

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)

Volume 14 | Spring 2021

[View as Webpage](#) | [Ver como una página de internet](#)

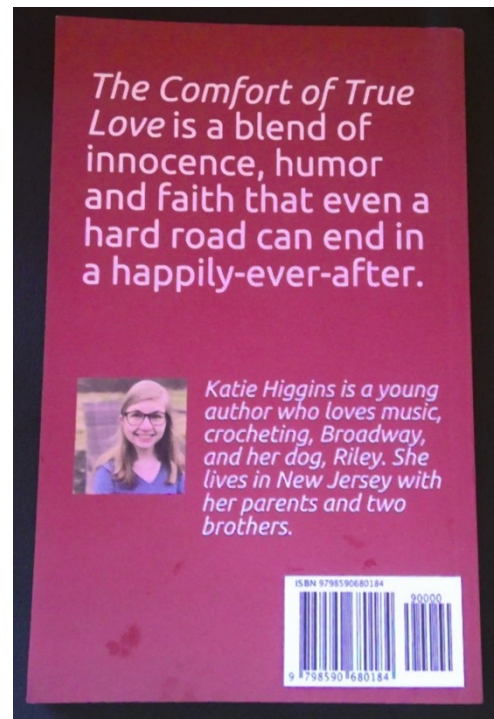
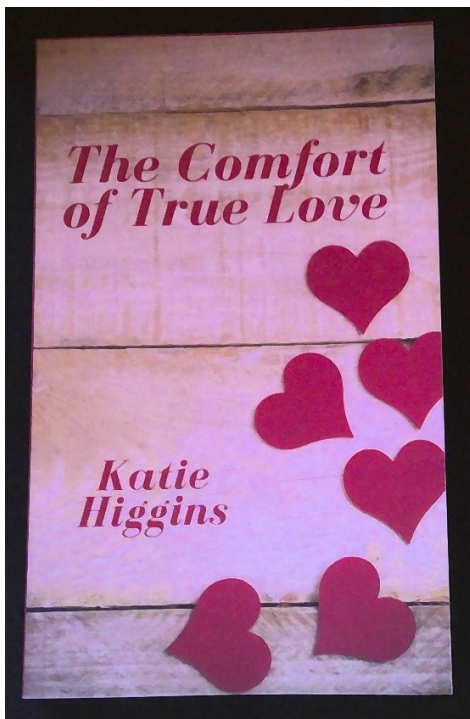


Tri County Community Connections

Youth Success Story

Katie Higgins is a young woman who was born with physical challenges and not only does this affect her physically, but she has also struggled emotionally and socially with how she is not a typical teenager. Katie is extremely intelligent, sociable, and friendly. Through CMO involvement and natural supports, Katie has been able to overcome some of these struggles and is close to graduation from high school and CMO! Over the past five years, Katie has worked on a book that describes a love story between two people that serve their community: an orphanage caretaker and a police officer. This love story is sure to make you feel good! Katie has now finished her book, *The Comfort of True Love* and has successfully published it for purchase online! In an interview with Katie, she shared that in fifth grade she was inspired by her English teacher to begin writing. This is when she first decided she would like to write a book one day. Katie explained that each character in the book is “a piece of her personality” and her humor also shines through her writing. Katie has also already begun writing a sequel! Katie would like to thank her CMO team by name: Cindy, Dr. Gessie and Juli. TCCMO is so proud of this accomplishment and will have signed copies of the book at both TCCMO locations in Branchburg and Washington, NJ. We look forward to reading the next one! Below you will find pictures of Katie and her book, and a link to consider purchasing it for yourself!

https://www.amazon.com/Comfort-True-Love-Katie-Higgins/dp/B08STPRL6/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=the+comfort+of+true+love+katie+higgins&qid=1615990225&sr=8-1



From the Desk of...
James Parauda,
CEO

**Moving toward
an anti-racist
platform**



In prior articles, I have referenced the events of last year that led to a greater awareness of systemic racism and the impact of racism on people of color, as well as its effect on our communities at large. These events evoked an immense emotional reaction from people all over the world which led to protests out on the streets and requests for social justice.

