

# BERGEN COUNTY PROUD TO BE STIGMA-FREE

## Bringing the Mental Health Conversation to Bergen County & Beyond

SFZ AT GOTTHEIMER ROUND TABLE - VALLEY HOSPITAL AUXILIARY PLEDGES \$1.5 MILLION - WOODLAND PARK JOINS SFZ - COMEDIAN MICHAEL WEITZMAN - QUICKLINKS TO NEWS - VALLEY ADDS MENTAL HEALTH CLASSES FOR SPRING-FAITH-BASED DRUG SYMPOSIUM

### SFZ Invited to Round Table On Proposed ACA Repeal With U.S. Congressman Josh Gottheimer

January 15, 2017

New Jersey's Congressman Josh Gottheimer (D), 5th District, reached out to NJ locals in early January to assemble a Round Table to discuss the potential problems a repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) might bring to NJ healthcare.

In attendance: Dr. Tim Eustace (D), NJ Assemblyman 38th District, Cynthia Chazen, Ambassador for Demarest Stigma Free Zone, Gale Callandrillo, VP, Valley Hospital, Ridgewood, Tom Sullivan, President of IBEW, Electrical Workers Union, Paramus, and Bergen County Freeholder, Betsy Ryan, CEO, NJ Hospital Association, Leila Amirhamzeh, Development Director, NJ Citizen Action, Jae H. Chun, MetroHealth Care Health Insurance Enrollment Services, Balpreet Grewal-Virk, Director of Community Health, HUMC, Hackensack, Dr. Robert Brenner, Sr. VP, Valley Health System, and Cassandra Green, a student from Seton Hall University.

Personable and organized, the Congressman made introductions, poured coffee and related 2 schools of discussion he had witnessed on the ACA; repeal as soon as possible, or leave it alone without changes. Gottheimer said he supported taking a bipartisan approach when possible, and said "My idea is to fix it, you can't repeal without a solution. But plenty [in the ACA] needs to be improved".

The Congressman opened the subject up and



listened to concerns about Cadillac taxes, LGBT health, and the financial difficulties hospitals face treating the victims of the opioid epidemic and untreated, severe mental illness. Although no one from the pharmaceutical industry attended, much time was spent on the rising costs of prescription drugs. NJ Hospital Association CEO, Betsy Ryan said "It's time for rate regulation", and Cynthia Chazen from the Stigma Free Zone went to great lengths to tell the congressman that medication management is the cornerstone of mental illness recovery, and it is already under siege from the recent change to a Fee For Service model. "More cuts will kill NJ behavioral healthcare," she said.

When it came to paying sky-high prescription rates the congressman, father of a child with febrile seizures, said he understands that difficulty as a parent, but added, "I'm not a heavy regulation person". He also responded to a statement that drug prices are out of control, saying "If your kid has cancer or is in psychosis, you're going to find a way to make it [prescription purchase] work".

He was open to hearing Ms. Chazen's concerns about keeping the mental health parity law and coverage for pre-existing conditions, especially for behavioral health, part of any ACA replacement law. He also listened attentively as she drew a picture of the inflated cost of hospital treatment for a mental health crisis vs. good preventative outpatient care from a community provider. He thanked the SFZ for its education efforts. Chazen provided him with a printout of information on First Episode Psychosis Treatment after explaining that it was a hopeful, evidence-driven new treatment that must be funded, and shared notes and an Online Toolkit for Policymakers on Mental Health and Substance Abuse from the organization, Women in Government, which he agreed to study. (See Quicklinks).

Congressman Gottheimer also visited CarePlus on January 30, 2017 to discuss the opioid epidemic in NJ. (See Quicklinks).

[InsuranceNewsNet: More on Round Table](#)

[Congressman Gottheimer's Website](#)



## Valley Hospital Auxiliary Pledge to Fight for Adolescent Mental Health, Make \$1.5 Million Pledge.

January 24, 2017  
Reprinted from The Valley Hospital Website.

In 2015, the members of Valley Hospital Auxiliary pledged to raise \$1.5 million that





would be designated to two areas—an endowment for Valley Home Care's Butterflies endowment and towards the Valley's Child & Adolescent Mental Health Program.

This month, this extraordinary group of women donated \$150,000 to the Valley Hospital Foundation. This was the result of many fundraisers that took place this past fall, including the Tree of Light ceremony, the 61st Annual Ball, the holiday luncheons and boutiques.

