

THE OUTLOOK

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER



WELLSTONE CRISIS CENTER RIBBON CUTTING

Governor Kay Ivey, Commissioner Kimberly Boswell and Chief Executive Officer Jeremy Blair will cut the ribbon on WellStone's new Crisis Center on September 19th, adding to the burgeoning Alabama Crisis System of Care. The center, WellStone Emergency Services (WES), a 24/7/365 facility for assessment, referral and treatment for individuals with mental health and substance use disorder crises, will add generously to the wide continuum of care that WellStone offers the community at large.

WellStone is Huntsville's designated call center when people call the 988 national crisis hotline. This means when anyone contacts the hotline during a mental health or substance use crisis, it's directed through WellStone. Officials with WellStone say since the number recently changed, they have helped hundreds of people. That's another big step for mental healthcare.

WellStone's new center offers a new level of access to mental health care to the Huntsville area and surrounding counties. Individuals who are in crisis have a place to walk right into and be served with compassion and care.

ADMH is thankful to the Governor and state Legislature for the investment in mental health care for Alabamians.





THE FAITH-BASED SUPPORT SPECIALIST PROGRAM

The substance misuse epidemic is a rapidly and constantly growing issue in America, and as many people as possible need to be informed concerning the truths and challenges of substance use disorder. There is a great stigma concerning substance use disorders and substance misuse in the faith-based community.

The Agency for Substance Abuse Prevention (ASAP) hosts the Faith-Based Support Specialist (FBSS) program which works to bridge the gap between the faith-based community and the mental health field. ASAP is dedicated to strengthening community awareness through substance abuse education and prevention services residing in the State of Alabama.

The FBSS program is actively knocking out the stigma amongst religious leaders and while simultaneously training them to help those with substance use disorders. In many cases, the church has been ill-equipped to provide practical help and connect people to certified practical resources available.

The FBSS trainings have excelled! In just six months, with two training conferences, there have been almost 60 Faith-Based Support Specialists trained. For the last two conferences of the year, there are already another 80 registrants. The program participants have engaged the program and information with great energy and excitement and are excited about implementing these tools, skills, and resources into their work and in the field of ministry. The faith-based community has received this program with open arms, and many are calling it an answered prayer.

Each conference has had around 30 attendees/participants, and training for the conferences covers many topics, such as general education on substance use disorders; detailed information on the treatment process like assessment, treatment planning, and treatment progression; communication skills and effective listening; cultural competence; and many other necessary topics and information are provided. For details about the Faith-Based Support Specialist program, visit <https://fbss.asaprev.com/events/>

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Want to be included in the next issue? Send us your stories, achievements, initiatives, events...etc!

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Every September, National Recovery Month is celebrated to encourage and support individuals in recovery and service providers. The goal of National Recovery Month is to educate people about substance use disorders and other co-occurring diseases, as well as the effectiveness of treatment and recovery programs and the fact that recovery is possible. Learn more about the month [here](#).

Please pass along information of treatment and recovery throughout the month and beyond; and share stories of success from our partners and individuals served at ADMH providers.

DENA

A PERSONAL STORY OF RECOVERY

"I was born on April 24, 1974, to a 15-year-old mom and a 17-year-old dad. My mom was drunk and on LSD on the night I was born. She was incredibly young and from a volatile upbringing herself. I do not blame my parents for my problems. I blame the disease of addiction.

By 13, I had started experimenting with drugs and marijuana. I was drinking at 15, pregnant at 18, and it was a downward spiral from there. I was working and clubbing on the weekends and partying at night. It was normal to go to work hungover and to take some diet pills to get through work to get to another party. That went on for a few years.

I lost my son to my parents, so I felt I had no responsibilities. I lived with my grandmother and did not help with the bills. I was entitled and selfish. At 20, I met my first husband. I started doing cocaine with him. I started working in clubs because he wanted me to dance so he could party for free. I did. I stayed with him until 24. He ran me over and broke my foot so badly that it had to be completely reconstructed. Here comes the devil of addiction. OPIATES. Up until this point, I partied, I worked, I functioned.

While my mom was living a life of alcoholism with a man, who had cheated on her and contracted HIV and did not tell my mom he was positive, I was developing my own misery by taking pain pills, losing both my daytime job and nighttime job. After my mom found out her husband is HIV positive and had been for six months, while giving it to her without her knowledge, she shot and killed him. Nine months later, my mom committed suicide.