At Tri County CMO, we had already begun to work on diversity and inclusion in the workplace several years ago. We had always thought that having a diverse workforce was the best way to serve the families that seek our help. However, the events of last summer and the reactions that ensued inspired us to do more to make a difference. We saw the tension caused by race relations in this country was not just out on the streets or in the news, but was entwined within the institutions that we all used every day. We also knew it was within the walls of our agency. It made us ask, what does it mean to become an anti-racist employer? How do we delve into such an emotionally charged topic to meet the needs of all our employees and families? How do we begin to initiate change that will lead to a larger transformation not just for our employees, but for all institutions that hold on to racism within its foundation? We knew we had to keep the momentum toward social justice going, but how? After all, complacency is complicity. TCCMO had been preparing for the next steps and we were ready to make a difference in our workplace. We decided the time was right, not only had we done the groundwork, but the opportunity had presented itself. The world had gone to the streets crying for change. Just as the 1960's had moved the country toward the civil rights amendment, this was a new opportunity. Institutions have the chance to invoke a difference and stand for change within their communities. The work would not be easy, but it never has been when making social change across dynamic systems. It may very well get harder before

results begin to show, but not doing the work would have graver long-term consequences on us as a society.

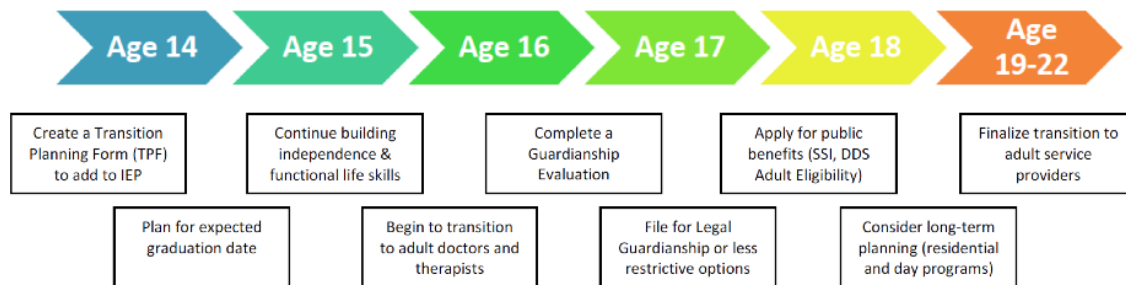
The hard steps lay out in front of us. In the coming months and years to come, Tri County CMO will embark on becoming an anti-racist organization by looking within the internal mechanisms of our workplace and assessing how we do business for the betterment of the families we serve. We will review hiring, training, and promotional practices, as well as look at our board composition and even assess our interior décor. We will need to determine whether our vendors hold these same values. Will our community partners move forward with us to support an anti-racist approach to our work? Ultimately, we need to understand and learn from our employees, our families, and our community to move forward in the best way possible.

As the leader of this organization, I am proud to say that we are prepared to commit to change in addressing systemic racism in our environment.



James Parauda, LSW
Chief Executive Officer

Pride in Partnership



Simplify Transitioning to Adulthood

Becoming an adult is challenging enough without moving from special education to state adult supports. As a parent, this period can be complex and stressful. The good news is that New Jersey has some of the best supports for individuals with disabilities in the country.

To begin the process of qualifying for disabled adult support services, I recommend that families follow these simple steps. First write your own plan for the future. This can be a simple Individual Life Plan. Consider what you would like life to look like five years from now. Ten years from now?

Start with a vocation. Think about how you would like work to look like.

- Full time? Part time? 5 hours a week?

Think about your individual strengths. Everyone has strengths.

- Are you hard working? Do you work well alone? Are you kind and friendly? Do you enjoy structured tasks?

Think about what you are interested in.

- Is it computers? Food service? Art? Writing? Being with people?

How would you like to live?

