



RUTGERS HEALTH  
Environmental and Occupational  
Health Sciences Institute

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY WORLD TRADE CENTER HEALTH  
PROGRAM CLINICAL CENTER OF EXCELLENCE (CCE)

MENTAL HEALTH

# NEWSLETTER

E-NEWSLETTER FROM THE DESK OF JODI STREICH, PH.D. - MENTAL HEALTH DIRECTOR



*Happy Holidays!*  
**2025**

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## Message from the Mental Health Director

### Supporting Mental Health During the Holiday Season

As the holiday season approaches, I want to acknowledge the dedication and resilience you demonstrate every day. This time of year can bring unique stressors, including health challenges, disrupted routines, family pressures, and reminders of past losses or difficult moments.

It is important to prioritize your mental health even during demanding times. Small steps, such as taking a short walk, connecting with a friend or neighbor, or spending a few minutes on mindfulness, can help you stay grounded and resilient.

Remember, seeking support is a sign of strength. Our program is always here to provide support, resources, and a space for reflection. Take care of yourself, stay connected, and approach this season with the same steady focus you have always brought to your work through the years. The Rutgers WTC Behavioral Health Team can support you with counseling, support groups, and other services. If you are feeling stressed, anxious, depressed, or experiencing any other mental health symptoms that worry you, please reach out. Email us at [wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu](mailto:wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu) or call us at (848)-445-0227. We are always here for you!

Wishing you a safe, restorative, and mindful holiday season.

***Jodi Streich, Ph.D.***  
Mental Health Director



## 25 ways to support your mental health this holiday season

1. Maintain a consistent sleep schedule, even during busy times.
2. Eat regular meals and stay hydrated to support energy and focus.
3. Plan holiday commitments realistically — avoid overextending yourself.
4. Set clear boundaries between work and personal time.
5. Take short breaks to practice deep breathing or grounding exercises.
6. Engage in light physical activity, like walking or stretching.
7. Limit alcohol and caffeine to reduce mood swings and fatigue.
8. Use a journal for reflections, notes of gratitude, or moments of stress.
9. Identify triggers and have a coping plan ready.
10. Connect with a trusted friend for support.
11. Participate in virtual or in-person support groups.
12. Schedule downtime, even if brief, for yourself each day.
13. Listen to calming music, podcasts, or guided meditations.
14. Practice mindfulness or progressive muscle relaxation.
15. Plan enjoyable, meaningful activities that bring calm.
16. Limit exposure to negative news or social media overload.
17. Share responsibilities at home or work when possible.
18. Keep holiday expectations realistic — focus on quality, not perfection.
19. Celebrate small wins and personal accomplishments.
20. Engage in acts of service or kindness that feel meaningful.
21. Pause, breathe, and center yourself during stressful moments.
22. Keep contact information for mental health resources readily available.
23. Use relaxation techniques before or after stressful events or work.
24. Focus on maintaining connection with supportive family or friends.
25. Be compassionate with yourself — acknowledge stress while recognizing your resilience.


*Resource: SAMHSA, Supporting Your Mental Health During the Holiday Season*

**If you need immediate support at any time, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached by calling or texting 988.**



# Mental Wellness Corner

## The Power of Journaling



Journaling is a simple practice that can create meaningful shifts in emotional clarity and stress regulation. Writing even a few lines each day can help organize thoughts, reduce mental clutter, and strengthen insight. Many people find that putting worries on paper makes them feel lighter and more grounded.

### Why it helps

- It encourages emotional processing and reduces internal tension.
- It improves self awareness which supports steadier mood throughout the day.
- It strengthens cognitive organization which can be calming when life feels overwhelming.
- It can support better sleep when used as an evening unwind practice.

### How to begin

Keep it easy and brief. Choose one of the following approaches. Try it for a week.

- Write three lines about anything you notice in your mind or body.
- Use a prompt such as, “What feels heavy today and what feels manageable?”
- Write a short list of small things you handled well this week.
- Keep a designated notebook or use the notes app on your phone to make it convenient.

### Helpful resources

For those who like structure or inspiration, these tools can be useful:

- Guided prompt journals such as *The Five Minute Journal* or *A Year of Self Reflection*.
- Digital journal apps like *Day One* or *Journey*.

