

MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2023

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



Happy New Year!

2023

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Upcoming Virtual Groups: Updates & How to Enroll
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- "It's Not All in Your Head" - An Editorial by Anton Steiger
- How to Beat the Winter Blues - By Jodi Streich, Ph.D.
- Get to know the WTC Mental Health Support Staff



Virtual Group Updates

Here is an updated list of all the virtual groups we offer!

All groups are completely confidential and HIPAA compliant. If you are interested in attending any of these groups, please email us at wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu. We are so excited to see you there!

| Group Name | Description | Eligibility | Date/Time |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Project Uplift | <p>This is a program that teaches mental health skills along with mindfulness and meditation skills to help members cope with increased stress, anxiety, depression, or chronic health problems. You will learn information, practice activities, and engage in peer support. Group sessions will be held by phone, once a week for 60 minutes. This program runs for 8 consecutive weeks.</p> | <p>Members experiencing increased stress, anxiety, depression, or chronic health problems and are interested in learning new coping skills.</p> | <p>Fridays at 12:00pm</p> |
| Retiree Social Group | <p>This group aims to provide support around life changes related to transitions such as retirement and other personal changes. It is a peer support group led by trained facilitators with a focus on sharing coping strategies, relating personal experiences of grief and loss, and building a sense of community. Group sessions will be held through a secure video platform once a week for 60 minutes.</p> | <p>Members who are interested in receiving support around life changes, adjustment, and transitions.</p> | <p>Thursdays at 6:00pm</p> |

Virtual Group Updates (Continued)

| Group Name | Description | Eligibility | Date/Time |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>Qi Gong Workshop</p> | <p>Qigong (pronounced "CHI- GUNG") is the healing power of the combination of breath awareness, body alignment, meditative movements and self-massage. In qigong practices, we move the body's energy (Qi or chi) and replace stagnant Qi with coordination of breath with the movements and intent. These practices have been proven to improve medical, emotional and spiritual health. In Chinese philosophy, it's considered a method of building and balancing life energy through exercise.</p> | <p>This is an ongoing weekly class, available to all members at any time!</p> | <p>Tuesdays at 10:30am</p> |
| <p>Meditation Group</p> | <p>Meditation is considered a type of mind-body complementary medicine. Meditation can produce a deep state of relaxation and a tranquil mind. During meditation, you focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. This process may result in enhanced physical and emotional well-being.</p> | <p>This is an ongoing weekly class, available to all members at anytime.</p> | <p>Tuesdays at 6pm</p> |

Virtual Group Updates (Continued)

| Group Name | Description | Eligibility | Date/Time |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <p>Health and Wellness Group</p> | <p>This group focuses on enhancing overall well-being. Topics include managing stress, maintaining good physical health, improving communication skills, sleep hygiene, nutrition, social supports, and better understanding the mind/body connection. This group meets weekly for 90 minutes.</p> | <p>Open to all members</p> | <p>Thursdays at 2pm</p> |
| <p>9/11-Related Cancer Support Group</p> | <p>This group provides a safe, therapeutic setting, where first responders can process their experiences with cancer amongst peers who have undergone similar health issues. It is a peer support group led by trained facilitators with a focus on sharing coping strategies, relating personal experiences and processing life changes due to a cancer diagnosis. There will be a 20-minute session of guided mindfulness intervention that will be introduced in this group. Group sessions are offered through a secure video platform, once a week for 75 mins.</p> | <p>Any member who has been diagnosed with a 9/11-related cancer and is interested in receiving support around this diagnosis (even if you are in remission).</p> | <p>Tuesdays at 6pm</p> |