I was addicted to opiates at this point. I went from pain pills to intravenous oxycontin and then heroin. I was in and out of prison and jail. During moments of sobriety, I had my second child. I did get sober a few times, but I could never stay that way.

My lifeline was God and Medicated Assisted Treatment (MAR). MAR has saved my life. God knew that I needed medicine. I prayed so many times for him to help me and deliver me! I was angry at myself, at Him, at my childhood! But little did I know that He had this plan for my life.

I remember when Pam Butler called me about a job with R.O.S.S. I felt humbled and undeserving. I thought, *"This woman does not know I am this ex-IV-user and a felon. A three-time loser with 21 years 'over me at one time'."*

But she did, and she was giving me, ME, a chance to help others get where I am. I took the job at R.O.S.S. and have helped others find their pathway to recovery. I am grateful for my life today. I am grateful for so many people. I would be afraid to start naming them for fear of forgetting someone. I am thankful for opioid treatment programs.

If you have the disease of addiction, please call our R.O.S.S. at 1-844-307-1760. If you are not sure if you do and need someone to talk to, call! We want to help you help yourself. Love you to a better life."

ADVA ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP

FOR NEW VETERANS SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) is proud to be a partner with the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs and colleges and universities around the state for a newly established Veteran's suicide prevention awareness campaign.

Operation: We Remember serves as a visual reminder that suicide knows no boundaries. Participating college and universities will display 152 American flags on their respective campuses during the month of September, which serves as National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. This act is intended to honor and remember the 152 Veterans in Alabama who took their lives in 2020.

"Supporting our veterans with mental health resources that are accessible and compassionate is crucial. Nearly eighteen percent of individuals who die by suicide in Alabama are veterans. Through resources such as 988 and the Crisis Centers, we hope to help Alabamians find help, begin the path to recovery and save lives," said ADMH Commissioner Kimberly Boswell.

"We are excited about this new campaign and continuing the discussion for this important topic within the Veterans community," said ADVA Commissioner Kent Davis. *"Suicide prevention is never an easy subject or an enjoyable conversation, but we hope this visual display will show the reality of how many Veterans have those invisible wounds and help create impactful, long-term change."*

Commissioner Davis, ADMH Commissioner Kimberly Boswell, Auburn Student Veterans Association Director Paul "Puck" Esposito, and Montgomery Biscuits General Manager Mike Murphy discussed efforts being made to improve mental health in Alabama.

Student Veterans associations participating in Operation: We Remember includes the University of Alabama, Auburn University, Troy University, Jacksonville State University, University of North Alabama, University of Montevallo, and Shelton State Community College.



Commissioner Boswell, Commissioner Davis and Sissy Louise Moore



Stay Connected, Keep Learning!

ATTENDANCE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN 2022

A project led by Attendance Works

10th Year Anniversary!



© Attendance Works

ATTENDANCE AWARENESS MONTH

ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Every September is attendance awareness month, and attendance awareness month is a time to spread awareness of the need for regular attendance for academic success. This year's event theme is *"Stay Connected, Keep Learning!"* Special emphasis is being placed on building greater student engagement, public awareness, and long-term family support for school attendance efforts.

Barriers in transportation, health issues, poor nutrition, and mental health concerns are leading factors that often impact student attendance. A recent national survey revealed that chronic absenteeism has more than doubled from pre-pandemic levels, with an estimated eight million students missing too many school days!

Chronic absences, particularly for students from low-income households and many children of color, can have a negative impact on participation and achievement. Identifying and resolving issues contributing to absenteeism, such as lack of mental health care services, housing, and food insecurity is one way to overcome the challenges students encounter in missing school.

Monitoring and promoting attendance by collaborating with the students and their families by offering needed support and resources is one way to assist students who are chronically absent. Engaging students and addressing absenteeism early is a great way to support a student and to reduce the dropout rate.

Throughout this entire month, local school systems statewide will focus their efforts on helping all Alabama students, families, and communities take more impactful action. The goal is to ensure that every student is at school each day and fully achieving academically. Please join ADMH and ALSDE in celebrating attendance and encouraging all students to be in school, every day!

To learn more about Alabama school attendance and awareness, contact Alabama State Department of Education Administrator Kay Atchison Warfield or ALSDE Prevention and Support Specialists Shenitra Dees and Tracy Goreed at 334-694-4717.

Truancy Vs. Chronic Absence

TRUANCY

- Counts only unexcused absences
- Emphasizes compliance with school rules
- Relies on legal & administrative solutions

Vs.

