

Peer Support & Recovery in Behavioral Health



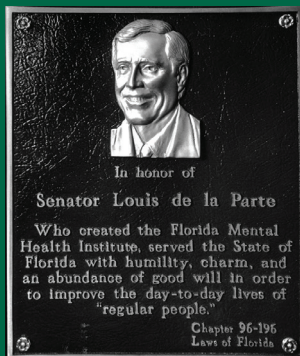
Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute **ANNUAL REPORT 2023**



UNIVERSITY of
SOUTH FLORIDA

College of Behavioral & Community Sciences





From the Dean



Julie Serovich, PhD,
Dean, College of Behavioral
& Community Sciences

As a Florida resident, it seems that storms are often on my mind: thunderstorms, afternoon rain showers, the occasional impending hurricane barreling toward our campuses. I have regular opportunities to examine how the complexities of a mental or behavioral health condition can be similar to weathering a relentless storm. But I'm also reminded of the "helpers" who appear before, during, and after a storm and how those trusted companions – whether a neighbor, friend, or first responder – are akin to a peer supporter in the realm of mental and behavioral health.

Peer support is a simple yet profound idea: individuals who have faced similar challenges come together to provide each other with empathy, understanding, and encouragement. Peer support, whether in the areas of mental health, addiction recovery, or various other challenges, adds value to behavioral health systems and serves as a testament to the strength of human connection.

What makes peer support so effective? First, it reduces the isolation that often accompanies personal difficulties. Knowing that someone else has experienced similar feelings or situations can be incredibly comforting. Second, it offers a sense of hope – if someone else has successfully navigated a similar journey, it suggests that recovery is possible. Finally, peer support fosters a sense of community and belonging, which can be vital for maintaining mental and emotional well-being.

One of the remarkable things about peer support is its ability to break down the barriers of stigma and shame that often surround these issues. We live in an era where the stigma around mental health and behavioral health is slowly diminishing. Don't misunderstand – stigma certainly still exists. But conversations that were once kept behind closed doors are now more often held in the open, and people are more willing than ever to seek help and share their experiences.

For peer support to reach its full potential, we must recognize its value and invest in its growth. This includes encouraging peer-led initiatives, continuing to support research, and providing resources to train peer support workers. I am proud of the work that the faculty and staff of the

Florida Mental Health Institute and the University of South Florida College of Behavioral and Community Sciences have done in this area. In the pages that follow, you will read about several faculty members who have dedicated their careers to addressing critical issues in this area of research. They have developed new labs, trained community members, and led projects and productions, and they share a mission of improving the lives of those suffering from behavioral and mental disorders.

Just as a storm eventually yields to the calm of a clear day, peer support, as part of an overall treatment plan, can guide individuals toward brighter moments of hope and recovery. I am grateful to witness and support the individuals who are leading the way. ■

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Message from the Executive Director

The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI) has been a driving force in improving behavioral health services for almost 50 years! In 2024, we will be celebrating our 50th anniversary and reflecting on FMHI's dedication to tackling complex issues involving mental health, substance use, co-occurring disorders, criminal justice, child welfare, and the well-being of older adults. Since joining forces with the University of South Florida (USF) College of Behavioral and Community Sciences (CBCS) in 2008, the interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and community-based agencies has been continuously strengthened by working together. In the 2022-2023 FMHI Annual Report, we will focus on our ever-emerging efforts in peer support and recovery, highlighting the wide array of research, training, and policy projects conducted over time in collaboration with community, state, and federal partners.

The content of this report will shine a spotlight on peer support and recovery, reporting on progress and accomplishments while reinforcing the need for continued research, evaluation, and training in this area. Peer support has existed in behavioral health for decades. Its rapid growth in recent years is for good reason. Research and experience show that peer support specialists have a transformative effect on both individuals and systems. Peer support has been shown to:

- Improve quality of life
- Improve engagement and satisfaction with services and supports
- Improve whole health, including chronic conditions
- Decrease hospitalizations and inpatient days
- Reduce overall cost of services

Peer support empowers people to make the best decisions for themselves and to strive toward their goals within their communities. Peers are an essential component of recovery-focused systems and are key across settings and stages of recovery. Health insurers, treatment centers, and others in the behavioral health arena increasingly rely on peers to serve in leadership roles to assist others in recovery. Peer specialists provide effective and cost-effective support because “they share common life experiences with those they assist” and promote a sense of community among those in recovery.