- Independently? In a small group? With your family? Or have a family of your own?

Then consider your future education/training, community involvement, and hobbies. The things that add richness to life.

- A college or certification course, activities in your religious organization, volunteer opportunities (i.e., joining your local fire department), or join groups such as a gaming club, a sports club, or a performing arts organization. Finally think of the supports and skills needed to achieve this vision. There are supports out there that you may not know about.

Consider supports you may need in the following areas:

· Transportation, life skills (like cooking, cleaning and shopping), decision making, emotional support, and safety in the community.

The best way to create this plan is to bring together a small group of family, friends and support providers that you trust. It only takes a few hours of brainstorming to create this list. With COVID-19, I brainstorm using Zoom group meetings. Finally, write it up in a simple 1-2 page plan. Share this plan with your child study team and have it ready for your Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) support coordinator when you transition into the adult services system.

The next step is to apply early to get into the adult services system. Starting early relieves a lot of stress as the process can take time. While the supports won't start until you are 21, don't wait. Begin at age 18. Apply for SSI/Medicaid by calling the [Social Security Administration](#). I recommend doing an in-person intake if possible, because it may be less stressful. If needed, this can also be completed over the phone during COVID-19. Once approved for SSI, apply for DDD supports by calling [NJ DDD](#).

You may consider finding a local expert who can guide you. Our community has some great resources. You will find that if they don't have all the answers, they can direct you to someone that does.

Hunterdon Counties resources include:

- o Hunterdon Healthcare Special Child Services
- o Hunterdon County Division of Senior, Disabilities, and Veteran Services
- o Children's System of Care-PerformCare Referral
- o Arc of Hunterdon
- o Hunterdon County Surrogates Office
- o Progressive Center for Independent Living
- o Bridges Support coordination

***Similar resources are available in each county**

Finally, reach out to other parents. We are a tight knit community that has gone through similar challenges. You can connect through your schools Special ED Advisory Group (SEPAG). Facebook is also a good tool. There are some very helpful groups. These include:

- NJ Special Needs Connection
- Hunterdon County Moms of Special Needs kids
- NJ Special Needs Resources
- Autism – Central New Jersey Families

I think you will find that our community is made up of a lot of parents who want to help each other.

I hope these simple steps help you through the process of transitioning to adulthood. If you would like more information, you can reach out to me at datkinson@goodbeaconplanning.com.

Don Atkinson, Good Beacon Special Needs Planning, Flemington, NJ



Abilities of Northwest Jersey Inc.,

Where Choice Happens

Abilities of Northwest Jersey Inc. supports people with different abilities through individualized services and offers options and opportunities in the setting of their choice. Whether in program, their own home, the community, or remotely, the same exceptional support

is provided to aid each individual to excel to their fullest potential and reach their goals. Our nearly five decades of experience providing day program and community employment services makes us the industry leader throughout Northwest Jersey and beyond!

Abilities is a consumer-driven, forward thinking organization, consistently creating new opportunities for success. Services provided include: career exploration and planning, prevocational training, vocational training, community job development, community job sampling and onsite training, job placement, individual and group supported employment, day habilitation, behavioral and medical supports, student transition, transportation, community-based services, and remote learning. Abilities offers pre-employment skill training through **SustainAbilities** electronics recycling, **PrintAbilities** apparel printing, **PossAbilities** Thrift Boutiques retail, technology, fulfillment and much more. Additionally, **Abilities STAR** program, based on the campus at Warren Community College, offers classroom soft skill training and career exploration opportunities.

Abilities transition services are provided to students age 14-21 and out of school youth. These services can include any or a combination of services mentioned along with internships at Atlantic Health Newton Hospital, summer internship opportunities and pre-employment transition supports. Abilities takes pride in working with each individual to assist them in achieving individualized goals based on his or her abilities, interests and dreams. Consultation and information sharing at IEP's can be coordinated with Abilities Outreach and Care Coordinator, Karen Menke – kmenke@abilitiesnw.com.