Virtual Group Updates (Continued)

| Group Name | Description | Eligibility | Date/Time |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <p>Women's Support Group</p> | <p>This group is aimed at helping members increase resilience, confidence, empowerment and improving self-understanding through the power of interpersonal relationships. The goal is to create a vision to guide you and strengthen your sense of self, and, to develop effective coping strategies through open discussions and group feedback. This group meets weekly for 90 minutes.</p> | <p>Female first responders.</p> | <p>Tuesdays at 12:00pm</p> |
| <p>9/11 Support Group</p> | <p>Individuals can collectively share their unique experiences with the support of their peers in a safe, therapeutic environment. These process groups will be held once a week, for 75 minutes.</p> | <p>This is an OPEN group. New members are welcome to join all year long.</p> | <p>Fridays at 2:00pm</p> |
| <p>COPE Group "Challenging our Personal Experience"</p> | <p>Have you found yourself drinking or engaging in other harmful behaviors? If yes, know you are not alone. For many, alcohol and substance use have become a way of coping with all of life's stressors. We are here to help. This group meets weekly for 90 minutes.</p> | <p>Any member who is interested in gaining greater self-awareness by listening to and sharing with others. This is an OPEN group. New members are welcome to join all year long.</p> | <p>Mondays at 6:00 PM</p> |

Virtual Group Updates (Continued)

| Group Name | Description | Eligibility | Date/Time |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| *NEW* Law Enforcement Group | The purpose of this group is to create a space where our members in law enforcement can connect and share openly with one another in a safe environment. This group will take place once a week for 8 weeks starting February 7th, and be held for 90 minutes. | Any active or retired members of law enforcement looking to connect with peers | Tuesdays at 10:00am, starting on February 7th and going for 8 weeks. |
| Couple's Workshop | The Couples Workshop will be led by two trained facilitators. It aims to provide skills and support for you and your partner and will focus on topics such as improving communication, managing stress and increasing fun and play! The workshop consists of 4 sessions, which will be offered through a secure video platform once a week for 2 hours. Both individuals must be willing to participate. | Any member interested in forming and maintaining a better relationship with their partner! | This group will begin early February if there is enough interest. Send us an email if you and your partner wish to participate! |

If you are interested in attending any of these groups, please email:

wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu

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

Mental Health Spotlight Series

January 2023 Features:



Barry Asnes

Retired Sanitation Supervisor for the New York City
Department of Sanitation



&

Dr. Jean Kanokogi

Retired Special Agent for the United States Government.

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Mental Health Spotlight Series: Barry Asnes

The following is an interview with Barry Asnes, a retired Sanitation Supervisor for the New York City Department of Sanitation

Q: What is your name and job title? Where did you work? Are you still working or retired?

A: "My name is Barry Asnes, I was a supervisor for the New York City Department of Sanitation. I started in Oct 2, 1989, and retired on January 1st 2015, so I worked in this field for a little over 25 years."



Q: How did you get into this line of work? How did you know this is what you wanted to do?

A: "I first heard about it while I was in college in 1981, took a written test in 1982 and a physical in 1983. Then, I left college and lost my way for a bit. Started working at a bank, met my wife around this time in August of 1984, gave her a ring two months later, and got married on August 16, 1986. We have been together for 38 years. So, the opportunity came at a good time. I was working full time at bank and going to college at night. Then, I got a notice from department of sanitation, where I knew at the end of 5 years, I would make top salary and I would have the security, pension, benefits that came with it. It seemed like a better fit for starting a new family. Then, I started working as a sanitation worker and then a little bit after that, a friend and I took the supervisors test and got promoted to supervisor with only 9 months on the job, which has never happened before or since. I stayed as a supervisor for my whole career."

Q: What do you like most about your job? What parts of your mission did you connect to the most?

A: "It was a dirty job working at the Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island, but we had a lot of fun. It was like a brotherhood. We worked with a lot of people, and it was closeknit. Everyone took care of and looked after each other. This was even more the case when 9/11 happened. We had an even tighter bond during that time. The landfill had closed in March 2001 but a few hours after 9/11, a decision was made to bring debris from ground zero to the landfill to sort through. So, we got put back into action. It was a huge effort, we had so many different people and agencies working out there. This went on from September 11th to around May 2002. We worked 12-hour shifts, 7 days a week. Everyone stepped up. We all got along. Everyone was there to help and do what we had to do."

Q: How did you grow professionally from when you first began to where you are now?

