Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) Teaches Adults to Recognize Mental Health Problems and Assist Youth in Accessing Support

Have you ever asked yourself ...

- ***I wish I could help, but I don't know what to do?***
- ***Should I ask what's wrong? But what if I make her/him angry?***
- ***I don't understand what's going on, but I think they need help.***

Delphi Drug & Alcohol Council has become a community champion in helping to decrease stigma and increase awareness of youth mental health and emotional wellness through offering Youth Mental Health First Aid classes. In 2015, Delphi was selected to be the lead agency overseeing a federal SAMHSA grant titled, Project AWARE-C, with the support of the following partners: Monroe County Probation, Office of Children and Family Services, Villa of Hope, Coordinated Care Services, Inc. and Causewave Community Partners. These partners assist in implementation of the plan to achieve the following: Reduced self-reports of teen aged depression; increase in referrals for mental health services; increase in numbers of YMHFA instructors and First Aiders; greater community awareness of the importance of early recognition of mental health problems with youth and identifying a plan for sustainability of this work beyond the grant.

Core partners were chosen because of their special connections with specific youth serving populations. Education, Public Safety, Juvenile Justice, Youth & Family Services, and Mental and Behavioral Health are all well represented with the partnering organizations. This strong interagency collaboration represents a community effort to build understanding to support disconnected youth and youth involved with the Juvenile Justice system. Moreover, it is the hope that by equipping teachers, coaches, parents and other adults who serve youth daily with the knowledge and skills obtained from attending the training to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health problems and assist youth in accessing support. This earlier intervention builds resiliency and supports healthy development.

In the past two years, over 1,350 adults have been trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid. The grant is scheduled to end in September 2018 with the goal of training over 1,500 adults. CCSI oversees the project evaluation of this grant. It has been identified through quarterly surveys of those who completed the class, that 4,654 conversations with youth which resulted in a linkage to a community support were reported by

First Aiders. This number is based on a 32% response rate of the surveys, suggesting that even more youth were impacted by someone who completed YMHFA. As part of the sustainability plan for YMHFA trainings, Delphi was selected as the lead agency to oversee a funding proposal through Finger Lakes Performing Provider System to help develop and enhance YMHFA across a 13-county region over the next year.

What is YMHFA? Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour public education program which introduces participants to the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents (YMHFA) or adults (MHFA), builds understanding of the importance of early intervention, and teaches individuals how to help someone who is in crisis or experiencing a mental health challenge. Mental Health First Aid uses role-playing and simulations to demonstrate how to assess a mental health crisis, select interventions and provide initial help, and connect people to professional, peer, social, and self-help care. MHFA offers classes for a variety of target audiences.

What Will Participants Learn? The course teaches participants the risk factors and warning signs of a variety of mental health challenges common among adolescents (or adults), including anxiety, depression, psychosis, eating disorders, AD/HD, disruptive behavior disorders, and substance use disorder. Participants do not learn to diagnose, nor how to provide any therapy or counseling – rather, participants learn to support a youth (YMHFA) or adult (MHFA) developing signs and symptoms of a mental illness or in an emotional crisis by applying a core five-step action plan:

A→ Assess for risk of suicide or harm
L→ Listen nonjudgmentally
G→ Give reassurance and information
E→ Encourage appropriate professional help
E→ Encourage self-help and other support strategies

Who Should Take the Course? The YMHFA course is designed for adults who interact with adolescents (teachers, school staff, coaches, youth group leaders, parents, etc.). Like CPR, MHFA prepares participants to interact with a person in crisis and connect the person with help.

Who Created the Course? The National Council for Behavioral Health was instrumental in bringing Mental Health First Aid to the United States. Mental Health First Aid USA worked with experts at the National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health at the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development to develop the youth program. It is expected that a YMHFA geared for peers to support other peers will be available in the United States soon.

Why is this important? This training has helped to shift perceptions of adults from "*It's not MY job*" to "*it's EVERYBODY's job*" to ensure safer environments for young people in our communities. The cost associated with training one adult can impact multiple youth; imagine what the impact training many adults across a region could have. As is taught in YMHFA, when a youth has three or more trusted adults it improves their resiliency.

Where Can I Learn More? To learn more about Mental Health First Aid contact Margi Taber at Delphi Drug & Alcohol Council, 835 W. Main Street, Rochester, NY 14611 -- 585-467-2230 x205 or mtaber@delphidrug.org