

Mental Health Monday: Bringing Cheer During the Holidays and Beyond

Bill Pollock

This is Show Me Today, the voice of Missouri. Geraldine Smith is with the Behavioral Health Network in Saint Louis, and the project manager of the crisis counseling program, which is part of the statewide Show-Me Hope Missouri Crisis Counseling program. And we've worked with Show-Me Hope for a while to get their word out. We had our burritos for burn out campaign in Mid-Missouri a couple of weeks ago, bringing free burritos for frontline workers.

Bill Pollock

Well, Geraldine, it's nice to speak with you. Thanks for coming on the show.

Geraldine Smith

Thank you for the invitation.

Bill Pollock

I want to talk about these holiday cheer cards and high school bands, and we'll get into that in a moment. But there are many institutions under the Show-Me Hope umbrella. As the project manager for the crisis counseling program under Behavioral Health Network, tell me a little bit about what you do?

Geraldine Smith

As a crisis counselor, or as the project manager for the crisis counseling program, it is my responsibility to, provide creative outreach activities for the Missouri community. And the aim of this is to assist individuals and communities in recovering from the psychological effects of natural or human caused disasters through the provision of these creative, community-based outreach and educational services that we create.

And so our aim again, is to help the survivors of Covid 19 understand their current situation and understand reactions and that they have. Our ultimate goal is to reduce stress and provide emotional support to Covid 19 survivors and those individuals within the Missouri community who are suffering from Covid 19 and need emotional support.

Bill Pollock

Yeah. You know, we may have listeners who are experiencing anxiety and uncertainty, and they may not even realize it. Do you see a lot of that? I mean, the people that reach out to you?

Geraldine Smith

Yes we do. Yeah. We see that quite a bit. So matter of fact, there was one, annual care fair that we had, attended in Maryland Heights and our, crisis counselors, they were there providing educational information and other materials to individuals who attended that fair.

They indicated that there was such outreach of individuals coming, you know, saying, I need help, you know, or someone in their family needed help. And so we were able to provide them information about counseling services available to them, even immediate, crisis information was also made available to them such as crisis hotlines that they could call, you know, to refer individuals and their families or their friends, you know, for help.

Bill Pollock

Geraldine Smith is joining us here on Show Me Today, the project manager of the crisis counseling program with Behavioral Health Network, a part of the Show-Me Hope Missouri Crisis Counseling program. And you talked about how you come up with unique ways to get the word out and help support people. Obviously, one of the groups that really suffered during the pandemic were nursing home residents. Can you talk a little bit about the holiday cheer cards and how that idea came about and what that was all about?

Geraldine Smith

We work with several extender agencies within the Saint Louis community. Such as Alive and Well, Casa de Salud, Mental Health of America, Safe Connections, and one of the extender agencies that we work with was Voice. And Voice is an agency that, provides information and materials to nursing homes. And they also extend their services to the senior population. And so they had what they call a holiday cheer card drive. And so, because we were affiliated with them, we said, oh, we would love to participate in that. And so the crisis counselors, for the Show-Me Hope program, we purchased holiday cheer cards, and we sign them with personal messages and our own personal signatures, to the Blue Circle rehab and nursing facility here in Saint Louis, Missouri.

There were approximately 96 to 100 residents that were at that facility. And so those cards were delivered to the nursing home to give to the residents so that they could get a real nice, cheerful, holiday greeting and letting them know that someone cared about them, that someone was thinking about them during this holiday season.

Bill Pollock

Oh, that's really special. What, what was the response? What was the feedback that you got from residents?

Geraldine Smith

Were so glad that you thought of us. You know, some of the residents do not have family members or anyone who visits them. And so that card was very special to them to know that someone cared and was thinking of them during the holiday season.

Bill Pollock

We're talking with, Geraldine Smith. She told me I could call her Geri. So, That's great. My mother's name was Geri. So I'll bring back some fond memories. Yeah, she's the crisis counseling program project manager. Working with Show-Me Hope, which provides, counseling for people who are experiencing anxiety and uncertainty that related to the Covid 19 pandemic and this kind of kicks into gear here all across the state.

And Geri does some work, on the eastern part of the state and in Saint Louis, there was also something with the high school bands getting involved, celebrating first responders. This sounds like a great idea, too.

Geraldine Smith

Yes. We did during, I believe, the month of September 2021, we partnered with the Hazelwood Central High School marching Band, and we asked them if they would perform some musical selections for employees, doctors and nurses at the BJC Christian Hospital and the SSM DePaul hospital.

And so they said, oh, yes, we would be very glad to do that. And so their band director, Mr. Mark Allen Thomas, he gathered a few of the students together and they joined us, the Show-Me Hope staff, they joined us at BJC Christian Hospital and SSM DePaul, went two separate days and provided music as the employees and nurses and the doctors changed their shifts during the day, not just leaving for their shifts, but they were in the windows looking out, you know, on to the parking lot to hear the music and see the students performing.

They were just everywhere, and they were just so thankful for us thinking about them, because our goal was to say to them, thank you for your ceaseless work that you're doing. Thank you for caring for our family and our friends and our relative, as you know, and we know that, you know, you all are here twenty-four seven and you're providing the care, you know, for individuals who need you.

And this was so, so special to me because it was the BJC Christian Hospital that cared for me when I was a Covid victim. And I am a Covid survivor. And I was there for 25 days and then I had 15 days of rehabilitation. And so, you know, I really wanted to thank the doctors and nurses and other staff members for the work that they do in the hospitals to care for people who are out there.

Bill Pollock

What's on the horizon? Can you talk about some of the things that the crisis counselors have done?

Geraldine Smith

Well, since that campaign in September, we have also visited some of our local school districts. So we have provided educational materials to the Jennings School District during their back to school drive. We have provided digital information about to show me how program to the Riverview Garden School District.

And this electronic and digital information was going to be provided to teachers. It was going to be announced occasionally on their PA systems, you know, to the school and social workers were going to be provided Show-Me Hope information. A number of our counselors attended various functions, such as the grand opening ceremony of a Life Recovery Community center, which connects services for opioid users and the homeless.

We also visited, during the month of November, city and county public libraries and provided Show-Me Hope care packages to them. We visit about ten county libraries and 11 city libraries. We visited local pantries, nail salons, apartment complexes. So that's sort of what we've been doing as crisis counselors, is making sure that individuals know that emotional support is there as they experience stress, anxiety and depression during the pandemic.

Bill Pollock

As we wrap up, if there is someone who's listening, who has some uncertainty, anxiety with Covid 19, how can they reach out to Show-Me Hope?

Geraldine Smith

When they contact Show-Me Hope, remember that services are free and confidential and the Show me Hope hotline number is 1-800-985-5990. Or they can text 1-800-985-5990 seven days a week twenty-four seven.

Bill Pollock

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