CHRONIC ABSENCE

- Counts all absences: excused, unexcused & suspensions
- Emphasizes academic impact of missed days
- Uses community-based, positive strategies



UNDERSTANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH FOR ALABAMA STUDENTS

STATE AGENCIES AND CHILDREN'S OF ALABAMA PARTNER TO EXPAND TRAINING FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE COORDINATORS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Over Summer 2022, the [Alabama Department of Mental Health \(ADMH\) Office of Infant and Early Childhood Special Programs](#), the [Alabama State Department of Education \(ALSDE\)](#) and the [Pediatric Access to Telemental Health Services Program of Children's of Alabama \(PATHS\)](#) partnered to train school system Mental Health Service Coordinators throughout the state on infant and early childhood mental health fundamentals.

"Identifying the impact of relationships on brain development, understanding the root causes of behavior, and learning effective strategies to work with students who may have experienced trauma, are crucial. The courses offered by the PATHS Program of Children's and the ADMH Office of Infant and Early Childhood Special Programs assist Mental Health Service Coordinators to better connect and serve students in our public schools," said Commissioner Kimberly Boswell, Alabama Department of Mental Health.

Mental Health Service Coordinators are appropriated by the Alabama Legislature to the Alabama State Department of Education. Their role is vital as additional mental health support, connecting students with school counselors, therapists and social workers, offering referrals and linkages to community services, and finding the right resources for children in need.

The training series is provided by Stacey Daugherty, LICSW, IMH-E®, Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant with the Alabama Department of Mental Health [Office of Infant and Early Childhood Special Programs](#), in partnership with the PATHS Program at Children's. The first two sessions were conducted this past May and the series concluded on August 23, 2022. The continuing education credit for this event was provided by The Amelia Center at Children's.

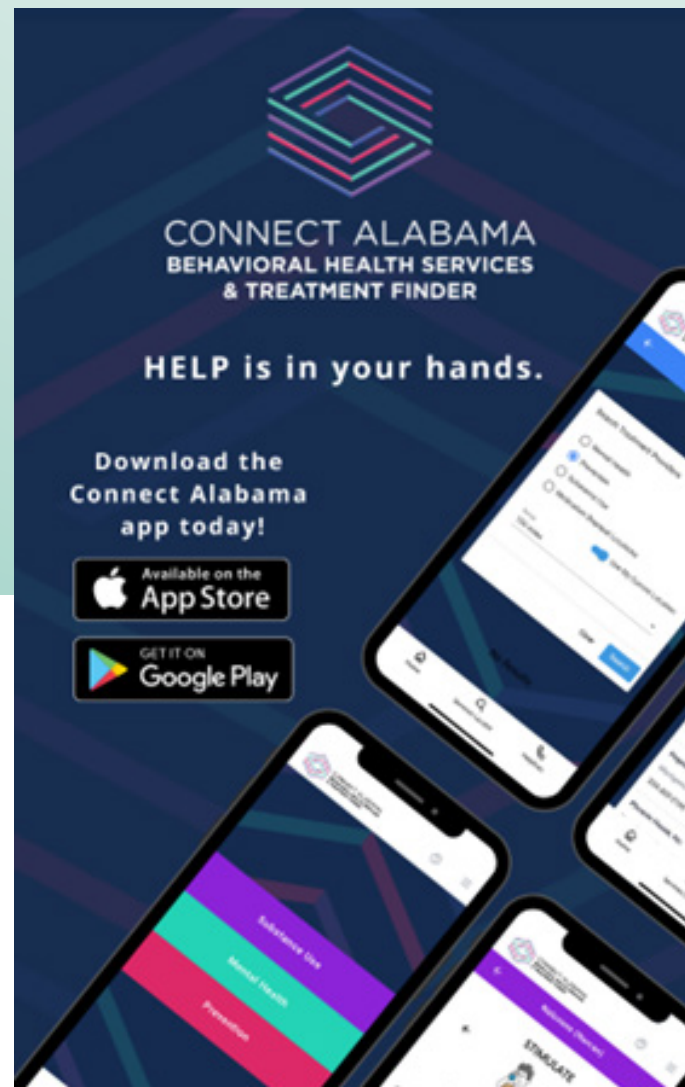
Participants have offered positive reviews of the first two sessions held.