Throughout its 70 year history, The Valley Hospital Auxiliary has raised more than \$17 million in support of much-needed healthcare programs and services that have touched thousands of patients and their families. It consists of more than 1,500 members in 15 branches, and works to fulfill the three-fold mission: to raise funds for valley's programs and services, provide volunteer service, and serve as community liaison. This benevolent donation designated to these two programs demonstrates their support of Valley's mission.



“The Valley Hospital Auxiliary is an incredible collection of philanthropic women who have been making a meaningful difference in this community since its inception in 1944”, asserts Valley Hospital Foundation Director of Development, Sandy Carapezza. “They are so generous with their time and firmly committed to Valley. We truly appreciate all they do for Valley.”

[Visit Valley Hospital's Foundation Page](#)

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## QUICKLINKS TO MENTAL HEALTH NEWS

[NJ Assembly Website: Huttie Bill Against Loss of Healthcare for Most Vulnerable Approved](#)

[Women in Government: Toolkit for Policymakers on Mental Health & Substance Abuse](#)

[Gottheimer Visits CarePlus to Discuss Opioid Epidemic](#)

[Philadelphia Inquirer: Christie Calls For Increase In Mental Health Beds](#)

[NorthJersey.Com: Verona Considering Stigma Free Initiative](#)

[AC Press: Vitale Bill Requires Drug Testing for All NJ Students](#)

[Tap Into Edison: Diegnan Prescription Monitoring Bill Clears Committee](#)

[Stigma Free News of NJ Now Available Online at HRG](#)

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### Comedian Michael Weitzman Reflects on Men's Mental Health

If you've spent time around a Stigma Free event, chances are you've met the charming and likable Michael Weitzman. Michael is a Rockland County native, but always makes the rounds of Bergen events and attends the Paramus SFZ meetings to stay informed.

Openly bipolar, Micheal sat down with us and we expected to talk about his comedy routines and programs on stigma, which he performs for local and national organizations such as NAMI. But the conversation took a turn, with Michael reflecting about his lived experience of mental illness, and we talked on how these experiences devastate men's self esteem.

Always a go-getter, Michael put himself through SUNY New Paltz, despite having already experienced severe depression in high school; which he wrote off as nothing. "I self-stigmatized and didn't want people to know I had a mental illness", he said. After a rocky first year spent more in the frat than the library, Michael's symptoms worsened, but he just buckled down with the goal of getting through college in 4 years. A series of uninteresting sales jobs followed and it took 6 years to land a job that really spoke to his outgoing and friendly enthusiasm. Michael got into selling mortgages at a very opportune time and made a veritable fortune; pulling down a six-figure income year after year. He won sales contests, was top producer and family life with wife and two children in a big beautiful home was solid and fulfilling.

Like many people with lived experience, Michael's recollections of his illness and his diagnosis are often blurred; with the years of treatments and hospitalizations hard to recount. Ever optimistic, he recounted his trials, but kept coming back to the bright side; supportive parents, good relations with his children, that giant paycheck and the sense of purpose and self-esteem it gave him, as family provider, every day.

He was very clear on how he felt after he had been disrespected by an unsupportive spouse who did not believe he had mental illness and objected to him taking medication. He was equally clear that luckily supportive parents, friends, family and doctors were there for him at his darkest moments .

"Mental illness just wasn't an issue in my life until it hit my wallet", he said.

After the mortgage boom waned and his marriage was strained, Michael's illness worsened. At one point he was feeling suicidal. Despite this, he still tried to work in his competitive, fast-paced job but found it difficult. He misused his meds, slept in the car in the park on lunch breaks so he could hide his troubles from his employer...and also his wife. With great difficulty he kept the job, but eventually his marriage crumbled under the strain of stigma. With treatment he was back up and running after a few tough years. But the blow to the male ego still stings.

"When you can't make any money, it's a stigma thing and when you can't provide for your family...it makes you feel like you are not a real man, not even a real person", he said. "That's how I felt for many years." He has since changed that harsh perspective, but it took a lot of time and work to do so.



A colorful graphic with a yellow background and a decorative border. The title "THE 3 AMIGOS OF MENTAL HEALTH" is written in large, bold, red and green letters. Below the title, the text reads "Non-Sufferers, Suffering in Silence, &amp; All Sufferers" and "EDUCATING, INSPIRING &amp; HELPING". A list of bullet points includes "Stomping Out Stigma", "Acceptance", "Wellness Tools", and "A Solution To Your Mental Health Challenges". To the right is a photo of a man wearing a colorful striped shirt and a sombrero, holding two limes. Below the photo, the text says "Props, Passion, &amp; Using Humor/Laughter as Medicine" and "Having All 'Amigos' Helping &amp; Supporting One Another!".