A: "I got promoted very quickly, so I got thrown into the fire and had to learn on the fly. I learned how to work with many different people. I also learned a lot about the different aspects of the job that goes beyond just picking up trash, such as salting the roads, snow removal, even traffic accidents such as clearing debris and oil spills. Overall, it was a good education. I learned a lot about the city."

Q: What are some challenges related to your role and how did you overcome them?

A: "As a new supervisor with only 9 months experience on the job, there were many challenges to navigate. Mainly dealing with interpersonal challenges and all the different personalities, especially with workers who had more experience than me. I had to learn to work effectively with different people and manage the expectations and needs of the bosses and the people I was supervising. In general, I always like to use humor to diffuse stressful situations. I like bringing joy to myself and others."

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Mental Health Spotlight Series: Barry Asnes

Q: What was your biggest accomplishment?

A: "I am proud of how everyone stepped on 9/11 and how there was a lot of professionalism, efficiency, solidarity, and respect among my coworkers and amongst all the different organizations that were supporting the clean-up efforts, especially when it comes to sorting through and finding remains. It was tough. We saw a lot of bad things. Having support from colleagues and other organizations meant a lot and helped during the process. The 9/11 community is very close knit from having gone through the same experiences, it's like an instant bond. That's why I like to thank Dr. Udasin and Kate for offering the group support services at the program."

Q: What advice would you have for young candidates starting out?

A: "My two sons are Sanitation workers now & when they got hired my advice to them was the same it would be for any new sanitation worker. Be punctual for your shift, do your duties assigned in a safe & efficient manner & when the promotional tests come out, take them. There is plenty of opportunity to move up the ranks in the Department."

Q: What are your proudest moments looking back?

A: "Helping out on 9/11 was definitely my proudest moment. There were other moments too such as the operation to assist during Hurricane Sandy, where we were again working 7 days a week. I'm most proud of the operation during 9/11 because of the enormity of it, the loss of life, and how everyone leaned on one another for support. It was very powerful. It felt good to see everyone come together for a common cause, and to get this taken care of as quickly and respectfully as we could. I always try to pay it forward and help everyone that I can. When people I worked with come asking for advice, I do my best to help. I also do charity work. Once I helped raise 18,000 dollars from walks and events for cancer research at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. "

Q: What do you like to do when you're off the job?

A: "I'm definitely an adrenaline junkie. I like to travel, go to concerts, see standup comedy shows, help people out, go to the gym, and be out in nature hiking. Just love enjoying life basically."

Q: How do you define success?

A: "I define success by having family and friends that you can rely on and who can rely on you. Money doesn't mean anything. Having the health and support from family and close friends, many of whom I consider brothers, is how I define success. Having people in your life who want to be close with you shows the kind of person you are.

Also, my Roman Catholic faith is important to me and to emulate living the way God wants us to, by paying it forward and doing for others as much as we can."

Q: When are you happiest?

A: "When I'm with my family, wife, sons, and daughter in law. When we are all together is when I'm happiest."

Q: Do you have a favorite quote?

A: "Don't sweat the small stuff."



Mental Health Spotlight Series: Dr. Jean Kanokogi

The following is an interview with Dr. Jean Kanokogi a retired Special Agent for the United States Government.



Q: What is your name and job title? Where did you work? Are you still working or retired?

A: "My name is Dr. Jean Kanokogi, I am a retired Special Agent for the United States government. I retired from my career in law enforcement a week ago after 25 years of service."

Q: How did you get into this line of work? How did you know this is what you wanted to do?

A: "I knew this was what I wanted to do, it was a calling, I always wanted to help people. I took two entrance exams for law enforcement while in college and thought federal would be a great fit."

Q: What do you like most about your job? What parts of your mission did you connect to the most?

A: "I liked the positive impact I had on people's lives and being a voice for those who didn't have one."

Q: How did you grow professionally from when you first began to where you are now?

A: "I always thought knowledge helped me grow professionally, both academically and through my experiences working in the field. This allowed me to grow not just professionally but also as a person. I became more resilient and used my resilience and the skills I learned to grow on and off the job."

Q: What are some challenges related to your role and how did you overcome them?

