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

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



SPRING 2024

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Warm greetings!

We hope that you had a cozy winter and a little time to focus on your wellness. Now more than ever, it is crucial to prioritize your mental health and wellness. In this issue, we focus on acknowledging the challenges that you have weathered and praise your resiliency. Your strength inspires us and we are here to support your well-being on this journey.

I would like to dedicate this newsletter to all of the **Unsung Heroes of September 11th.** We would like to acknowledge all those that were not in the traditional first responder roles but were involved in the rescue efforts and played such a vital role during that time. We dedicate this issue to **the Sanitation workers, Verizon workers, Iron Workers, Transit Workers, Truck Drivers, Crane Operators, other Transportation Workers, Construction workers, Engineers, Electricians, Plumbers, other Utility Workers, Medical Personnel, Volunteers, and Bus Operators.**

WE SALUTE YOU!

Jodi Streich, Ph.D. Mental Health Director

The Rutgers WTC Behavioral Health team can support you with counseling, support groups, and other services to make the most of your retirement. If you are feeling stressed, anxious, depressed, or any other emotion that worries you, please reach out. Email us at wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu or call us at (848)-445-0123. We are always here for you!

Unsung Heroes: 9/11 Recovery Workers

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, amidst the devastation and shock, a segment of the WTC Health Program member population emerged that does not get discussed often - **the invisible heroes**. It is important that we acknowledge these heroes of September 11.

We appreciate the work you did as **sanitation workers**, **ironworkers**, **transit workers**, **truck drivers**, **crane operators**, **transportation workers**, **construction workers**, **engineers**, **electricians**, **plumbers**, **utility workers**, **medical personnel**, **volunteers**, **and bus operators**. Despite not being traditional first responders - your dedication was constant and critical, as you assisted in the activities after the disaster.

This group of general responders were the backbone of efforts following the initial rescue and recovery. They worked tirelessly throughout the reconstruction -often working double shifts and demonstrating tremendous courage and resolve. If you thought at any point your role went unnoticed, it did not, and we want to acknowledge and thank you again for the work you did to help rebuild our city.

We know that many of you are dealing with mental health impacts from 9/11 and its emotional toll. Some of the more obvious symptoms manifest in disrupted sleep patterns, heightened vigilance, less patience, and increased sensitivity to stressors. In addition, some of you may have difficulty trusting others, have issues with social relationships and feelings of isolation.

You may have grappled with these or other mental health challenges but hesitated to seek help. Unfortunately, many feel a stigma about acknowledging a mental health concern. As we have learned over time though, experiencing a disaster has a profound and lasting effect on mental health, which can lead to a range of long-term consequences if left ignored.

We wish to remind all our WTC Health Program members that it is important to lean into self-compassion. It is okay not to always be okay, especially when we feel the pressure to keep it together. Once we start to normalize our feelings and experiences, we recognize that we all carry invisible wounds which are part of our shared humanity. We at the WTC Health Program are with you on your healing journey and are here to listen when you are ready.

All of you were there for us and it is our turn to be here for you. You do not need to face your struggles alone. Please remember that support services are available to you whenever you need them. Do not hesitate to reach out for assistance or guidance at any time. There are many resources and professionals ready to help you navigate any challenges you may be facing. Thank you again for your unwavering dedication and service.

Jodi Streich, Ph.D. Mental Health Director

Spring 2024 Virtual Groups!

9/11 Support Group

A space for first responders to share their unique experiences with the support of their peers.

Fridays 2PM-3:30PM (Zoom)



Firehouse Kitchen NEW

Facilitators: Liz and Gina

The firehouse kitchen has long been a place of bonding for firefighters. This virtual, weekly group is for active and retired firefighers. Connect with peers and discuss professional related topics.

Mondays 1:30PM-3PM (Zoom)



Blue Line Support Group

A space for law enforcement officers to process their experiences together and offer comfort, comradery, and strengthen interpersonal support

Thursdays 1:30PM-3PM (Zoom)

Disability Support Group

A safe space for individuals who are going through the process of getting on long term disability, have been on long term disability for a while, or have been put on accidental disability to connect with others that have faced similar experiences during this transition, and overall promote resilience.

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 and runs for 8 consecutive weeks.