FMHI and our community partners are passionate about peer support because we can role model our own recovery and offer hope and a sense of belonging within the community to those seeking recovery for themselves. Through self-help and mutual support, peer support facilitates personal growth, wellness promotion, and recovery while honoring one's strengths, needs, and personal choices. Within this report, several CBCS faculty members who are committed to research aimed at reducing stigma and enhancing recovery and peer-supported services have been highlighted, along with a long-time FMHI affiliate:

- **Dr. Kristin Kosyluk** is an assistant professor in USF's Department of Mental Health Law and Policy and director of the STigma Action Research (STAR) Lab. Dr. Kosyluk has worked over the past decade to build an evidence base around storytelling and peer support as stigma change strategies.
- **Dr. Linda Callejas** is an associate research professor in USF's Department of Child and Family Studies. Her research and evaluation projects are focused on understanding the mechanisms that lead to behavioral health inequities and implementation of strategies to increase behavioral health equity.



Kathleen Moore, PhD,
Executive Director,
Louis de la Parte
Florida Mental Health Institute

Message from the Executive Director

- **Dr. Jerome Galea** is an associate professor in USF's School of Social Work. Dr. Galea co-founded a community-based mental health program in Peru and has been training community members (peers) to provide evidence-based mental health interventions.
- **Dr. Kerry Littlewood** is an assistant professor of instruction in USF's School of Social Work. Dr. Littlewood has two decades of expertise in designing and evaluating programs to support families headed by grandparents and relatives raising children.
- **John Mayo** is a licensed mental health counselor and retired deputy executive director of Success 4 Kids and Families who has been a peer support trainer and coach, assisting people with lived experience who want to give back and help others. Currently, John is working with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) on a program called Parents 4 Parents that utilizes parent peers to support other families navigating the child welfare system.

This report also highlights several USF and community organizations that promote peer support and recovery, such as the This Is My Brave: College Edition at USF, which held a spring 2023 performance of peers sharing stories about recovery. USF also hosts two student programs: (1) Peer Advisor Leaders which, as part of the New Student Connections team, helps new students transition to the university, and (2) TogetherAll, a free online platform for USF students to connect with peers about mental health and gain support. Within our community, we are fortunate to have numerous agencies that focus on peer support and recovery: Peer Support Coalition of Florida, Hillsborough Recovery Coalition, NAMI, Success 4 Kids and Families, and James A. Haley Veterans Mental Health Peer Support Program.

Each year, CBCS and FMHI hold an annual colloquium that provides a space for community leaders, providers, local citizens, and university faculty and students to convene and have a dialogue on pressing state and national issues. This year's colloquium is called Peer Support and Recovery in Behavioral Health. It will bring together subject matter experts to discuss the domains of peer support and recovery, integrating practice, policy, and research. The presentation will include:

- Keynote speaker Dr. Kristin Kosyluk, assistant professor, Department of Mental Health Law and Policy, USF, director of the Stigma Action Research (STAR) Lab, first vice president of NAMI Hillsborough
- Panel #1 – Peer support agency program directors with participating organizations: Hillsborough Recovery Coalition, James A. Haley Veterans Mental Health Peer Support Program, NAMI Parents for Parents Program Success 4 Kids & Families
- Panel #2 – Peer support specialists: peer support specialists from above-identified agency will discuss their experiences, roles, and current work as a peer support specialist with lived experience.

We hope you enjoy this annual report focusing on peer support and recovery and its examples of innovative leadership across our college and community. The peer support message of hope and strength reshapes the conversation around mental health. As we look to the future, the goal is universal adoption, recognition, and integration of the peer mental health workforce across all elements of the health care system. Throughout the history of FMHI, we have tried to reframe a problem into an opportunity; time remains a testament to the resilience of those serving and those being served in this field. Next year marks the 50th anniversary of FMHI and we look forward to recognizing all the work we have achieved over the years. Being the executive director of FMHI over the last five years has been an honor and privilege. We are very excited by all the new initiatives on the horizon, and we hope you, too, are inspired by the collaborative efforts of our community! ■

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Kristin Kosyluk

Dr. Kristin Kosyluk is an assistant professor in the Department of Mental Health Law and Policy at the University of South Florida (USF) and director of the STigma Action Research (STAR) Lab. She received her doctorate in rehabilitation counseling education before working at the University of Texas at El Paso and later USF. Since joining MHLPP, she has gone on to be the recipient of several awards, including the Outstanding Behavioral Health Researcher Award from Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute and the Dean's Outstanding Research Award.

