

For Immediate Release

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Statewide Behavioral Health Conference May 12-13 in Lincoln

Lincoln—Nebraska’s fifth statewide behavioral health conference will be held May 12-13 at the Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln. This year’s theme is “Working together for prevention and recovery.”

“This conference is an opportunity for people with behavioral health issues, family members, and providers to learn more about recovery, peer support, wellness and trauma-informed care,” said Sheri Dawson, acting director of the Division of Behavioral Health in the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Behavioral health includes mental health and substance abuse issues.

The keynote speakers will be Jon-Michael Rosmann, the executive director of the Iowa Prescription Drug Corporation, and Jim Addy, president of Mapping Strategies, a data analysis company. Both speakers are from Des Moines. Iowa has one of the largest drug donation repositories in the nation and is currently leading initiatives to address high rates of recidivism among state and local offenders with behavioral health disorders. The Polk County Jail Behavioral Health Medication Assistance Program provides participants leaving the jail with access to free psychotropic medications. An initial evaluation indicates a significantly smaller percentage of participants are returning to incarceration than non-participants with mental illness who are released. Rosmann and Addy will discuss how the model is being used in Iowa prisons and plans for expansion.

Another keynote speaker will be Ryan Kaufman, an Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom veteran from Grand Island. He experienced trauma as a child, as a member of the military, and as a veteran. He has lived through homelessness, family separation, substance abuse, a suicide attempt, and post-traumatic stress. He currently works with veterans and their families as a peer support specialist and program coordinator with the Lutheran Family Services’ At Ease Program. He speaks monthly to members of the Nebraska National Guard, sharing his story with service members and their families. His motto is, “I would not leave a member behind 6,000 miles away, so why would I leave them behind at home?”

Also speaking will be Keris Jän Myrick, director of the Office of Consumer Affairs at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Washington, D.C. She will share her experience with mental health reform, peer support and her own personal story. She is former president of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Another speaker is Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, the executive director of the National Association of Addiction Professionals, Washington, D.C. For over 30 years she was the administrator of multi-county drug prevention and treatment centers with services ranging from prenatal care to the serving the elderly in Washington State. Prior to this she was the program director for Volunteers of America Western Washington, serving homeless populations and dealing with the co-occurrence of poverty and substance abuse issues. Her book, Rein in Your Brain: From Impulsivity to Thoughtful Living in Recovery, was released last year by Hazelden Publishers.

Also speaking will be **Jen Genzler** from Omaha, a single parent of five children, two of whom live with behavioral health disorders, and guardian to three cousins with special needs. Her son was in two out-of-home residential treatment centers and is now living successfully at home. She currently works as a family navigator for Nebraska Family Support Network in Omaha.

CEUs are available. For a complete agenda and to register, go to <http://www.nebraskastateconference.org/> or contact Pat Talbott, Mental Health Association, 402-441-4373, ptalbott@mha-ne.org.

A pre-conference event, "Theater of War," is a dramatic reading of Sophocles' *Ajax*, an ancient Greek war play that can serve as a catalyst for discussion about challenges faced by service members, veterans and their families due to psychological and physical wounds inflicted upon warriors. The hope is to de-stigmatize psychological injury, increase awareness of post-deployment issues and resources, and generate compassion and understanding. Admission is free for the May 11, 700 p.m. event, but seating is limited. Reserve a seat at <http://www.mha-ne.org/>.

-30-

Note: Sponsors include the Kim Foundation, Mid-America ATTC, BHECN, Janssen, Bryan Health, Magellan, Lutheran Family Services, Community Health Endowment, the Mental Health Association and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.