Fridays 12PM-1PM (Zoom)

depression

Tuesdays 6PM-7:30PM (Zoom)

Mindful Meditation

using meditation to

combat aniety and

An interactive seminar on

The Out-of-Towner's Group

A 9/11 support group. This is for WTC members 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 (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.

Thursdays 6PM-7:15PM (Zoom)

If you are interested in participating in any of our virtual group offerings, please email us at wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu or call us at (848)445-0230

Spring 2024 Virtual Groups!

Continued

Disabilities and Benefits Workshop



A space for discussing various WTC Health Program questions and concerns with our Social Work team. Some topics we discuss include: Line-of-Duty Injuries, Accidental Disability Benefits through the WTC Health Program, Social Security Disability, and Supplemental Security Income.

Next workshop: Wednesday April 17th at 5PM (Zoom) More upcoming dates to be announced. Email us if interested: WTC-Benefits@eohsi.rutgers.edu



Health and Wellness Group

This is 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 and relationships, and spiritual well-being.

Mondays 12PM-1:30PM (Zoom)

Women's Support Group

A safe space for women to support other women with shared experiences in creating lives of greater meaning and connection.

Wednesdays 6PM-7:30PM (Zoom)





Cancer Support Groups

A space for WTC Health Program members diagnosed with 9/11-related cancers to come together and receive support for your cancer, while learning coping skills to help manage stress.

Tuesdays 4:30PM-6PM (Zoom) Wednesdays 5PM-6:30PM (Zoom)

If you are interested in participating in any of our virtual group offerings, please email us at wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu or call us at (848)445-0230

Group Facilitators:

Elizabeth Smith

My name is Elizabeth Smith and I am an extern this year working at the WTC Health Program. Currently I am a student working towards the completion of a doctorate in psychology. I love providing counseling services and working to help people improve their lives. In my free time I spend a lot of times outdoors and I enjoy hiking, kayaking, and gardening.

Nancy Medina

My name is Nancy Medina, and I'm currently completing my doctoral degree in counseling psychology at Saint Elizabeth University. A fun fact about me is that I have a son who is a veteran and a volunteer fire fighter who is currently enrolled in the Masters in Counseling Psychology program at Saint Elizabeth University. We have a shared passion for serving first responder and veteran populations, and we hope to be able to work together one day to assist these individuals in navigating their mental health challenges and supporting them on their journey to well-being. In my free time I enjoy cooking for my family and friends!

Anton Steiger

I'm a student at St. Elizabeth University, aiming to graduate in 2025. Alongside being a psychology student here at the clinic, I am also a Licensed Professional Counselor and have been practicing for a few years now. When I'm not here, or anywhere else, I like to spend my time reading, writing, and, when time allows it, traveling.

Gina Duker

Hi everyone, my name is Gina Duker, I am a final year MSW student at Rutgers School of Social Work, I am working towards my LCSW, and when I'm not in school I enjoy karaoke and exploring different cities and foods!

Faith Saychaleune

My name is Faith Saychaleune and I am a second year graduate student at the Rutgers University School of Social Work. My clinical work includes individual therapy with clients, mental health check in's, diagnostic certification interviews, and benefits assessments. Some activities I enjoy doing when I am not working are playing the ukulele, baking, and going for long walks.



Priya Desai

Hi all! My name is Priya Desai and I work as an intern within the Social Work department at WTC Health Program. I am in my first year of my master's in social work at Rutgers University and I plan on getting my LCSW after I graduate. On my free time when I am not working, I enjoy reading a good book and hanging out with my friends.

Theresa Marie Lewis

Theresa Marie Lewis is a rising second year doctoral student 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 an undergraduate and graduate level at Saint Elizabeth University. 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

Valerie Maung

My name is Valerie Maung and I am a social worker for the Rutgers WTC Health Program. I currently have my BSW and am excited to begin my MSW journey through the advanced standing social work program at Rutgers. When I'm not working, I enjoy crocheting, reading, taking walks in nature, and watching new movies/tv shows. I look forward to speaking with you in person at the clinic or over the phone following your visit!