Much of Dr. Kosyluk's work centers on reducing stigma, particularly for those living with mental health conditions. The sharing of stories of lived experience is an evidence-based strategy for stigma reduction, and so much of Dr. Kosyluk's work involves various forms of peer support. Her peer-centered work started in Texas, where she developed a relationship with a local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) affiliate agency to evaluate the NAMI Peer-to-Peer program. The NAMI Peer-to-Peer program is a free psychoeducation program led by peers with lived experience in mental health and substance use. Peers provide support to help others better understand recovery and build relationships, confidence in decision-making, coping skills, and more. As vice president of the board of NAMI of Hillsborough County, Dr. Kosyluk is now working to support the offering of the Peer-to-Peer program to Hillsborough County residents.

Since coming to USF, Dr. Kosyluk has led several other projects with a peer focus, including This Is My Brave (TIMB) and Up To Me. TIMB is a program that empowers people to share their stories of mental health and/or addiction, the challenges they've encountered, as well as their recovery journey and message of hope. "When you are vulnerable, you give other people permission to be vulnerable too," she says, adding that hearing and sharing stories is a form of peer support. TIMB is delivered by recruiting individuals from the community to share their stories on stage. A cast of eight to 10 storytellers support one another through the rehearsal process, on production day, and beyond. This spring, Dr. Kosyluk and the USF production team supported 10 USF students in sharing their stories of recovery at USF's Concert Hall. At this event, Dr. Kosyluk shared her own lived experiences with anxiety. Sharing allowed her to connect with the program, her students, and colleagues in a way she can only describe as being "profound."



Kristin Kosyluk, PhD
Assistant Professor,
USF Department of Mental
Health Law and Policy



Up2Me is funded by the National Institute for Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research. The program is a collaboration between the USF Counseling Center, USF's College of Behavioral and Community Sciences and College of Engineering, as well as Temple University and Illinois Institute of Technology. The program, co-facilitated by a USF student living with a mental health condition and a USF Counseling Center staff member, is designed to empower individuals to make the decision of whether or not to disclose their mental health conditions, resting on research that shows concealing a stigmatized identity has detrimental effects on well-being. Over several weeks, individuals participate in groups with peers to learn about the pros and cons of disclosing their condition, how to select whom to safely disclose to, and how to craft a narrative if they were to open up about their mental health. The goal of Up To Me is to reduce internalized stigma and the stress individuals feel as a result of stigma, as well as increase community inclusion and a sense of belonging.

In the future, Dr. Kosyluk would like to broaden the reach of peer support through the use of technology, such as chatbots. She collaborates with Dr. Jerome Galea in USF's School of Social Work in her chatbot research. She is also interested in adapting TIMB for a family focus that would facilitate conversations early and often within families about mental health and addiction to reduce the stigma felt by parents and caregivers around seeking treatment for children experiencing mental health challenges. Lastly, she is collaborating with Dr. Kathleen Moore to explore outcomes around Alcoholics Anonymous and other forms of peer support within substance use, given preliminary evidence that peer support contributes significantly to long-lasting recovery and well-being. ■



Linda Callejas, PhD
Associate Research Professor,
USF Department of Child and
Family Studies

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Linda Callejas

Dr. Linda Callejas received her Master of Arts in comparative sociology at Florida International University and later, her doctorate in applied anthropology at the University of South Florida, where she is now an associate research professor in the Department of Child and Family Studies. Her research focuses on reducing inequities in behavioral health, including increasing access to care and improving cultural competency. Part of this work has examined the effects of peer support for parents with child welfare involvement. "This is a very new area of peer support. For instance, where the state certifies peer specialists, they do so primarily in mental health, substance use, veterans [services]," she says.

Dr. Callejas has previously trained community health workers, natural helpers, and peer specialists to deliver in-home services and provide support for children and families through a variety of programs and for local agencies such as Success for Kids and Families. She participated in the development of the first training manual recommended by the state for peer specialist certification and has conducted a training for providers interested in the promotoras de salud model through the Children's Board of Hillsborough County. Her most recent project in the Miami-Dade County child welfare system emerged from a previous project that used peer specialists to support families completing in-home family preservation services. In that study, Dr. Callejas found that peers were able to provide parents with additional needed support related to finding housing, employment, and other resources in a manner unmatched by traditional services.

