have seizure disorders and migraines. They also work with people who are recovering from concussions or who are in the early stages of dementia. The grandparents group brings together grandparents who are parenting a younger family member.

But Knox is especially excited about the women's family violence group and the anger management group, both of which are brand new. The women's family violence group provides support and resources for women who are experiencing abuse or recovering from past domestic violence. The anger management group is open to men and women over age 18 who need help controlling anger and their responses to frustrating situations.

Knox explained that new OSF therapist Vanna Lenhardt spearheaded the women's family violence and anger management groups. Lenhardt has shown that these two groups don't necessarily go hand-in-hand.

"A lot of people are under the assumption that the anger management and the family violence group would mirror each other. But it truly is very, very different subject matter," Knox said. "Family violence could be any family member that happens in what's supposed to be a safe environment. This group provides a place to learn about resources available, to be able to find support and develop networking, whereas the anger management might be working with people who have struggled not so much with family violence, but just difficulty controlling anger in a variety of settings."

Knox said she has seen more mental health issues since the COVID-19 Pandemic, which exacerbated existing mental health conditions in some people and served as a catalyst in others. She hopes the new groups will provide an outlet for people to feel more connected and supported.

"By opening up these groups, it also allowed us to see more patients and provide quicker points of service," she added. "I'm just so pleased that so much work has been done surrounding the stigma of receiving mental health services. It's very evident by the number of people who are calling now."

For more information about OSF St. Anthony's mental health services, including how to get involved in their support groups, call 618-474-6240. A doctor's referral is not necessary, and most insurances are accepted, including Medicaid and Medicare.