A: "One of the biggest challenges in any work environment is leadership, management and navigating people and personalities. One way to understand that is to be true to yourself and to who you are and not to what others think you should be. Managing your own emotions and others' emotions is crucial. Ask yourself where their emotions are coming from. Also, ask yourself, do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?"

Q: What was your biggest accomplishment?

A: "One of the biggest accomplishments that I look at is restoring dignity back to the victims. Also mentoring young agents and law enforcement officers by providing career guidance. Lastly, working on mental health legislation. I recently worked on two bills for law enforcement in smashing the stigma for mental health."

Q: What advice would you have for young candidates starting out?

A: "Don't look for the shortcut, pay your dues, and if you fall down, get up."

Q: What are your proudest moments looking back?

A: "The ability to make change. I'm glad that I left a legacy of some positive changes, such as the mental health legislation I co-authored for law enforcement."

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Mental Health Spotlight Series: Dr. Jean Kanokogi

Q: What do you like to do when you're off the job?

A: "I volunteer as a director of mental health for the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association. I am passionate about helping the helpers. I love to travel. Also, I practice and teach judo, I'm a 6th degree black belt and actually wrote a book called, "get up and fight." I like to read, write, cook, and exercise."

Q: How do you define success?

A: "I measure my success by how many people I can positively impact. I do that through my keynote speaking and presentations on how people can be the best versions of themselves. It's not about me, it's about the big picture."

Q: When are you happiest?

A: "I'm happiest when I'm grounded and when other people are achieving their goals and finding their purpose."

Q: Do you have a favorite quote?

A: "The Maya Angelou quote when she said something to the effect of "It's not what you can do for someone but it's how you make them feel." People don't remember the lunch you bought them, but they remember how you made them feel.

Also, "In life you are either the hammer or the nail. Be the hammer." Take responsibility and accountability.

If you are interested in being featured in one of our spotlight interviews, send us an email at:

wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu

"It's Not All in Your Head"

An Editorial by Anton Steiger M. Ed., LAC, NCC - CCE Extern

I'm not one for making generalized statements, but if I had to make one, it would be that people are often too hard on themselves, and I wish that they would be a bit kinder to themselves. We seem to be especially hard on ourselves when managing our stress levels and depressive moods. Perhaps this is most evident with the statement, "it's all in my head," or even worse, when someone else says, "it's all in your head." I see this behavior in not only my clients but also my friends, family, and occasional enemy. Why is our first response to stress or depression to brush it off? What does the phrase "it's all in my head" mean, and what does it do for us to say it? Do these experiences of stress and low moods mean nothing? Is it really in our heads, or is there more to it than that?

Well, I think a whole book could be written to explore these questions, and maybe I'll get around to writing that book later, but for now, let us focus on that last question because the truth about long-term depression or stress is alarming, albeit informative. When the phrase "it's all in my head" comes up, we usually refer to the mind over the brain. Grouping up the feeling of stress or low mood to similar fleeting things like our imagination. Doing this is not only unfair to ourselves, but it is also incorrect. Every thought and feeling we have ever experienced has a physical form in the body as electrical signals firing in our brain. If we are going to talk about our brain, we need to talk about our nervous system.



The nervous system can be broken up into two parts: the central nervous system and the peripheral nervous system. The central nervous system (or CNS for short) is our brain and spinal cord, while the peripheral nervous system (or PNS for short) is the collection of nerves that stem from the spinal cord and extend to all parts of the body. We're talking about not just our muscles but our organs and the different biological systems they are a part of. You may start to see where I am going with this. Anything that goes awry with the brain eventually makes its way down the spinal cord, through the PNS, and into these different biological systems causing a variety of problems that are very real and very much not just in your head.



“It’s Not All in Your Head” (Continued) An Editorial by Anton Steiger M. Ed., LAC, NCC - CCE Extern

For example, one symptom of people who manage chronic depression or chronic stress is problems sleeping. Problems falling asleep, problems staying asleep, or problems waking up in the morning. Problems all around, but unfortunately, we have more problems than that. One reason why sleep is so important is that during this time, our brain flushes out the old cerebrospinal fluid in our skull and replaces it with fresh cerebrospinal fluid. This fluid is vital as its sole job is to keep our brains clean and run smoothly. Think of it like motor oil. You risk seriously damaging your engine if you don’t change your oil after a certain number of miles. The same goes for sleep; if you don’t get it after a certain number of hours, you risk seriously damaging your brain.