Resource

WebMD: Cheryl Whitten, “How Journaling Can Help You Manage Stress.”

## *Simple Winter Cocoa*

While entering in your gratitude journal, enjoy a warm cup of hot cocoa. Warm 1 cup milk with 1 tablespoon cocoa powder and 1 tablespoon sugar. Whisk until smooth and add a small splash of vanilla. Pour into a mug and finish with a light topping such as cinnamon or a few mini marshmallows. It is an easy way to enjoy a quiet moment during the season.



## Fall 2025 Virtual Groups

### 9/11 Support Group

A space for first responders to share their unique experiences with the support of their peers in a safe, therapeutic environment.



**Fridays 2PM-3:30PM (Zoom)**

### The Out-of-Towner's Group

A 9/11 support group. This is for WTC responders who have left the NY-NJ area. You are still part of our community! Join us over Zoom for connection, conversation and support.

**Fridays 10AM-11:30AM EST (Zoom)**



### Blue Line Support Group

This support group is for individuals who are active/retired law enforcement officers. It is designed to be a safe environment to discuss and share concerns, stories, and experiences with other officers. The goal of the blue line support group is to provide a place for law enforcement officers to process their experiences together, offer comfort and comradery, strengthen interpersonal support, and increase resiliency and well-being.

**Thursdays 1:30PM-3PM (Zoom)**

### Firehouse Kitchen

The firehouse kitchen has long been a place of bonding for firefighters. This support group is for both current and retired firefighters to discuss various aspects of this profession and to engage in honest conversations about any current stressors you are facing. Connect with peers and discuss professional topics.

**Mondays 1:30PM-3PM (Zoom)**



### Project Uplift

This program teaches mental health skills along with mindfulness and meditation to help cope with stress, anxiety, depression or chronic health problems. This program runs for eight consecutive weeks, typically twice per year in October and again in February. Members are encouraged to commit to the full eight weeks. Our next cycle should begin in February, although we will not finalize dates until the interest questionnaire is sent out.

**Thursdays 2PM - 3PM (Zoom)**



### Retiree Social Support Group

This group provides support related to life transitions such as retirement and other events. The focus is on sharing coping strategies to deal with stress, personal experiences and building a sense of community.

**Mondays 6PM-7:30PM (Zoom)**

## Fall 2025 Virtual Groups (Continued)

### Inner Peace Group

This group is designed to help individuals rediscover and tap into their spirituality, values, and principles at the heart of living a well-balanced life. Members will identify how to foster spirituality in their life. Topics will include “meaning making”, purpose finding, and building resilience. We will examine the 3 C’s: Connection to something greater than yourself, Compassion for others, and Contribution to your community.



**Tuesdays 3PM-4PM (Zoom)**



### Health and Wellness Group

This virtual group will focus on a holistic approach to well-being through presentations and discussion focused on the health-related domains of food and diet, working/moving the body, sleep hygiene, stress management, social connections, relationships, and spiritual well-being.

**Mondays 12PM-1:30PM (Zoom)**



### Cancer Support Group

This group provides a setting for first responders to share their experience with cancer amongst peers who have undergone similar health issues. This is a peer support group with a focus on sharing coping strategies, relating personal experiences, and processing life changes due to a cancer diagnosis.

**Mondays 6:30PM to 8PM (Zoom)**



### Couple's Workshop

This group will provide skills and support for you and your partner, focusing on topics such as improving communication, managing stress and increasing fun and play! The workshop is comprised of four 2 hour-long sessions through a secure video platform. Both individuals must be available for all 4 sessions to participate in the group. This group often runs twice per year, in the Fall and in the Spring.

**Thursdays 6PM-8PM (Zoom)**

**If you are interested in participating in any of our virtual group offerings, please call us at (848)445-0227.**

# WTC Responder Spotlight Series: Kimberly Best

Kimberly Best dedicated more than 26 years to the Middletown Township Police Department in New Jersey, retiring as Detective Lieutenant and Detective Bureau Commander. Throughout her career, she focused not only on enforcing the law but on connecting with people, supporting victims, and mentoring fellow officers — particularly women entering the profession.