Over the last several years, Dr. Callejas has been spearheading the Parent Partners for Families of Miami Dade Evaluation, funded by the Administration for Children and Families. This project provides parents whose children were removed from the home and placed in foster care with peer support in addition to general case management, with hopes of improved engagement in services, including substance



Dr. Callejas found that peers were able to provide parents with additional needed support related to finding housing, employment, and other resources in a manner unmatched by traditional services.

use and mental health treatment, to improve reunification outcomes. Preliminary analyses reveal reductions in depressive symptoms and increased engagement in services after working with a parent partner. “Parents themselves feel they need that extra support,” Dr. Callejas says, noting that about 50% of parents assigned to the study’s control group still opted for a peer. She says that this is an interesting finding given that parents wait four months to complete their time in the control study condition.

Parent partners share a personal understanding of child welfare involvement, including child removal, and provide mentorship and guidance through periods of uncertainty that case managers many times cannot. Because of this shared experience, they may be willing to trust a parent partner with their experiences and frustrations arising from their interactions with the child welfare system. For example, following the Covid shutdowns in 2020, the Parent Partners for Families project established peer lead support groups for mothers who had experienced the removal of a child to foster care. Evaluation of the support group showed a small group of mothers participating weekly for a period of 32 weeks. Dr. Callejas underscores the importance of this finding “for people who are often characterized as non-compliant and not wanting to participate [in services].” Some of her more recent work showcasing how parent peers can help parents secure material resources and maintain connections with their children in foster care despite Covid shutdowns and other restrictions was published in *Human Organization*, the journal for the Society for Applied Anthropology, in 2020.

By building evidence for the integration of peers within the child welfare area and beyond, Dr. Callejas has drawn national interest from policy makers and funders. She believes that peer support workers fill a vital role in meeting the needs of many communities. In the future, she hopes to continue her work in Miami-Dade County and lead discussions with key stakeholders to better understand how Covid affected child welfare services (e.g., judges, case management agencies). In addition, she intends to disseminate her findings related to Parent Partners and will make use of ethnographic methods to examine the effects of Covid on Miami-Dade’s child welfare system as part of an upcoming book. Through this project, she hopes to support social workers and others working within the child welfare system to better understand family needs on their terms. ■



Jerome Galea, PhD, LCSW
Associate Professor,
USF School of Social Work

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Jerome Galea

Dr. Jerome Galea is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at the University of South Florida (USF). He received his Master of Social Work before receiving his doctorate in HIV prevention science. In addition to being a licensed mental health clinician and his appointment at USF, he is a lecturer on global health and social medicine at Harvard Medical School and, more recently, a health and policy advisor for the nonprofit organization Partners in Health. For the last 20 years, Dr. Galea has been conducting work in Lima, Peru, to improve global mental health and equip laypeople with the skills to deliver mental health interventions.

Dr. Galea recognizes that the burden of mental health problems worldwide far exceeds our ability to treat the problems when relying only on trained professionals to deliver specialized services. “A very small proportion get care, so what the field of global mental health does is to try to find strategies that meet that demand, and one way is by training peers to deliver mental health care,” he says. In his pursuit to close the gap between those who need services and those who receive services, Dr. Galea co-founded a community-based mental health program in Peru and has been training community members (peers) to provide evidence-based mental health interventions. One example of his work is carrying out the World Health Organization’s Thinking Healthy Program, which trains community health workers to screen and treat perinatal depression. Programs that target community health such as this, he says, promote early intervention and help prevent the escalation of conditions into more severe cases.

A challenge that Dr. Galea has been working to successfully navigate is stigma. When asked how stigma affects his work, he explained that education is a large part of training. “We look at using language, which has the cultural context. This is really about feeling yourself, having well-being, not just the absence of a disease state but...boosting and sustaining the quality of life.” As a co-investigator for the Spanish version of the Do More, Feel Better program (Principal Investigator, Dr. Amber Gum), he and his team train aging adults to act as peer coaches to work with other aging adults. The peer coaches do not have a background in mental health care but are trained to listen non-judgmentally, provide psychoeducation on depression, and help their peers increase activities in their lives that are important and pleasurable. In all of Dr. Galea’s work, emphasis is placed on framing services in such a way that creates a culture of care and understanding and allows stigma to be reduced.

