

Community Advocates

How everyday people are making a difference

Baby steps... One day at a time... Patience is a virtue... These clichés are tiresome in themselves. But their words ring true to those in the behavioral health field who are watching and waiting for the stigma surrounding mental illness to fade and vanish.

While insiders in the field may grow impatient with the lack of awareness surrounding mental illness in our country, things are in fact moving steadily in the right direction. Through informative programs offered to the community to help train and educate people about behavioral health issues, a form of “viral” advocacy has taken root in Northeast Ohio.

Coleman provides training sessions on suicide prevention, mental illness awareness for first responders, and community advocacy programs, among others, to help inform members of the community about mental illness. These efforts are beginning to payoff, as leaders have seen changes in public perception that seem to stem directly from persons trained by Coleman who are serving as advocates to others in the community.

Coleman helps to fund a suicide prevention program conducted by the Portage County Suicide Coalition. The program aims to teach the average citizen warning signs of suicide and basic intervention skills to help prevent an incident. Since participation in this program began four years ago, the number of completed suicides annually in Portage County has decreased by 50 percent. As citizens such as teachers, nurses and law enforcement personnel – those who have direct contact with people in need of help – become familiar with techniques to prevent suicide, the results are remarkable, both nationally and locally.

Another important program supported by Coleman with the Portage County Mental Health and Recovery Board is Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Trainings. The CIT program is a pre-arrest program that builds skills with police officers and first responders in order to decrease the amount of time they spend responding to calls related to mental disturbances and suicide prevention. Since the program began two years ago, the team reports very high rates of officer satisfaction concerning the disposition involving persons with mental illnesses who are in crisis.

As more community members learn about mental illness, they are able to spread the word to others as advocates of behavioral health. As the public learns more about the diseases associated with mental illness, the fear and negativity that are often associated with the illness begin to fade. It is through the help of everyday people that Coleman’s advocacy efforts are successful. To learn more about ways to become a community advocate, please visit www.coleman-professional.com.