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Advancing Mental Health Awareness

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Mental health is essential to our overall health. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of mental health conditions was on the rise. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now indicate that mental health conditions for both adults and youths are more widespread than ever. It is critical to pause, reflect, and evaluate our views about mental health conditions and be mindful of our own mental health as well as the mental health of others.

For people living with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and other mental conditions, the associated stigma is often a barrier to improved mental health. Many are made to feel ashamed when encountering an emotional rough patch — as if feeling worried or sad is abnormal. Yet, it is not a choice or simply a lack of willpower, but rather a result of something not in their control, such as family history or trauma and abuse in their past. Until we destigmatize mental illness in our society, many will not seek the help needed to be on the road to recovery, which then delays the process of coping and healing.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, an annual reminder of the importance of overall well-being and the need to work together to elevate the conversation. It is an ideal time to focus on increasing understanding about mental illness to raise awareness and acceptance in our communities to support those who need access to resources and treatment.

The Fairfield County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health (ADAMH) Board seeks to promote healing, support recovery, and provide prevention and treatment services of mental health and addiction disorders within our community. As part of advancing an overall continuum of care, we seek a comprehensive approach. That is why it was so important that voters recognized a gap in mental health and substance use care in Fairfield County and passed a levy in 2019 to approve construction of the Starlight Center to address this critical need.

Once operational, the Starlight Center will fulfill a promise to our community to provide a safe, welcoming place where residents can receive immediate help from medical professionals

for mental health and substance abuse crises. Residents will be able to remain close to home while receiving quality care from this treatment facility that is the only one of its kind in Fairfield County. We are proud to hold the groundbreaking for the Fairfield County Starlight Center during Mental Health Awareness Month and look forward to the benefits it will bring for families throughout our community.

It is up to each one of us to ensure that those living with mental health conditions are treated with compassion, respect and understanding. No one needs to suffer alone. Help exists and, by working together, we can help those who need mental health support to heal, recover and thrive.

Marcy Fields is executive director of the Fairfield County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health (ADAMH) Board.