This can lead to neuro-inflammation, which means different parts of your brain starts to swell. The problem with this is that there isn’t much space in the skull, so portions of the brain start pressing against the skull, sending ripple effects into the body. Here’s the real issue. Certain biological systems rely on other systems to do their job to function properly. For example, the cardiovascular system does not have a means of cleaning the blood it pumps. It relies on the digestive system to do that. So, if a portion of the brain is under stress, it could negatively affect the function of the liver, which in turn puts more strain on the heart. So, what starts as prolonged stress or low mood can lead to pressure on different systems within the body.

This is an oversimplification of the matter, but just about every biological system within the body is negatively affected by chronic stress and depression. Bone and muscle density decrease considerably, liver and kidney function reduce significantly, the heart and lungs are strained to work sometimes up to twice as hard as usual, and don’t get me started on the reproductive system! This is all to say that when daily tasks feel harder while you’re struggling to manage your stress or low mood, it’s because it is actually harder. It’s not just in your head. So, be kinder to yourself. You are not imagining things. Your body is a reflection of your mind, and your mind is a reflection of your body. Psychotherapy can be an excellent service as it can give one the time and space to process what stressors affect one’s life and body, but it might not be enough. Speak with your doctor. Maybe physical therapy or a consultation with a dietitian can help. Whatever you need, we here at the Rutgers University World Trade Center Health Program Clinical Center of Excellence are here to help. If nothing else, I want you to know — you are not alone, and it is not just in your head.

"How to Beat the Winter Blues" By Jodi Streich, Ph.D., Mental Health Director

Do you find yourself feeling more lethargic and down this time of year?

You are certainly not alone!

Due to the lower levels of natural sunlight that we experience during the winter months, there are scientific explanations that explain feeling more 'gloomy' this time of year. In the fall and winter months, we are exposed to less natural light.

This can lead to:

- Dips in serotonin, a neurotransmitter that regulates mood;
- Disruptions in circadian rhythms (your body's internal clock), which help control sleep-wake cycles;
- Alterations in melatonin, a hormone associated with both mood and sleep.

Therefore, if your mood fluctuates, things can also feel more challenging this time of year. You may experience less pleasure in your day-to-day functioning, recognize job performance issues, and may be struggling in your relationships with family and friends.

Although your mood may feel more gloomy than usual, the winter blues do not have to hinder your ability to enjoy life.

Try considering the following Mood Booster tips:



Sunlight

It's important to get outside whenever the sun is out during these darker days. Try to take a short walk each day. Exposing yourself to natural light will help boost serotonin production and your overall mood. Sunlight also increases serotonin production, which helps stabilize mood and overall sense of well-being. If you're having a tough time in the A.M., try using a wake-up light.

Sleep

Try to maintain a regular sleep schedule during the winter months. This can help keep your hormones in balance and regulate your mood. Go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day to help normalize your circadian rhythms.



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“How to Beat the Winter Blues” (Continued) By Jodi Streich, Ph.D., Mental Health Director

Mood Booster tips (continued):

Exercise

Research consistently shows a strong exercise-mental health connection, particularly for those who experience depression and anxiety. Exercise releases endorphins to make you feel happy - a great way to beat the winter blues! Exercise can also increase serotonin which also affects mood.



Book a “mini” Staycation

If Bermuda is not in your immediate future, you may still get a boost by planning mini-getaways closer to home. Sometimes it is much easier to make time and plan a local staycation treat. Consider taking a cooking class with friends, trying out a new restaurant in a nearby town, or checking out a local museum.

Get lost in a good book

Reading for pleasure is a great way to take your mind off how you're feeling. Your local library also has a range of mental health & wellness books which can provide helpful information and support for managing stress.



Monitor your Media!