***“What I liked most was connecting with people and comforting them in difficult situations. That human connection is what kept me passionate about the work.”***

Kimberly grew up in a family of police officers, though she initially pursued a career in archaeology and then history at Rutgers University. Encouraged by her father, she took the civil service exam and began her law enforcement career with the Monmouth County Sheriff’s Department before joining Middletown Township Police, where she would spend her entire career.

Starting in Patrol, Kimberly spent over a decade engaging with the community on the front lines. She later joined the Juvenile Aid Bureau, which became the Special Victims Unit, investigating child abuse, sex crimes, and institutional abuse. During this time, Kimberly also raised her daughter as a single mother, balancing rotating patrol shifts with parenting, and credits her family for their support. Kimberly is a proud mother. Her daughter is now a junior at Rutgers, majoring in psychology, minoring in biology, and excelling academically and athletically.

Her career achievements are groundbreaking. Kimberly was the third female officer hired in the department, the second female sergeant, and the first female lieutenant in the history of the Middletown Township Police Department. She also became the first woman in the department to command a division.

***“It was important to me to set an example for other female officers, to mentor them and show them that the ceiling could be broken.”***

When asked what advice she has for young candidates starting out, she says, ***“You should always remember that you meet people during the worst times in their lives, and what you see every day, they have never experienced. It is important to stay compassionate and not to become jaded. You also must sometimes show a vulnerable side to gain that person’s trust. Empathy is not a weakness and can go further than sympathy; in understanding a person’s world and communicating that to them, it helps them feel understood and not feel alone. Going into this profession, you will be giving up a lot of time with loved ones, missing time with children, holidays, and it is not a traditional family life, and you must be prepared for that. Lastly, ignore the naysayers and stay on your path.”***



Pictured: Kimberly (left) at her retirement walk-out ceremony.

# WTC Responder Spotlight Series: Kimberly Best

When asked about some of her proudest moments looking back on her career, she recounts a story that has stuck with her for many years.

***"When we first got the automatic defibrillators in the cars, people were afraid to use them. I was an EMT, so I became an instructor. We got a call that there was a man down at one of our firehouses. I thought he was dead when I first saw him, but I hooked him up to the defibrillator, and a shock was indicated, and I thought, "Is this happening? Is this working?" He was revived and lived for another 9 or more years. He was the first person I used the defibrillator on by myself, not with an ambulance crew, and he was one of our life member firefighters, so this meant a great deal to me. Several years later, I met his daughter, and she asked me who I was and then told me that I saved her father's life and thanked me. That meant everything."***

Before retiring, Kimberly joined the Middletown Landmarks Commission. Since then, she has pursued genealogy coursework at Boston University and is completing a Historic Preservation Certificate at Rutgers. She plans to earn a master's degree in public history and historic preservation and is starting a nonprofit focused on historic cemetery preservation. She also serves on the township Historic Preservation Committee and America 250 Committee.

Beyond that, she is the Registrar for the Middletown Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, working on veteran support and cemetery projects. Her interests include concerts, travel, family time, and membership in the Deutscher Club of Clark.

Kimberly began learning the bagpipes in 1998, joining the Monmouth County Police Pipes and Drums. After 9/11, the band marched in the 2002 NYC and Belmar St. Patrick's Day parades with the Port Authority Police Pipes and Drums, who had lost three drummers and their manager. Today, she plays with the Vol. Patrick Torphy Pipes and Drums and the Leatherneck Pipes and Drums. Her daughter, a drummer, received a memorial scholarship from the Port Authority Pipes and Drums in honor of the drummers lost on 9/11 – a moment that brought Kimberly to tears.

This year, Kimberly will co-coordinate Wreaths Across America at Bay View Cemetery in Leonardo for the first time, working alongside another 9/11 responder, retired Captain Tom Stone.

Kimberly takes pride in seeing other women continue rising through the department, including two who have since become lieutenants. When asked how she describes success she says, ***"Success isn't about titles or ranks – it's about the way you treat people and the impact you have on their lives."*** Her career, volunteer work, and ongoing community involvement demonstrate her dedication to service both on and off the job.