Getting to know TCCMO

Team Traore



Team Traore is TCCMO's team of experienced Care Managers who specialize in working with intellectual and developmentally disabled youth (I/DD). The team is led by supervisor Ashley Traore who has experience working with both children and adults with developmental disabilities. Ashley has managed adult residential programs that service the DD population. Furthermore, Ashley has extensive experience coordinating care for families of individuals with special needs. Ashley is a strong leader and is passionate about the work that she does with her team for TCCMO's families with special needs youth. Each member of this team helps their families connect to services both in the home and within the community. In addition, the team helps educate their families about what services are available for their child. Services for the DD population are more intense with more hours per week in the home, and this requires the Care Managers to be in close collaboration with the providers. These Care Managers are phenomenal advocates for their youth and families and help guide them through the world of DD services. They also

work hard to empower families by identifying their strengths and helping them create a team of supports.

It is also important to recognize that each member brings something different to the table as they have a diverse work background. The team's Lead Care Manager Khadijah Green has worked in the home as a Behavioral Assistant, Behavior Technician, and a Mentor. Additionally, Khadijah ran an inclusive daycare for young children who are on the autism spectrum. Khadijah is a reliable right hand and is always there to help train new team members. Deborah Zolcinski has previously worked with the adult DD population in various settings including Easter-Seals, Bancroft Neuro Health, and Division of the Developmental Disabilities (DDD). Caitlin Trotter started at TCCMO as an intern during her undergraduate education, served as a Care Manager Specialist, and now as a Care Manager has been helping families reach their goals. Lauren Matasker received hands-on experience in a communal and school setting when she worked as a direct support for I/DD youth and adults prior to joining the TCCMO team. Lauren shared that, "these youth have brought so much light to my life." Kimberly Soto also has experience working with the adult DD population from her time with Support Coordination and working for a supported living program. Juliana Mastrangelo has experience facilitating social skills groups for young adults on the autism spectrum. Juliana enjoys getting to know each of her families and helping them discover and explore their strengths. Jocelyn Hatcher has 8 years of experience working with the DD adult population, including DSP (Direct Support Professional), residential management, and support coordination. In conclusion, Team Traore is a group of skilled and passionate Care Managers who are an important part of the TCCMO family.

[Tri County CMO](#)

[Tri County ResourceNet](#)

[How To Submit A Resource To The Tri County ResourceNet](#)

[Sign Up For Future Newsletters](#)

[Regístrese para futuros boletines](#)

TCCMO's Growing Greatness

There is no better time than the present to assist our youth in being "strong on the inside". Over the past year, youth throughout the world have had to adapt to a new way of learning, socializing and living. The inconsistency and ever-changing guidelines are things that we cannot control. Tri County Care Management Organization (TCCMO) has taken on the task of assisting the youth of Hunterdon, Somerset and Warren Counties in building their Inner Wealth® during difficult times.



Inner Wealth®, a term utilized within The Nurtured Heart Approach®, empowers both youth and adults to come into alignment with the

great qualities that exist within themselves. Through the Promising Path to Success grants, providers and families have been trained in The Nurtured Heart Approach™, a method that has become transformational for the work that is conducted within the Children's System of Care. TCCMO has created a workshop, specifically for youth, based off of The Nurtured Heart Approach®. During the workshop, youth learn The 3 Stands™ and how to incorporate them into their everyday lives, as well as learning to see greatness within themselves. The virtual youth workshops are offered for ages 9 and up.

As Wayne Dyer once said, "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change". Through the Youth Nurtured Heart Approach workshop, TCCMO has shown their commitment to assisting youth in changing the way they look at things, even during the most challenging times.

Try this: Think about the last time you and your child were in a challenging situation. Can you think of strengths that you each demonstrated? Be sure to share this with your child!

Join us for our upcoming virtual youth workshops!

May 18th 6pm-7:30pm (ages 9-13) or July 15th 6pm-7:30 pm (ages 14 and up).

For more information on registration please contact Nicole Del Duca at

ndelduca@tricountycmo.org.