A Mental Health Service Coordinator stated, *"I loved the scientific connection and examples as it is so clear as to how impactful teachers and parents are on the behaviors of students and their ability to be healthy and productive."*

Another Coordinator stated, *"I loved learning more about attachments in children and also how trauma affects the brain."*



HELP IS IN YOUR HANDS. Download The Connect Alabama Behavioral Health Services & Treatment Finder App Today! The Connect Alabama App can assist you in finding treatment for you or your loved ones who struggle with mental illness, substance use disorder, or who want to learn about prevention. Download today!





MENTAL HEALTH COURTS IN ALABAMA

Alabama has 13 mental health courts in the state, serving 16 counties. A mental health court is a specialized court where individuals who have committed non-violent offenses are referred to a mental health court to address their offense in a way that provides help while still maintaining accountability. AltaPointe and WellStone both have partnered with mental health courts in their respective counties to provide mental health services.

For the last ten years, WellStone has partnered with the City of Huntsville and Madison County to provide a mental health court. Madison County mental health court typically sees 300-400 people per year. This year, WellStone has partnered with Cullman County to start a mental health court to assist non-violent offenders in getting the help they need. In order to be a part of the program, participants must apply to the mental health court. Mental health services are then provided by WellStone through the program.

Since August 2021, AltaPointe has partnered with Baldwin County to provide a mental health court. To date, 70 individuals have been referred and 40 have been enrolled into the program.

This program is for individuals 19 years of age or older who are facing misdemeanor charges in district court; people facing non-violent felonies may be considered on a case-by-case basis. A mental health court is reserved for those who suffer from serious mental illness.

AltaPointe and the Alabama Department of Mental Health have teamed up to bring the Stepping Up Initiative to Baldwin County. Stepping Up works to break the cycle of incarcerating mentally ill people by linking them to treatment and community resources. While the Stepping Up Initiative was enacted as an individual program, it has achieved the most success in combination with mental health court.



Mental health courts are a great resource for both clients and the community to ensure that individuals are receiving the mental health care they need in order to assist them in avoiding further justice system involvement. Mental health courts serve a significant role in the community. They facilitate follow-up for mental health treatment upon release, helping to curb the revolving door to the criminal justice system. The goal is to address the root causes of behaviors that led to a court date and possible jail time.

**YOU'RE NOT ALONE.
THERE IS HOPE.**



ICYMI - 988 calls are routed to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline centers in each state, transitioning from the current Lifeline number, 1-800-273-8255!

988 is available to anyone in need, 24/7, and aid in diverting individuals away from crises by connecting them with specialists. Calls are answered by crisis counselors who are located here in the state.

In Alabama, calls will be answered by centers here in the state. The call centers are located in Mobile at [AltaPointe Health in Mobile](#), in Birmingham at [The Crisis Center Birmingham](#) and Huntsville at [WellStone](#) and [Crisis Services of North Alabama](#).

The crisis counselor on the other end of the line speaks directly with the individual and, if necessary, makes assessments, referrals, and connects them to a mobile crisis response team or to a crisis care center.

With the introduction of 988, we expect to see a decrease in suicides, arrests, emergency medical services, hospitalizations, and law enforcement interventions. Not only should 988 divert calls from traditional emergency dispatching services, but it will help de-escalate life-threatening situations by providing urgent assistance. 988 is the first step in Alabama's Crisis System of Care that will increase access to critical care and life-saving resources.



THRIVAL STORIES

'If telling my story helps only one person, then it'll be worth it' - Fred Vars

Over the past year, Wings Across Alabama has been working to collect video stories from people who have overcome mental health challenges across the state. They have begun to publish the first installments in their Thrival series.

[Please enjoy the stories of empowerment](#) and find out how to share yours! Mental health stigma comes in many forms. Exclusion, silence, and labeling are just a few. Sharing your personal story of THRIVAL can help end stigma and offer hope.

TOGETHER. WE THRIVE!

AL-APSE CONFERENCE

Alabama APSE, the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), held their annual conference this year in Montgomery, Alabama. Alabama APSE supports individuals with disabilities by advocating for their rights, integrated employment opportunities, and services.

This year, the keynote speaker for the opening night of the conference was Lemzel Johnson. The theme for this year was *"The Vision is Clear in 2022,"* and Lemzel's speech for the night reflected those sentiments. He covered many topics, such as self-purpose, leadership, followership, teamwork, effective communication, and discovering the driving force behind our success. He questioned the audience. What was our purpose? What was the point of undertaking this work? What was our motivation? Lemzel holds that to succeed and be fulfilled, everyone needed to have a clear understanding of their purpose.