Kimberly says she is happiest when volunteering and spending time with family. Her favorite quote, by Timothy Leary, reflects her fearless career path:

***"Women who seek to be equal with men lack ambition."***

# WTC Responder Spotlight Series: Richie Depaola

For 20 years, Richie Depaola worked as a Railroad Car Inspector with the Staten Island Railway, ensuring the safety of tens of thousands of daily commuters. Working closely with the bomb squad, Richie inspected trains for suspicious activity, taking immense pride in ensuring passengers reached their destinations safely. He retired in 2013 and now lives in Cedar Point, North Carolina.

***"I was the front line making sure tens of thousands of people during rush hour every day were safe. I took my job very seriously, left no stones unturned."***

Richie's interest in trains began in childhood, living just two blocks from Staten Island's Old Town Train Station. He began his career as a Platform Maintainer. Technically inclined and eager to learn more, he soon moved into the mechanical shop where he mastered the inner workings of trains. From there, he earned the highly competitive inspector position — a role many pursued but few achieved. He held this position until retirement in 2013.

Before the railroad, Richie worked in an entirely different world: the music industry. His father was a soundman for the Ed Sullivan Show, and Richie grew up surrounded by music legends. His father even escorted The Beatles from the green room to the stage for their first U.S. television appearance in 1964. Inspired by those experiences, Richie worked as a professional soundman himself, collaborating with many artists, including Ozzy Osbourne, Madonna, Whitney Houston, Guns N' Roses, Talking Heads, and The Ramones.

***"My house is a rock and roll museum,"*** he laughs. Even after joining the railroad, he stayed connected to music, running sound for the Talking Heads and The Ramones whenever they came to town. But music wasn't always steady work. Looking for stability, Richie joined the Staten Island Railway.

Throughout his railroad career, Richie took pride in preventing incidents and ensuring passengers arrived safely. One of his most memorable moments came when he helped save a 12-year-old girl who had fallen onto the tracks.

***"I called dispatch to cut the power to the tracks, pulled her out from under the third rail, and I noticed she was close to death. I resuscitated her and she survived. That meant a lot to me to help someone in that moment,"*** he recalls.

For Richie, it was the ultimate example of what his career was all about: keeping people safe so they could go home to their families.

Richie's railroad career was demanding, but some of his toughest challenges came off the job. After 9/11, he spent three weeks on the bucket brigade at Ground Zero. Later, he lost his home to Hurricane Sandy. Through it all, Richie leaned on his family, his community, the support of mental health professionals, his love of music, his dogs, and his faith.

***"The power of prayer also helped a lot, especially after 9/11. I've been doing a 15-minute prayer every morning for five years straight and never missed a day. That one-on-one time with God starts my day right."***

# WTC Responder Spotlight Series: Richie Depaola

Faith and routine gave him strength, but so did community. He joined a mental health group in 2010 that helped him for over a decade, and in 2023, he found another family through the Out of Towners Group at the World Trade Center Health Program at Rutgers.

***“It’s a great bunch of people,” Richie says. “Anytime something is going on, everyone is there for each other, and Dr. Erika January, who runs the group, is amazing. They make you feel like family.”***

Since his retirement, Richie has focused on helping others in his community. He sponsors youth bowling leagues, mentors children through music, and donates supplies to schools and communities affected by floods. He also participates in disaster relief efforts and donates supplies to children in need. He cares for elderly neighbors by cooking, shopping, and helping with appointments. For Richie, these efforts are an extension of his commitment to service that began with his work on the railroad. Richie also loves to cook, fish, work on cars, and spend time with his wife and his dog.



Looking back, Richie is proud that his years of service kept people safe. He reflects, ***“Through all my years of working, nobody got hurt. People came to work and went home safe to their families.”***

***“I’m usually happiest when walking the beach with my wife and dog, or when I catch a big giant fish!” -Richie Depaola***

When asked what advice he would give to new candidates just starting out, he says, ***“Stay on the straight and narrow, put your mind to what you do best, and never give up! If you are passionate about something, go for it.”***

Richie defines success not by titles or recognition, but by kindness. He says, ***“I would define success as being a really good person, being nice, being kind, and helping others. To me, success is knowing that you did a lot of good over the years.”***

His favorite sayings capture his outlook:

***“Live and let live. Don’t judge a book by its cover.”***

From the railroads of Staten Island to the stages of rock and roll, and from Ground Zero to his North Carolina community — Richie's life is a testament to resilience, service, and faith.