Join our Caregiver virtual training on June 9th & 16th 6-9:00 pm or August 10 & 17th 6-9:00 p.m.

For more information on registration please contact Stephanie Suriani at

ssuriani@tricountycmo.org.

Register for our Next Youth NHA Training

Register for Our Next NHA Parent/Caregiver Training

We need **STRONGER KIDS** more than ever!
Learn how to be **STRONG** on the inside!

FREE VIRTUAL YOUTH TRAINING

Build Inner Wealth™!

Presented by: TCCMO Certified Nurtured Heart Approach® Trainers
Nicole Del Duca, Tina O'Sullivan, Janet Hrehoweski & Ashlee Dixon

Based off of The Nurtured Heart Approach® (NHA). NHA is a relational approach that instills greatness and transforms intense behaviors in positive ways.



When: May 18th, 2021 (ages 9-13)
July 15th, 2021 (ages 14 and up)
6-7:30pm

Where: Microsoft Teams



To register please contact:
Nicole Del Duca
ndelduca@tricountycmo.org
908-256-0254

Looking for effective and positive strategies to manage your intense child? This may be your answer...



FREE VIRTUAL 2-Session Training

Build your child's Inner Wealth™! The Nurtured Heart Approach® is a relational approach that instills greatness and transforms children's intensive behaviors in positive ways.

Each session is 2 evenings, and we are offering 2 options! Choose either June or August.

You MUST be able to attend BOTH nights of one session in order to register. Upon completion a certificate will be provided.

Training dates:
Wednesdays, June 9 & 16th, 6-9 pm
OR
Tuesdays, August 10 & 17th, 6-9 pm



Presented by TCCMO
Nurtured Heart
Certified Trainers!

Registration preferred one week prior to training start date.

YOU WILL THEN RECEIVE AN EMAIL LINK!

To register, please call Stephanie Suriani at 908/255-5595 or email:
ssuriani@tricountycmo.org.

[Register Here](#)

[Email Questions Here](#)

VIRTUAL PLATFORM:
Download Microsoft Teams by clicking on the image.



If you need help with this, email or call 908/255-5595.

Community Corner



Special Needs Advocacy Network, better known as SPAN, is a non-profit organization that has been providing services and support for over 30 years in New Jersey. SPAN's mission "is to empower and support families and, inform and involve professionals interested in the healthy development and education of children and youth." With April being Autism Awareness Month, SPAN is a great resource that youth, families, and caregivers can utilize. This is especially beneficial for children who are developmentally disabled that require additional educational supports. Their mission: "SPAN is committed to engaging parents and professionals as partners in improving outcomes for infants, toddlers, children, and youth in NJ. We offer programs that address parent involvement, childcare, general and special education, dropout and bullying prevention, child welfare, health care, mental health, youth leadership, transition to adult life, incarcerated youth, military family support, violence prevention, and more!" SPAN also hosts and runs trainings, programs and projects aimed at empowering parents and caregivers to become advocates in their community while ensuring inclusion for all. For more information about SPAN, visit <https://spanadvocacy.org/> or call 1-800-654-SPAN (7726).



Helping Other People Endure in 2021

In her book "Sometimes Therapy is Awkward," author and psychotherapist Nicole Arzt sheds light on one of the biggest challenges surrounding self-care – getting yourself to actually do it! We may know that taking time out of our stressful day to exercise or practice deep breathing techniques will only benefit us in the long run, but on especially busy days it is tempting to procrastinate or blow off self-care entirely. Arzt introduces a more structured method of implementing and tracking your self-care routine. For some of us, writing things down helps us hold ourselves accountable to our goals. Keeping a self-care log can help you track and assess the benefits of taking some time for yourself. It also helps you to see what isn't working as well for you, so you don't continue wasting time on a routine that isn't effective. In developing

her self-care assessment, Arzt made a commitment to herself to try one new self-care routine each week. Try developing a self-care SMART goal – one that is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based – and using the log to track your progress in weekly increments. I have provided an example below using yoga, but you can choose anything you feel will bring you emotional and/or physical benefits.

