

AFFINITY



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By: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee

For this issue, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee is foregoing the traditional personal or expository essay penned by an MBLB attorney for the AFFINITY newsletter to use this space for mental health awareness. October is depression and mental health awareness month. According to John Hopkins Medicine, one in four adults suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder each year. Mental health issues reach across races, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, sexual orientations, genders and professions. But, mental health struggles plague the legal profession at an alarming rate. It is well documented and well-established that professionals in the legal profession have mental health problems and substance abuse disorders at higher rates than those in other professions. A 2017 survey from the American Bar Association found that 28.0% of lawyers suffered from depression, 19.0% of lawyers had severe anxiety, and 11.4 % of lawyers had suicidal thoughts in the previous year, and mental health issues may affect those who do not appear to be struggling.

The DE&I Committee wants to direct readers of this publication to two essays drafted by New Orleans council member Joe Giarrusso. The DE&I Committee felt that these essays fit the style and mission of the AFFINITY publication, i.e., these writings provide a personal insight into a specific issue receiving heightened recognition. Councilman Giarrusso's essays are both deeply personal and relevant to raising awareness about depression, suicide, and mental health issues.

In the first essay from 2012, Mr. Giarrusso (then a local lawyer) told the story of his father's suicide and his own desire for greater education, discourse, and understanding surrounding mental health issues. In the second essay authored ten years later, Mr. Giarrusso reflected on how time impacted his feelings about his father's death, and he described his commitment to mental health issues in his capacity as a city council member. We would encourage reading these essays, and we provide hyperlinks to those stories via NOLA.com.

[Depression was hidden until it was too late: Joseph I. Giarrusso III](#)

[10 years after father's suicide, New Orleans council member Joe Giarrusso tells his story](#)

In addition, the DE&I Committee has compiled various mental substance abuse and mental health resources for reference.

Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program

In 1992, the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) formed the Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (LAP) an LSBA-owned 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation designed to provide confidential, life-saving assistance to the profession and its family members.



Over the years, LAP has expanded the scope of its services and is now the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (JLAP), a full-service and comprehensive mental health and wellness assistance program with full-time professional clinical staff members. JLAP provides direct and confidential assistance for all mental health issues that members of the legal profession may encounter. For more information, visit <http://louisianajlap.com>.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining



custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. This website contains resources for mental health issues unique to various affinity groups, such as BIPOC, LGBT+, disabled, and attempt survivors. For more information, visit <http://988lifeline.org>.



National Alliance on Mental Illness (“NAMI”) New Orleans

NAMI New Orleans offers hope, help, and healing to people with mental illness – and to those who share their lives – through family support, education and advocacy, and quality psychosocial services. Our work helps individuals live with dignity and independence within the community, enriching all of our lives.

Affiliated with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and NAMI Louisiana, NAMI New Orleans is our community’s leading organization helping people with mental illness and their families. In our four-parish service area Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines there are approximately 75,000 people whose lives are affected by mental illness. Our education, support services and advocacy efforts help families cope with the effects of mental illness and increase public understanding. For more information, visit <http://namineworleans.org>.