Group Facilitators (Continued):

Amanda Petrone

My name is Amanda Petrone, and I am a 2nd year Doctoral Student at Saint Elizabeth University currently pursuing my doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology. I have completed my Master's Degree in Forensic Psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and have experience working with first responders, trauma victims, families, ages across the lifespan: within forensic, university, and hospital settings. My passion is working with individuals experiencing chronic stress, occupational stress, secondary traumatic stress/vicarious trauma, general trauma, depression, sadness, adjustment issues, marital /relationship problems and across the lifespan issues as we all experience challenges at each stage of life. I believe that a trusting and nonjudgmental therapist is of utmost importance and that is what I strive to be. I have a background in teaching fitness classes and I am very passionate about health and wellness. In my down time, I like to workout and enjoy cycling, listen to good music, and travel when I can. I am honored to be a part of WTC's mission of care.

Kaan Kideys

"Hi, my name is Kaan Kideys, I work as a Mental Health Specialist in the Mental Health Department for the World Trade Center Health Program here at the Rutgers, Piscataway clinic. I am responsible for assisting in the coordination of the mental health services in the clinic, including referrals to mental health services for members and our support group offerings, as well as other administrative responsibilities. I 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 believe in a nonjudgemental, compassionate, individualized, approach that takes into account the unique circumstances, strengths, and goals of each person in order to provide the care that best allows for growth. I am also passionate about improving access to quality mental health care for all and hope to operate my own community mental health clinic one day. In my free time, I enjoy staying active through lifting weights, running, training Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and martial arts, and practicing yoga. I also enjoy photography, traveling, and getting together with friends and family. It is an honor to work with the 9/11 responder population and I look forward to meeting you!

Heather Rothwell-Termotto

My name is Heather Rothwell-Termotto and I am currently a mental health extern at the WTC Health Program at Rutgers. I am a third-year Ph.D. student in the Clinical Psychology program at Fairleigh Dickinson University. Prior to pursuing my doctorate, I earned my Master's degree in Mental Health Counseling from New York University. My clinical interests include trauma-related disorders as well as mental health challenges associated with chronic health conditions. On a personal note, I enjoy riding horses and hope to one day own an equine therapy center.

Skylar Aurichio

My name is Skylar Aurichio and I am one of the social workers here at the clinic. You may hear from me or another social worker at some point in the year following your monitoring visit! I currently have my BSW from Rutgers University and will be going for my MSW alongside Valerie. Something about me, that not many people know, is that I have had my poetry published. Another fun fact about me is that I have been affectionately referred to as a "Jill of all trades" by the Mental Health Director because I recently primed and painted the entire mental health suite. I look forward to meeting you all!



Mental Health Spotlight Series Spring 2024 Features:



Ed Maher

Project Superintendent





Darrius Sollas

Retired Trucker



Spotlight Series: Ed Maher

The following is an interview with Ed Maher, a Project Superintendent with ARCO Design Build.

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

A: "My name is Ed Maher. I currently work at ARCO Design Build, White Plains NY as a Project Superintendent. I'm not retired, I still have quite a bit of rubber on the tires, I've got a several more years until I retire. I live in Sparta NJ. I am married and have two boys, my oldest goes to Rutgers and my youngest son is still in high school."



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

A: "I started out at age 18 working as a carpenter's helper during the summers and school breaks. Over time, I developed and grew into a competent frame carpenter. I enjoyed being outdoors and the "hands on" aspect and experience I gained as a framing carpenter. That is how I fell in love with building construction. When I was going to college, I found that my love of construction motivated me to pursue a degree and career in architecture, engineering, and construction. Have been doing this kind of work ever since. For 35 + years."

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

A: "ARCO Design Build allows our employees a lot of room to grow and be independent to perform our jobs as we see fit (always with company and client best interests top of mind). I enjoy the autonomy. I treat my position as if I were an owner of the company. The bottom line is, I enjoy the art of building construction. Every day is different and presents different challenges. There is never a dull moment. Construction also has its frustrations but overall, it has always been a challenging and satisfying pursuit for me. I cannot see myself doing any other work. This work suits my skillset, my temperament, my personality and my love of building buildings."

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

A: "I have been blessed to have worked for employers that have given me room to move, have allowed me to work independently, make my own mistakes, solve my own problems and grow professionally from there. 35 + years of making and solving your own mistakes would make anyone competent and experienced at their trade. I consider myself competent at my trade, not a Master. There is always room to learn. I continue to pursue the goal of mastering my trade. I'm not there yet.

I have been very blessed and grateful as I have worked for top rated construction companies. I have a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Virginia Tech and a Master of Civil Engineering/Construction Management degree from NJIT. This combined with 35 years of experience has allowed me to gain the competence and expertise to grow in the industry."



