

Edwardsville Township Hosts Informational Event on Local Mental Health Services

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - Edwardsville Township recently sponsored a community briefing about mental health. Attendees learned about local resources and organizations that can support people who live with or who have a loved one with a mental health disorder.

Madison County Mental Health Board

Deborah Humphrey, the Madison County Mental Health Board's executive director, explained that the Board is a "community mental health authority" that helps fund providers and services throughout the county.

Annually, the Board funds 14 to 16 providers and more than 30 mental health, substance use or developmental disability services. Agencies apply for funding through the Board every year.

"We review applications. We look at them in terms of, 'What is it that our community needs?' We do a needs analysis every year. We do a one- and three-year plan to determine what things that we feel the direction we should go based on what's current in the community."

But Humphrey noted that the main issues have remained the same over the past few years. Stigma and opioid use are two major concerns. The Board is also focused on children's behavioral health, as more kids seem to be struggling than ever before.

"Kids are in crisis. Huge crisis, still. It started before COVID. It exacerbated during COVID," Humphrey said. "So that's another area where we are really in the schools working to put programs and services."

According to recent surveys, 42% of students in Edwardsville High School self-identified as having thoughts of depression, anxiety or suicide. The Board hopes to help more [students become certified in teen mental health first aid](#), and they are promoting additional services in the schools.

There were 44 deaths by suicide in Madison County last year, and the Board wants to see this number decrease as much as possible. You can visit the [official Madison County Mental Health Board webpage](#) for more information about what they do or to [find resources](#).

Illinois State Police

Sergeant Brian Masters with the Illinois State Police spoke about mental health training and officer wellness. He noted that he has spent years working with some of the most upsetting cases, and it has been beneficial for him and his officers to learn more about mental health.

"That plays a toll on you, and you can only imagine sometimes with law enforcement if we're not healthy or in a position of good standing, it's very difficult for us to be effective to respond to a mental health crisis call or anything else," he added. "So we, kind of slow, but we're getting on board with the concept of officer wellness. And one

of the things that became part of the law of the SAFE-T Act was for the city and county officers to receive that 40 hours of mental health training, which is nice.”

Under the SAFE-T Act and an initiative from the Illinois State Police, all cadets in the Illinois State Police Academy now undergo 40 hours of mental health training before they graduate. Masters noted that they aren’t training to become therapists or social workers, but they’re learning the basics of mental health, resources and other important information so they can respond to crisis calls.

“This is something we’re excited about,” he said. “We have learned so much because that’s part of our program, having some speakers come in that have a serious mental illness or a mental illness or are relatives of those that do. And it’s so impactful and meaningful and beneficial to hear about those police encounters that they’ve had, what was effective, what wasn’t, what we can do different.”

National Alliance on Mental Illness

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) offers several support groups and classes for families and people living with mental illnesses. Kelly Jefferson, a program director with NAMI, shared information about how NAMI programming has helped her family.

“The first time we walked into a class or group, there were 21 other families who were affected by mental illness,” she said. “So we knew we weren’t alone, that there was somebody who understood our burden, understood our challenges, and we can find help and we can share resources.”

NAMI’s Southwestern Illinois chapter covers Madison, Clinton, Bond, St. Clair, Randolph, Macoupin, Montgomery and Monroe Counties. They offer Connections groups for people over age 18 who are living with a mental health condition, and they have several peer-to-peer classes and family support groups. You can visit their [official website at NAMISWI.org](https://www.namISWI.org) for details.

Edwardsville Public Library

Cary Harvengt with the Edwardsville Public Library explained that the library offers space and information for people who want to learn more about mental health.

“What hurts individuals hurts the community, and we see that a lot in the library,” she said. “I think librarians feel, in a public library, that we’re a bridge to information. We know every day when we go to work, we’re there to give people information when they’re brave enough to ask without judgment. We do it discreetly. We don’t ask too many

personal questions. We just want people to have what they need, and that's what we're there for."

The librarians are trained on how to administer Narcan, and they also offer free winter clothing accessories to people who need them. Harvengt and other librarians try to keep the shelves stocked with resources and information about mental health. She said compassion is an important part of working at the library.

For more information about Edwardsville Township and their [upcoming community briefing events](#), visit their [official website at EdwardsvilleTownship.com](http://EdwardsvilleTownship.com).