*If you would like to be featured in a future spotlight series, let us know. We would love to hear from you! Please call us at (848) 445-0227.*

# Meet the Mental Health Staff

## Nancy Medina

Nancy Medina is a Mental Health Staff Clinician with the World Trade Center Health Program at Rutgers CCE, where she has served in this role since 2023. Her clinical and research interests are centered on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with a special focus on understanding the unique mental health challenges faced by first responders and veterans. She is committed to supporting individuals who have dedicated their lives to service — helping them navigate the complexities of trauma, build resilience, and move forward on their path toward healing and well-being. She considers it an honor to contribute to the long-term care and recovery of those impacted by the events of 9/11.

## Theresa Marie Lewis

Theresa Marie Lewis is a fourth-year doctoral candidate in the Counseling Psychology, Psy.D program at Saint Elizabeth University (SEU). She is a proud member of New Jersey Association of Black Psychologists (NJABPsi), sits on the Executive Board for New Jersey Psychological Association Graduate Students (NJPAGS), and is a lifetime member of PSI CHI International Honor society. Theresa is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in New Jersey with over a decade of clinical experience in various settings such as private practice, rehabilitation organizations, intensive outpatient programs, day programs, etc. Theresa teaches psychology courses at a graduate and undergraduate level at multiple universities in New Jersey. When she is not working or studying for her doctorate, she spends her time with her two young children creating various art projects, playing sports, or exploring the great outdoors.

## Heather Rothwell-Termotto

Heather Rothwell-Termotto is a fifth-year Ph.D. candidate in the Clinical Psychology program at Fairleigh Dickinson University. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, she earned her Master's degree at New York University in Mental Health Counseling. This is her third year training at the World Trade Center Health Program at Rutgers CCE. She continues to feel passionate about providing services to those impacted by the events of 9/11. She feels immense gratitude for the opportunity to provide ongoing care to a population she deeply respects and values. She looks forward to meeting you and considers it a privilege to be a part of your healing journey.

## Michele Ventola

Michele Ventola is a fourth-year doctoral student in the Felician University Counseling Psychology Program. She currently holds a BA in Special Education and has over 25 years of experience teaching troubled adolescents. Currently, she teaches part-time at Felician University's master's counseling psychology program. Michele is serving as a Psychology Extern at the World Trade Center CCE Mental Health Department. She is a member of the American Psychological Association and the Northeast Counties Association of Psychologists of New Jersey.

# Meet the Mental Health Staff (continued)

## Olivia Matts

Olivia Matts is a dual master's candidate in Public Policy and Public Health at Rutgers University. She is excited to represent the Mental Health Team as their Graduate Student Assistant. Her professional background includes securing funding and managing projects in the global public health sector. She is dedicated to advancing policies that close health gaps, improve community wellbeing, and ensure evidence-based practices guide public health decision-making. Outside of her academics and professional life, Olivia enjoys spending time traveling, attending live music events, and reading.

## James Doherty

James Doherty is a recent graduate from Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History and English. He is a Work Assistant with the Mental Health Department at the WTC Health Program at Rutgers, helping coordinate between members and staff. When not working, he enjoys reading, spending time with family and friends, and being outdoors.



## Marta Bettinelli

Marta Bettinelli is a third-year Clinical Psychology PhD student at Rowan University and one of the new externs at the World Trade Center Health Program at Rutgers. Born and raised in Italy, she came to the United States as a college student-athlete. Prior to beginning her doctoral studies, Marta earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in forensic psychology. She has gained two years of clinical experience working in inpatient and outpatient settings with individuals presenting with serious mental illness and a history of violence, substance abuse, and homelessness. As part of her doctoral training, Marta also conducts trauma and relationships-related research and teaches undergraduate psychology courses. When she is not working, Marta enjoys taking group fitness classes, exploring new places, and spending time with friends.