Spotlight Series: Ed Maher (Continued...)

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

A: "Personally, I believe the biggest challenge is maintaining a work-life-balance. The work is demanding and requires long hours. I am always trying to find ways to take more time off for myself to spend with family. Burn out is common in the construction industry.

Professionally, the usual challenges associated with construction such as weather delays, material shortages, labor shortages, things of that nature. Construction can be difficult and can be confrontational. There are always challenges. Every day, all day. It becomes an issue of how you deal with problems and challenges, it's all about problem solving, time and schedule managing, and project coordination.

I have become a competent problem solver due to the nature of the work. You learn to be able to see over the dashboard, you try and anticipate problems and plan accordingly."

Q: What was your biggest accomplishment?

A: "I would have to say hands down, marrying my wife and raising two kind, gentle, well-adjusted, educated and handsome young men."

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

A: "Work hard and seek something that you have a passion for."

Q: What are your proudest moments looking back?

A: "I have so many. I am proud to have been able to work and participate in the 9/11 World Trade Center clean up. I am proud of getting a Bachelor's degree. I am proud of getting a Master's degree. I am proud of working for ENR top rated construction contractors (and too many high profile projects to list here) for over 35 years. I am proud of raising a beautiful family. These are all proud moments."

Q: How do you define success?

A: "Being a kind and humble human being. Being grateful for who you are and what you have. Being happy with your lot in life. Being content and happy with all aspects of your life as a whole. Recognizing the many blessings you have in your life. Finding happiness with what you have and in what you do to feed your family. If you can find happiness in what life has dealt you, that is success."

Q: When are you happiest?

A: "When I'm with my family."

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

A: "I am a Family-man, I like to spend as much time with my family as possible. We have a beautiful dog named Zuzu. She is a black lab. I love to take Zuzu hiking. I spend quite a bit of time exercising and walking with Zuzu as this is more or less, my form of decompression. I accomplish a lot on my walks with the dog. I pray, meditate, listen to music, clear my head, plan the future....most times, I just walk and enjoy the exercise, listening to the Grateful Dead and having the wind and sun on my face."

Q: Do you have a favorite quote?

A: "Let your life proceed by its own design" – The Grateful Dead

Don't let anyone else guide you away from what you want. Be thankful for what makes you unique and those who accept you for who you are!

Spotlight Series: Darrius Sollas

The following is an interview with Darrius Sollas, a retired truck driver and current artist and DJ.

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

A: "My name is Darrius Sollas and I was a teamster trucker for 34 years and was forced to retire recently on November 1st, 2023 due to health complications, such as colon cancer, issues with degenerative nerve damage, spinal stenosis, and had a stroke. Currently I live in New Jersey and have a home in California."



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

A: "As a child, I would play with my Tonka trucks, build Lego trucks, Matchbox and Hot Wheels cars, things like that. I ended up living with my grandparents in Co-op city in the Bronx on the 33rd floor and I remember looking out at the windows to see the Manhattan skyline, especially I-95 and seeing all the trucks going by, elaborately lit up and decorated and thought to myself, "that is what I want to do."

After basic training in the Marines, I was shot 6 times while waiting for the subway and couldn't continue my service due to injuries; this happened in November 1989. While I was recovering, I saw a news special, called 20/20 about top 10 jobs that include human involvement. I saw trucking was number 6 and said to myself, "yeah that's it, I can do this."

I like the aspect of being on my own, very comfortable in my solitude, somewhat of a recluse. I did all my driving overnight working the PM shift, except for when we were doing construction work in the city with the teamsters, then I would work during the day. On 9/11, we were dispatched immediately to Ground Zero for any kind of assistance and were onsite 24 hours a day for the first 5 months (Sept to Jan) and then sporadically from March to May, so overall from the day of 9/11 to pulling out the last steel beam of debris in May.

I enjoy being with my family and enjoy working as a graffiti artist in my free time."

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

A: "The freedom to appear and disappear arbitrarily, on my own. To come and be around family and friends on my own. Not having a domestic, redundant work routine. I like to be away for long periods of time and see different states; I got to see every NFL team in their city while driving through the country! If there is somewhere I would like to travel to, I can let my manager know and get a load to go to that location. The job really suited my personality and how I would like to live."



Spotlight Series: Darrius Sollas (Continued...)