Happily, Michael has rebounded and stays in recovery with the help of his loyal family and fan base. He is now active in the peer movement in mental health and is working on inspiring others.

Michael, we think you are quite a man.

[Contact Michael For A Performance](#)

## Woodland Park Goes Stigma Free, MHA Passaic Follow Bergen's Lead

On December 7, 2016 the Woodland Park Council was urged by county advocates to adopt a Stigma Free resolution. Librarian Linda Hoffman worked with Mayor Keith Kazmark to raise awareness after a number of recent suicides had rocked the area. 5 people in 2016 had taken their lives; a teen, a young girl, 2 young adults and an elderly man; the loss really rocked the small community of 12,000. "Mayor Kazmark came to me one day and just asked- what can we do?", Hoffman said.

They found the help needed from the dynamic Joanne Green, Passaic chapter Executive Director at Mental Health Association, a national organization for mental illness advocacy. Joanne was able to connect with local health officials, Tracy Amato and Jaclyn Luker to start a Task Force and give them the resources needed to join Stigma Free.

According to MHA Passaic, Associate Director, Rebekah Leon, "Mental Health Association, Passaic is following Bergen's lead on the Stigma Free Zone. Our goal is to get the entire county to go Stigma Free". She added "Bergen County is our example."

Greene, Hoffman and the Task Force approached the town's first responders, Board of Health, Parks Department, the school districts and the Municipal Alliance and found not one person said no, or objected to the SFZ idea. Since passing the resolution, all of the task force members and the local police department have completed Mental Health First Aid Training, funded by businessman and task force member, Anthony Collandro.

Board of Health employee Tracy Amato is overseeing volunteers and plans for SFZ projects are in the works. Collandro is creating window decals for all organizations in the SFZ to identify the places where mental health information is available. They are working on a suicide prevention brochure and the Mayor commissioned a dozen aluminum SFZ signs for the town. Their website is under design and a health fair is planned. "The passion that people have for the Stigma Free is really beautiful", said Hoffman.

The Stigma Free News of NJ would like to congratulate Mental Health America and the town of Woodland Park. You have taken a sad



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR FROM NICK MATAHAN, PARAMUS SFZ

Dear Stigma Free Zone News of NJ,

During his State of the State address, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie pledged Tuesday January 10, 2017 to make combating drug abuse and addiction in the state a top priority; he said "Let's work to save lives together and let's start today." The governor noted that drug overdose deaths went up nearly 22 percent in NJ between 2014 and 2015. Moreover, addiction is a "disease, it's not a moral failing" and "arresting, jailing, or stigmatizing the victims will not make it better" The governor added "Our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and our children are dying every day in numbers we can no longer ignore."

Stigma is the "mark" resulting from the judgment by others. That judgment is often rooted in a lack knowledge or training. The resulting shame or embarrassment from stigma is cited as a primary reason why many people do not seek help - that is what Paramus Stigma Free Zone wants to change. Sharing statistics, facts, information, resources; and whatever it takes to help all understand that mental illnesses are treatable diseases. President Obama said "There should be no shame in seeking help for treatable illnesses that affect too many people we love."

Statistics show that 1 in 4 adults experience a diagnosable mental, yet more than half will not seek treatment. Why? The main reasons cited are shame and fear of judgment from friends, family, and co-workers. In other words, the STIGMA associated with mental diseases - even though it's a disease like any other. It is our goal to build a society where people are free of stigma and can get the help they need. We can build that society by banding together as a community, breaking down the walls, and showing others how they can do the same. Join us: You can show your support by visiting our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ParamusStigmaFree>

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**Valley Hospital Offering Community  
Mental Health Supports Spring 2017**



is offering a wide array of workshops, webinars and classes that support good mental health. The safety net hospital for the uninsured, BRMC, has been a stalwart supporter of the SFZ since its inception, but our public hospitals in Bergen County have not yet joined the Stigma Free Zone. Along with the landmark donation from their Foundation's Auxiliary, these educational offerings show our *friends at Valley are Stigma Free!*



While serious mental illness may still not be on the cover, the Valley Hospital Winter/Spring glossy mailer clearly shows a willingness to educate the public about mental illness. They are operating true to our SFZ Mission, "do something about mental health".