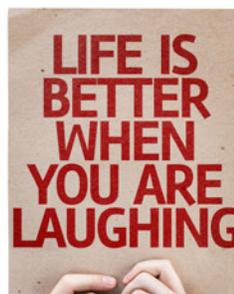
The news is getting very scary lately. And these days, the constant COVID coverage and updates on new variants is enough to lower anyone's spirit. While staying informed is important, this does not mean that you need to oversaturate yourself. We all know that the news repeats the same information over and over. Do pay attention to how the news is delivered. Does it feel more sensational? If you have answered YES, then you have probably been spending too much precious time on media. Try cutting your social media and news delivery time in half.

Be kind to yourself

Many people set unrealistic New Year resolutions and then feel a sense of deflation and failure when they can't keep them. Remember to slow down and make some time for yourself.

Laugh more often

Even though we know that laughter is one of the best medicines out there, most of us are not laughing enough! Studies have found that even the anticipation of laughter can help to reduce stress levels and lift spirits. Easy ways to increase your laughter is to have a zoom chat with a friend, watch your favorite comedian, watch a comedy movie, or read a funny book.



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“How to Beat the Winter Blues” (Continued) By Jodi Streich, Ph.D., Mental Health Director

Mood Booster tips (continued):

Get an indoor hobby

When the winter months roll in, it does not mean you need to stay in and watch tv for months on end. To keep yourself occupied, take up a new hobby for the winter months that you can complete indoors, such as journaling, writing, reading, painting, learning a new language or cooking. Having a hobby you can do in the winter will help keep your mind occupied and add some fun and variety to your evenings.



Make healthy versions of comfort foods

Even those of us who dread the cold cannot turn away from the delicious aroma of warm soups, stews, and other yummy, comforting dishes like mac ‘n’ cheese. Fully embrace the cooking this winter as a fun and simple indoor activity. Try following recipes on your favorite internet channels while indoors on a cold afternoon.



Take a Hike

Do some mindful walking. Explore each sensation as they arise in each moment. Feel the shock of cold air as you inhale. Notice the crunch of snow or frozen ground beneath your boots. See the pristine beauty of nature. Being mindfully present in these winter moments, you can learn to connect more deeply with yourself and your surroundings as you open to appreciating the magic around you

Start a nightly tea ritual

There’s something very comforting and distinctively wintery about sipping on a hot mug of tea. If you know you’re going to spend the next three months feeling that extra chill (even while indoors), create a tea arsenal so you can set aside time for yourself each day to relax and warm up. Find flavors you love, so you’ll really look forward to some cozy tea time.



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“How to Beat the Winter Blues” (Continued) By Jodi Streich, Ph.D., Mental Health Director

Mood Booster tips (continued):

Be tech smart and switch off

Being constantly connected to technology can negatively impact your mood. Switching phones and tablets off at least 90 minutes before you go to bed can help you to relax, feel less anxious and get a good night’s sleep



Learn to meditate

When all else fails, crank up the heat, stay in and finally do what you’ve been meaning to for the past year: Learn to meditate. Here are some popular 2023 apps that can help you get started:

- Headspace
- Best for Beginners: Ten Percent Happier Meditation
- Best for Sleep: Calm
- Best Budget: Insight Timer
- Best Guided: Buddhify
- Best For Focus: Unplug.
- Best Selection: Simple Habit
- Best for Learning Breathing Techniques: Breath work



Join a WTC Virtual Group

Lastly, consider joining one or more of our virtual groups! Many will be starting up this February and we would LOVE to see you there!

If you have any interest in participating in our virtual groups - please send us an email at: wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu

Mental Health Support Staff

Here we have highlighted a few members of the mental health support staff. These individuals have been extraordinary additions to our team. We appreciate them for all the hard work they do!

Our Psychology Externs

Practicing under the clinical supervision of our Mental Health Director Jodi Streich, Ph.D.

Anton Steiger

Hello! My name is Anton Steiger, and I am a doctoral psychology extern at the Rutgers University World Trade Center Health Program CCE Mental Health Department. I'm new to the team but not new to the field. I'm a licensed associate counselor in New Jersey and have been practicing for about three years. I specialize in grief and depression and take an existential approach to working with patients. What I mean by that is that I believe each patient may have similar experiences, but how that experience affects someone is entirely unique. We explore why some experiences affect us more than others and develop ways to ensure some experiences no longer affect us in the ways they used to.