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

A: "After physical therapy and learning how to walk again, I joined an apprenticeship with local 282, teamsters and they taught me particular types of skills specific to the teamsters, which was operating dump trailers and dump trucks. At another school in Illinois, I learned to drive an actual tractor trailer. Back in 1989.

Twenty-five percent of my trucking career was operating dump trailers which was local to the tri-state area, picking up and dumping loads in the NY and NJ metro area, and sometimes Delaware. The other seventy-five percent was over the road (OTR) cross country work, where I drove a tractor trailer across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico."

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

A: "Dealing with bigotry on the road across the country was challenging. Some places I would stop and realize, "oh I'm not welcome here."

The other challenges would be missing my kids growing up and being away from my family, as well as fighting through health issues in the later part of my career."

Q: What was your biggest accomplishment?

A: "I'm modest so nothing comes to mind. I would say paying things forward, sharing whatever knowledge and experience I have with my kids and grandkids, whether it is painting, helping them out with any issues they have, and being there for them. They know they can always count on me and that I am here for them."

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

A: "Learn a trade and develop skills, learn as much as you can."

Q: What are your proudest moments looking back?

A: "Battling back from stage 3 colon cancer, it took a lot to get through that, the physical therapy and rehab, my will and fortitude. Proud that I'm honest and never took anything from anybody. Proud of the murals I paint, that is always something I feel great about. I am proud of my kids and grandkids."

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

A: "Now that I'm retired, I like to DJ and produce music and spin Vinyl. I love the music and the music has always loved me back and been there for me. So yeah, painting murals and spinning records."

Q: How do you define success?

A: "Not owing anybody anything and great health."

Q: When are you happiest?

A: "When I'm able to sit quietly outside my home in the yard in California, it's desolate, mountainous, beautiful, and warm all year. I like sitting in the yard where I can be surrounded by beauty and peace, quiet, and tranquility."

Q: Do you have a favorite quote?

A: "Never put measure on favors."



Spotlight Series: Darrius Sollas (Continued...)

Q: Are there any projects or work that you are involved in that you would like to highlight?

A: "I am a graffiti artist who paints murals in my spare time. My mom was a painter and I always thought it was cool to paint with a brush. She noticed the talent in me. When my grandfather came to visit, he would bring comic books. I loved the comic books and how the fonts looked, I would see those colorful letters on subway trains and wanted to get in on it. I went to a performance arts high school and got to know people doing graffiti on the trains and became affiliated with other graffiti artists. I wanted to learn to do whatever it takes to spray paint on a surface and the rest is history.

I have some real estate in Hackensack, NJ. The city of Hackensack had a ceremony talking about the history of union street park, renamed the Graffiti Temple that I started (111 Union Street). It is a collective for graffiti artists from all over the world to come and paint at my venue. I was also featured in 201 Magazine for my work, you can see it here: https://201magazine-nj.newsmemory.com."



Big thank you to Ed Maher and Darrius Sollas for sharing their stories with us!

If you or someone you know would like to be featured in our next spotlight series, email us at: wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

Call or text this **24/7 hotline** if you or someone you know is in need of help:



About the Suicide Prevention Hotline

The **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress **24 hours a day**, **7 days a week**, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices.

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a leader in suicide prevention and mental health crisis care. Since its inception, the Lifeline has engaged in a variety of initiatives to improve crisis services and advance suicide prevention for all, including innovative public messaging, best practices in mental health, and groundbreaking partnerships.

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is independently evaluated by a federally-funded investigation team from Columbia University's Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene. The Lifeline receives ongoing consultation and guidance from national suicide prevention experts, consumer advocates, and other stakeholders through the Lifeline's Steering Committee, Consumer/Survivor Committee, and Standards, Training and Practices Committee.



30-day Self Care Challenge

"One step at a time. You'll get there."				
Clean your bedroom	Make a healthy meal	Start a new hobby	Listen to a calming music	Watch a new movie
Meditate	Eat clean	Stretch	Do yoga	Hydrate
Do a DIY project	Take a walk	Call a friend	Read a book	Write a journal
Recycle your waste	Make time for exercise	Explore a new city	Try a new recipe	Drink some herbal tea
Exercise	Be social	Set a goal	Make art	Declutter
Play with your pet	Plant a tree	Watch the sunrise	Watch the sunset	Visit a museum

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30-day Health Challenge