***Click on the image below to print out a blank Self-Care Goal Assessment.**

Weekly Self-Care Goal Assessment

Date	March 15, 2021
Identified Goal	I will do 10 minutes of yoga every day this week during my lunch break
Why I am setting this goal?	I want to schedule time to unplug and de-stress during the week. I know yoga has many health benefits, including stress reduction. I know it will be good for my body and mind.
How I plan to achieve this goal?	I will set a reminder on my phone and block out some time on my calendar so my colleagues know I will be busy during my lunch break. I will spend some time on Sunday evening choosing instructional videos for the week so I don't have to think about which ones I'll use.
Any identified obstacles?	I may get caught up in my work and lose track of time. There may be a meeting scheduled for me during that time which would be beyond my control. I may try to convince myself to just do it after work.
Did I complete my goal?	Yes
How challenging was it to complete? (1 being the easiest, 10 being the most difficult)	5
If I didn't complete the goal, what prevented me from doing so?	N/A: Completed
If I did, what difference did it make in my well-being this week?	I felt like I was not as tense throughout the week as I usually am. I was also more in-tune with my breathing or lack thereof. I became more aware of my posture. I also felt focused and refreshed after doing yoga, which helped me get back into my work.
What changes, if any, would I make to this goal in the future?	I would like to increase my time from 10 minutes to 15 minutes each day. I felt like the time flew by too quickly.

Source: Arzt, N. (2020). *Sometimes therapy is awkward: A collection of life-changing insights for the modern clinician*. HMD Publishing.

A Highlight on ADVOCACY



Advocacy

The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, policy, or interest, or active support of an idea or

Behind the Scenes with the Advocacy Committee

If you ask anybody about what the CMO does, they would likely tell you about how it helps families reach their visions, or helps youth who experience mental health or behavioral issues to succeed in the community. But many might not be aware of some of the work that CMO does “behind the scenes” to better the lives of the youth and families we serve. Tri County CMO has a number of committees and workgroups that meet regularly, involving all levels of staff members, to work toward various goals, from increasing staff wellness, providing peer support for keeping our youth in the community, and supporting our DD/ID youth and families in their unique needs. In this newsletter, we are highlighting the Advocacy Committee, which was developed several years ago to collaborate on ways to work with legislative bodies to better provide advocacy and support to youth and their families.

The Advocacy Committee developed as a follow up to all of the CMOs statewide creating a coalition to alert legislators as to the benefit of our services in helping to reduce the number of children in institutional care, detention centers and in psychiatric hospitals. Additionally, CMOs provide a cost savings to the state of NJ through these reductions and through use of the Medicaid platform. This advocacy resulted in the approval of increase legislative state aid to our system several years ago. Therefore, TCCMO decided to continue this type of advocacy work and collaboration with legislators and it has been ongoing.

The Advocacy Committee is comprised of TCCMO’s CEO, two Board of Trustees members, Supervisors, Care Managers, Specialist and a member of our Resource Department. The committee actively stays apprised of legislation that might impact our youth and families, and provides statements or opinions about those issues. It also follows local legislators and key policies on social media in order to inform our youth and families on issues that they should be aware of. For example, several months ago there was pending legislation that threatened to bar professionals, such as Care Managers and SPAN (Special Needs Advocacy Network) advocates, from attending IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings. The Advocacy Committee was able to follow these developments, and our staff was able to provide public comment on the importance of participation of all key stakeholders in these meetings. The Committee also publicized this issue to all of our families so that families could contribute to public comment. **The Advocacy Committee recently received an update indicating a new ordinance which was written to allow for students and families to receive support in IEP meetings.** In a Notice to the Bar dated April 14, 2021, the Committee published [Opinion 57](#) - Non-Lawyer Special Education Advocates and the Unauthorized Practice of Law - Superseding Opinion 56. More information about Opinion 57 will follow soon. The Advocacy Committee will continue to monitor this, and hope you will too.