Karly S. Weinreb

I'm a fourth year Clinical Psychology PhD Student. My experience is in working with trauma-exposed people, including veterans, healthcare workers and first responders. I meet with a lot of EOHSI patients for mental health certification interviews and am co-facilitating the Women's Group and Law Enforcement Group this year.

Ritvik Dutta

Ritvik Dutta, MA is a 4th year doctoral student in Kean University's Combined School and Clinical Psychology program and extern at the Rutgers World Trade Center Health Program (WTCHP). His clinical and research interests include mindfulness, acceptance, and compassion-based cognitive-behavioral treatments for anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive and related disorders, and trauma- and stressor-related disorders. At the Rutgers WTCHP, he conducts individual and group psychotherapy as well as mental health monitoring and follow-up to help first responders heal, grow, and live well. He is also passionate about issues related to policy and systems affecting the mental health of individuals of minority statuses, such as people of multicultural backgrounds. He aspires to make these policies and systems more helpful through an emphasis on rehabilitation and guidance rather than punishment and distress control.

Our Social Work Interns

Practicing under the clinical supervision of Kate York, L.C.S.W.

Mickey Maffei

Hello! I am a first year Master of Social Work student at Rutgers. As a Social Work intern, my role with the World Trade Center Health Program is a Benefits Counselor. Also with the WTCHP I will be co-facilitating the Law Enforcement, and Health & Wellness virtual programs. After graduation I hope to work in either a school or clinical setting, with the ultimate goal of going into private practice therapy. Some of my interests outside of social work include: football (Go Steelers), Music (I play in a Classic Rock cover band and make original music), and exercising. Hope to see you in groups this spring!

Shelby Dutkiewicz

I am a social work intern here at the World Trade Center Health Program. Outside of the office I spend a lot of my free time hiking. As a result, I've been fortunate enough to visit many beautiful places, Maine being my favorite and holding a special place in my heart. Some of my responsibilities as a social work intern includes benefit assessments, co-facilitating groups, and assisting with mental health. I received my bachelor's degree from Montclair State University. Currently, I am in my last semester of graduate school. I attend Rutgers University where I am working towards my master's degree in social work. In the fall I had the opportunity to co-facilitate the Cancer Support Group and Project Uplift, both of which allowed me to meet and interact with wonderful members in our program. This upcoming spring, I look forward to co-facilitating the Women's Support Group and having the opportunity to meet many more members of our program!

Mental Health Support Staff (Continued)

Here we have highlighted a few members of the mental health support staff. These team members have been extraordinary additions to our team. We appreciate them for all the hard work they do!

Graduate Assistant

Kaan Kideys

Hi, my name is Kaan Kideys, I am a Graduate Assistant working in the Mental Health Department for the World Trade Center Health Program here at EOHHSI. I am responsible for assisting in the coordination of the mental health services in the clinic, particularly our support group offerings, as well as other administrative responsibilities. I have recently graduated from Rutgers with a Master's in Applied Psychology and my career goal is to complete a doctorate in clinical psychology and become a licensed clinical psychologist. My clinical interests include providing trauma-informed care and working with mood, anxiety, and substance misuse issues. I am passionate about improving access to quality mental health care for all and hope to operate my own community mental health clinic one day. I will be co-facilitating the Retiree Social Group and the Project Uplift Group. I am also responsible for conducting the interviews for our spotlight series so please reach out if you would like to have your interview featured in our upcoming newsletters. Your stories are incredible and inspiring, it is an honor for me to assist the members of the WTCHP anyway I can.

Group Facilitator

Mike Smith, LCADC

Mike Smith, LCADC has an MA in counseling and is licensed in the areas of Mental Health and Chemical Abuse. He has over 30 years of experience in various areas of both group and individual counseling, casework, and supervision. These areas include substance abuse recovery, mental health, and vocational rehabilitation. He is committed to providing a safe and collaborative environment in which individuals can openly address whatever challenges they may be facing.