

Urging the African American community to

Say it out loud

by Lorrie Rickman Jones, Ph.D.

Good mental health is a core component of the overall health and wellbeing of every child and adult in our state. How we feel emotionally impacts how we feel physically, and vice versa.

We don't talk about mental health issues as often as we should, even though statistics tell us that mental illnesses affect one in five members of our community. In fact, studies have shown that mental health challenges like depression impact a wider range of our personal and work lives than it does for other groups. One study, published by the Archives of General Psychiatry in March 2007, concluded that depression is more disabling and persistent for African Americans than for non-Hispanic Whites.

Yet, while the success rate for treating depression can be as high as 80 percent, according to Mental Health America, only 45 percent of African Americans and less than 25 percent of Caribbean Blacks received treatment for symptoms of depression.

A few years ago, Ebony magazine did an eye-opening article, "The Mental Health Crisis in Black America", which included the following quote:

"One of the things we seem to find in African-American communities is that the spirit of self-reliance - which is good - is sometimes combined with a sense of shame about mental symptoms and a belief that you should be able to shake off these symptoms by yourself," said Dr. Steven Hyman, director of the National Institute of Mental Health. "That kind of thinking leads to people getting into treatment too late."

The reasons for why so many of us are reluctant to talk about mental health issues are many and complex. And while progress is being made, the mental health field and its practitioners are still finding better ways to become even more culturally aware and sensitive to the

unique needs of African American consumers.

Clearly, we need to address the stigma associated with mental illnesses in our community, helping people to see that mental health is a critical component of whole-self wellness for each and every one of us.

That's why we've launched an exciting campaign here in Illinois - Say it out loud - to promote good mental health for every child and adult in our state. Say it out loud is a multi-year statewide campaign that promotes good mental health for everyone, reduces the barriers that prevent too many people from seeking or offering help and supports, and builds a stronger base of support and network of services for people with mental health challenges. The campaign is jointly sponsored by the Illinois Department of Human Services, Mental Health Division and the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership.

The campaign urges each of us to:

- Talk with someone who seems stressed or down. Let them know you care.

- Ask for help from someone you trust if you think you or your child might need it.

- Speak with your child's doctor and teachers about how to encourage your child's social and emotional development.

- Encourage policy leaders to make children's and adult mental health a top priority.

Find out how you can promote good mental health in yourself or someone you care about by visiting www.mentalhealthillinois.org. And if you need a mental health referral or more information, you can call 1.866.359.7953 (or 1.866.880.4459 TTY).

Together, we can build an even stronger state by promoting good mental health for every child and adult in Illinois. And the best way to start is to Say it out loud.

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ONE CHURCH ONE SCHOOL COMMUNITY COLLABORATION CONFERENCE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2009, 1:30 PM
Northern Trust Bank Community Room
7841 South State Street
Chicago, Illinois

SUMMER 2009
ACCOMMODATION
SAFE
FUN
HEALTHY

*Together we can make sure our children have
a safe and wholesome summer.*

OCOS Founder, Bishop Henry M. Williamson, Sr. will host the conference and representatives from the Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Police Department, Chicago Department of Health and other organizations concerned with the welfare of our children will be in attendance.

For more information, please contact OCOS at
(773) 651-0071 or www.onechurchoneschool.org