<https://edlawcenter.org/issues/special-ed/upl-opinion-56.html>

The Advocacy Committee is continuing to follow other key legislation such as cannabis legalization and potential penalties to minors, and how this impacts our youth. We are also working to schedule meet and greets with legislators in our area to ensure they are aware of what CMO does, as well as connecting with the specific legislators on the newly formed New Jersey Legislative Disability Caucus.

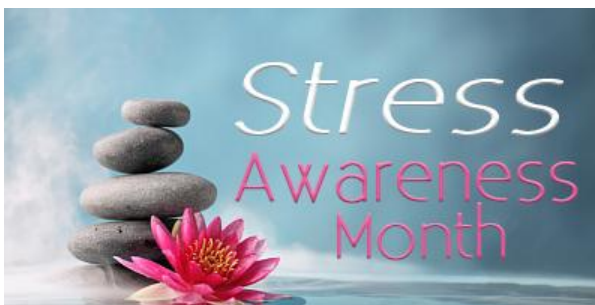
There is a connection between policy and the practice of behavioral and mental health. The behind-the-scenes efforts of TCCMO's Advocacy Committee, as well as our legislators who make policies that affect budget and health care, are integral to the direct work happening every day in our families' homes and our community.

For Your Information...



Stress Awareness Month

This past year has been, without a doubt, a stressful one. This April, join America in observing Stress Awareness Month. Stress is an inevitable part of human life, but what is important is to practice ways to reduce that stress. Meditation and exercise are a couple of the most popular practices for stress reduction. Stress Awareness Month is important because it reminds us to pay more attention to both our mental and physical health. April is not over yet! So, find what works for you to reduce your stress and continue to practice it even after April is over.



Mental Health Month

May is the dedicated month to bringing awareness to mental health. It was in 1949 when May was first declared Mental Health Awareness Month (also referred to as Mental Health Month). The goal is to fight the stigma while providing support to others and educating the public about mental health. In addition, participants in this movement strive to advocate for policies that support individuals with mental health challenges. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) encourages people to participate in the "You are Not Alone" campaign. This campaign highlights experiences of those who have been impacted by mental health challenges to fight the stigma. NAMI's also hopes to build connection between others during this time when we are physically apart.

You can read stories shared in the NAMI community here:

<https://www.nami.org/Personal-Stories>

You can also share your own story here:
<https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/Mental-Health-Month/Share-Your-Story>

You can also sign up for free to participate in the NAMI Walks Your Way walk for NJ here:
<https://www.namiwalks.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=donorDrive.event&eventID=1021>

Resources and Upcoming Events

<https://www.tricountyresourcenet.org/news-events/events/>



*Click on each image to be linked to resources and events!



Visit our website

Our Board Members

Leslie Brusser – **Board Chair**
Tanya Romasz-McDonald- **Vice Chair**
Walter Dudzinski– **Treasurer**
Erin Karl – **Secretary**
Danielle Zurawiecki
Christine Henderson
Beth Fischer
Lynne Eaton
Dan Kerr
Rikki Goodman

Ivette Michel



How to Get Referred to Tri County CMO

PerformCare can help a parent or guardian connect their child to Children's System of Care services. PerformCare staff are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide assessment and guidance to families facing challenges to their functioning and well-being.

PerformCare / Contracted Systems Administrator (CSA)

1-877-652-7624

<http://www.performcarenj.org/>

<http://www.performcarenj.org/families/index.aspx> (video guide)



Tri County CMO

Tri County ResourceNet

How To Submit A Resource To The Tri County ResourceNet

Sign Up For Future Newsletters

Regístrese para futuros boletines

Branchburg Office

3040 Route 22 West, Suite 210
Branchburg, NJ 08876
Phone: (908) 526-3900

Washington Office

315 West Washington Avenue, Suite 1
Washington, NJ 07882
Phone: (908) 526-3900



Tri County Care Management Organization | info@tricityresourcenet.org | tricityresourcenet.org