## Angela Cabble

Angela Cabble is a rising fourth year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program at Seton Hall University. Angela's research interests are disparities in mental health services in rural areas among Black communities, as well as working with forensic populations. Angela obtained her master's degree in mental health counseling from Long Island University and became licensed in 2020. Angela currently works part-time as a licensed mental health counselor at Rockland Psychiatric Center, where she has gained vast experience over the last 12 years working with individuals with various psychiatric disorders. In her down time, she enjoys outings with family and friends, traveling, spades, and jewelry making.

# Meet the Mental Health Staff (continued)

## Meaghan Donnelly

Meaghan Donnelly is excited to join the Mental Health Department at the World Trade Center Program at Rutgers CCE as a psychology extern. She is a doctoral candidate in the Clinical Psychology PhD program at Fielding Graduate University, with a concentration in Health Psychology. Meaghan is passionate about supporting individuals living with chronic health conditions, helping them navigate the emotional and psychological challenges of illness — from receiving a diagnosis to coping with identity changes and survivorship. Before joining the Program, Meaghan provided clinical care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, focusing on both cancer support and couples therapy. She also served in a community clinic offering individual therapy, group work, and psychological assessment across the lifespan. In addition to her clinical work, Meaghan has over a decade of teaching experience at the undergraduate and graduate levels and brings a strong commitment to education, collaboration, and compassionate care. Outside of her professional life, Meaghan enjoys time with her family and two rescue dogs, loves a good book, and is always planning her next travel adventure.

## Samantha Anduze

Samantha Anduze is a fourth-year doctoral candidate in the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program at The New School for Social Research. Her therapeutic style is integrative and client-centered, emphasizing the importance of tailoring the space to best fit each individual. She draws from her training in psychodynamic therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) to address client needs. She is committed to creating a supportive and non-judgmental environment where clients can openly discuss their adversities and how they affect their daily functioning. She has experience working with a wide range of challenges, including depression, anxiety, trauma, relationship difficulties, and substance use. Her primary objectives are to build a positive therapist-client relationship and ensure that her client's goals are central to the treatment planning process.

## Eva Niemeijer

Eva Niemeijer is a third year Psy.D student at Rutgers University. Prior to pursuing her Doctorate, she earned her Master's in Applied Psychology at Rutgers University. She is excited to begin her work at the World Trade Center Health Program at Rutgers CCE and to be a part of the wonderful services provided by the Program, and looks forward to meeting you.

# Meet the Mental Health Staff (continued)



## **Mike Smith, MS Ed, LMHC, LCADC, CRC**

Mike Smith has over 40 years of experience in various types counseling and human services. He is licensed as a Mental Health and Chemical Abuse and Dependency Counselor, as well as Certified as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Mike has been facilitating our Retiree Support Group for the past 3 years. In addition, Mike is available to provide services for any of our members who are experiencing substance use disorders or challenges.

## **Erika January, Ph.D.**

Dr. January is a licensed psychologist with over 20 years of experience in various clinical settings, including counseling centers, hospital-based wellness programs, and private practice. She is proud to be an extern and intern supervisor at the WTC Health Program at Rutgers CCE. She is eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) trained and has advanced certification in eating disorders, addictions, and compulsions. Her professional interests include trauma, anxiety, life transitions, and disordered eating. In her free time, she enjoys swimming, reading, taking long walks, and watching movies with her family.

## **Jodi Streich, Ph.D.**

Dr. Streich currently serves as the Mental Health Director and is a licensed clinical psychologist with experience across hospitals, outpatient rehabilitation programs, and universities. During her doctoral training, she was appointed as the World Trade Center Coordinator in Hudson County after September 11th. Her dissertation examined the effects of exposure to the 9/11 attacks within the New York City corporate population, and her clinical focus has consistently centered on trauma and healing.

Dr. Streich is committed to reducing the stigma surrounding mental health and to normalizing the impact of traumatic events on all survivors. She also proudly serves veterans who experience PTSD, psychiatric and mood disorders, and traumatic brain injuries. Dr. Streich believes that when your job aligns with your passion, you are not simply working; you are nurturing your soul.