Valley public health outreach nurses and educators have also been attending recent SFZ events.

We guess this makes them a Stigma Free Zone!

So, Valley, when is the party?

**2017 mental health offerings include;**

**Positive Coping, 1 session, Feb. 15, 10:30-11:30**

**Caregiving 101 , 1 session February 21, 6:00 -7:30**

**The Teenage Brain, 1 session, March 17, 7:00- 8:30**

**Subst. Abuse Nutrition Therapy, May 10, 7:00-8:30**

**Truly Integrated Care, 1 session, May 25, 7:00-8:30**



**Speak Up When You're Down: A free weekly new mother's postpartum depression support group.**

Also offered are online webinars on anxiety, Tai Chi, visualization and mindfulness classes, bereavement group for teens, and coming in late spring, an 8 week stress reduction course.

Thank you, Valley Hospital! We hope you will continue to provide education and supports for all age groups and for the entire spectrum of mental illness, including serious and psychotic mental illness.

[Read Valley's Class Schedule for 2017](#)

[Valley Stress Reduction Program](#)

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# Do No Harm



A symposium addressing  
the role of *faith based*  
leaders in preventing  
substance misuse and  
supporting families  
in crisis

**Thursday  
February 23, 2017**

Atlantic County Library System  
Mays Landing Branch  
40 Farragut Ave  
Mays Landing NJ 08330

Linking New Jersey's Faith Leaders  
with Substance Misuse Prevention & Treatment

Registration & Breakfast: 9:30-10am  
Symposium: 10am-1pm

Register for this FREE symposium:  
[www.drugfreenj.org/faithbaseddonoharm](http://www.drugfreenj.org/faithbaseddonoharm)



Atlantic County  
Opiate Task Force



This symposium is part of the Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey's Do No Harm Symposium Series. There is no cost to attend.

This symposium is designed to empower the faith based community with resources and information to help prevent and address substance misuse in their congregation.  
For more information and to register, please call: (609) 272-0100



## FAMILY EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

Presented By:

### INTENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES OF BERGEN COUNTY Series #1

These workshops are for families who have an adult relative with a mental illness. Family Education is an eight week program that meets from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at  
BERGEN REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER: Behavioral Health Building, Room E218  
230 East Ridgewood Ave., Paramus, NJ 07652  
**If interested in attending, please contact Intensive Family Support Services**  
(201) 646-0333 ext. 251, 252 or 253

**WEEK 1: January 17, 2017**

#### REVIEW OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Presented by Robin Foley, MS, APN

Discussion of Schizophrenia, Major Depressive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder and other mental illnesses

**WEEK 2: January 24, 2017**

#### PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATIONS

Presented by Dr. Jack Dang, Medical Director at CBHCare, Inc.  
Learn important facts about medications that treat mental illness

**WEEK 3: January 31, 2017**

#### BERGEN COUNTY'S ADULT MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Presented by Eric Arnesen, Recovery Resource Specialist at Advance Housing, Inc.  
Discussion of the mental health services available to adults within our community

**WEEK 4: February 7, 2017**

#### RESOURCES FOR OLDER ADULTS AND THEIR CAREGIVERS

Presented by a representative from Bergen County's Division of Senior Services  
Discussion will include Medicare, MLTSS, care management, and general information

**WEEK 5: February 14, 2017**

#### A VIEWING AND DISCUSSION OF PBS SPECIAL, "RIDE THE TIGER: A GUIDE THROUGH THE BIPOLAR BRAIN"

**WEEK 6: February 21, 2017**

#### ASSISTED OUPATIENT TREATMENT SERVICES

Presented by James Nono, AOTS Director

Learn how involuntary outpatient commitment can offer an alternative to inpatient commitment

**WEEK 7: February 28, 2017**

#### SELF CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

Presented by Dr. Norma Uranga, Integrated Lifestyle Coach

Are you so involved in caregiving that you've neglected yourself?  
Learn various methods to deal with caregiver stress, including mindfulness, meditative practices, and other relaxation techniques

**WEEK 8: March 7, 2017**

#### RECOVERY

Presented by Tammy Smith, Mental Health Advocate, Case Manager, and Public Speaker for NAMI  
This is a dynamic, inspiring presentation from someone who has a very personal experience with mental illness. Tammy conveys hope that recovery is possible.

ALL OF OUR LINKS ARE LIVE !

STAY CONNECTED



Bergen County Stigma Free Zone | 25 Maple Ave, Demarest, NJ 07627

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