During the *"Employability Skills"* breakout session, Daniel Spencer discussed job readiness. The presentation was very interactive. Many of these skills are transferable and provide excellent learning opportunities for job seekers. During his presentation, Spencer emphasized the importance of leaving a positive, memorable first impression. He states, *"How you are perceived is how you will be treated."*

The breakout session *"Employment Success-Tips from the Workplace"* featured a panel of four self-advocates: Matthew, Adam, Westley, and Meredith. Everyone on the panel has been employed for over ten years. The self-advocates discussed how they resolved conflicts, remained flexible, and thrived at their jobs. Everyone on the panel acknowledged the importance of maintaining and retaining a job.

The conference was informative and engaging with numerous attendees. The conference provided valuable resources and tools. Many local organizations that work with individuals with disabilities participated in the conference, highlighting the work and assistance available in the community. For more information about AL-APSE, visit www.al-apse.org.



Congratulations!

Congratulations to Nicole Walden on her appointment as an Associate Commissioner of the Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, effective Oct 1.

Walden will transition to the position of Associate Commissioner of the Mental Health and Substance Use Division for ADMH. Walden has been a fundamental part of the Alabama Department of Mental Health's progress and growth since 2013.

Nicole Walden received her Bachelor of Science and Master's in Psychology with a clinical concentration from Jacksonville State University. She has worked in the direct care service field of substance use treatment and housing for 20 years.

She began work with the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH), as an Adult Treatment Services Coordinator, working closely with the opioid treatment programs and other providers of substance use services. Walden is currently the Director of Substance Abuse Treatment and Development for ADMH and has served in this role since 2017. As part of this role, she serves as the chair of the Substance Abuse Treatment and Recovery Support Committee on the Governor's Alabama Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council. Nicole also serves as the State Opioid Treatment Authority (SOTA) for the state.

Walden has been the project director for numerous grants, including ones from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, SAMHSA, and the USDA. She is responsible for the management of Alabama's Substance Abuse Treatment and Prevention Block Grant and serves as the subject matter expert for ADMH in substance use treatment.

Please join ADMH in welcoming Nicole Walden as the new Associate Commissioner of the Mental Health and Substance Use Division!

Shout out to Dr. Tammie McCurry, outgoing Associate Commissioner for the MHSA Division, on her recent Member Spotlight in the newsletter of the *National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors*! <https://buff.ly/3oXM8II>

Congrats to ADMH Director of the Office of Deaf Services Steve Hamerdinger, awarded the MHIT Lifetime Achievement Award! <https://buff.ly/3AdXoak>

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Walden



McCurry



Hamerdinger

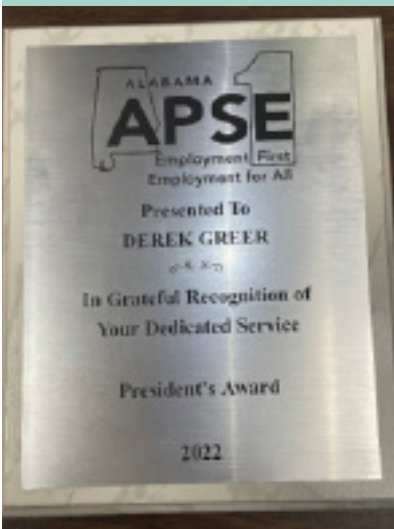
Congratulations to Mike Autrey, Director of the Office of Peer Services, awarded the NAMI Lifetime Achievement Award at the recent Awards Ceremony!

Congratulations to Amy Fisher, EI Specialist, Office of Infant and Early Childhood Special Programs, on her recent Endorsement as an Infant Family Associate!

Congratulations to our partner, John Hollingsworth of NAMI-Alabama recently awarded the Michael Woody/Michele Saunders Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Coordinator of the Year Award by CIT International! Hollingsworth became a pioneer for justice in Alabama when he launched the first CIT program in Huntsville, AL. Since then, he has expanded CIT broadly across the state! <https://buff.ly/3P0vi6n>

Congratulations to Derek Greer! Derek was awarded the President's Award at this year's AL-APSE conference. The President's Award is given at the discretion of the President of the organization to honor a recipient who he feels has gone above and beyond in the performance of their duties

Congrats to Devin Kennedy for celebrating FIVE years with the State!



Serve • Empower • Support