Currently, Dr. Galea is working with Dr. Kristin Kosyluk on several projects that harness chatbot technology to increase access to mental health services. In one, the chatbot (called TABATHA) screens first responders for distress, delivers depression education, and provides self-help skills and linkage to appropriate care. This project aims to better educate people on psychological first aid and help facilitate access to care while reducing related stigma. He is hopeful that using a chatbot will reach individuals who might not want to talk with another person but would otherwise benefit from such services. Other projects of Dr. Galea’s include testing whether social marketing can be used as a public health strategy to reduce HIV-related stigma, identifying barriers to accessing tuberculosis care, and developing interventions to address these barriers. In the future, Dr. Galea aims to develop a certification process for training peers and continue his trajectory of meeting communities where they are to better serve their mental and physical health needs. ■

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Kerry Littlewood

Dr. Kerry Littlewood is an assistant professor in the University of South Florida (USF) School of Social Work. She received her doctorate in social work from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and served as the assistant director of the School of Social Work and the graduate social work program at East Carolina University before coming to USF in 2015. Her research focuses on program evaluation and community-based research that aims to better support underserved and marginalized communities.

Dr. Littlewood was exposed to work in peer support during her first job working to launch the kinship warm line. This experience gave her a better perspective of the needs of caregivers with a macrofocus on community needs, she says. Since then, she has sought to incorporate a peer component in much of her work. For example, she conducted a clinical trial using community health workers with Type 2 diabetes who lived in rural settings to connect other women with Type 2 diabetes to resources. More recently, Dr. Littlewood has been working to get the Kinship Navigator Program, which utilizes a peer model wherein peers provide information, referrals, and resources to caretakers and families with children at risk or in foster care, rated as supported by research in a new federal evidence-based clearinghouse. In gaining approval as a supported program, eligible jurisdictions would be reimbursed for the program and receive more resources for families.

Across projects, Dr. Littlewood has found that peers greatly benefit from additional support and systems that cater to their strengths. In addition, she highlighted the importance of maintaining a culturally responsive approach to evaluating the needs of systems that support peer workers and ensure that existing infrastructure supports them in a way that is authentic and allows them to use their strengths. As such, she continues to disseminate findings of recent work that recommend how to design a warmer culture and climate for hiring paid peer workers and developing mechanisms within system infrastructure to better serve and support them. Dr. Littlewood says that implementing training for supervisors of peers or developing triage systems to help peers manage fewer complex clinical cases and more cases focused on connecting families to resources are needed.

When asked what she'd learned or do differently as it relates to peer support, Dr. Littlewood spoke about the importance of dissemination of research. She explained that a very effective way to get information out is to use the peer system and feedback loops within organizations and communities to quickly relay and translate information. She hopes to see work aimed at evaluating how informal communication and relationships can be better supported without connections to organizations or systems. That is, what are peers doing on their own and aside from formal systems that sustain effective work? In the future, she aims to continue disentangling different types of models that use a peer-to-peer approach to better evaluate which model is the appropriate one in different situations and when working with underserved populations. ■



Kerry Littlewood, PhD, MSW
Assistant Professor of
Instruction,
USF School of Social Work





John Mayo
Retired Deputy Executive
Director, Success 4 Kids and
Families

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

John Mayo

John Mayo is a licensed mental health counselor and retired deputy executive director of Success 4 Kids and Families (S4KF). John has long been recognized as a peer support trainer and coach, assisting people with lived experience who want to give back and help others. He focuses on motivational interviewing and other skills to help peers build supportive relationships with the people they serve.

John's career in peer support training began in 2008 when he helped co-write the first family-oriented certified recovery peer specialist curriculum for the state of Florida, which emphasized the system of care and wraparound principles. When asked what peers provide, he described peers as instrumental in helping people through their recovery process with substance use and behavioral health issues, developing natural supports, and accessing and navigating formal support systems. A significant benefit of peers, he says, is that they have a different dynamic without any hierarchy, for example, between a parent and their case manager. Instead, "peers act as a knowledgeable support who has been through a similar experience who will advocate for you... and maximize the positives through taking a strength-based approach," John says. He further explained that "lived experience is actually the central point of the relationship" and that peers provide hope.

After being affiliated with Youth MOVE, an organization formed by youth wanting their own voice and choice related to accessing services for behavioral health, child welfare, and juvenile justice, S4KF received a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant and started the Healthy Transitions program in 2015, which included a Youth MOVE chapter. The Healthy Transitions program serves youth and young adults with mental health issues; peers facilitate group and individual sessions to help young adults struggling with substance use and mental health symptoms. This program has since continued to use this peer model and is still supported by Success 4 Kids and Families.

Currently, John is working with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in Sarasota and Manatee counties on a program called Parents 4 Parents (P4P). It utilizes parent peers to support other parents navigating the child welfare system. P4P peers are individuals with lived experience who have successfully overcome challenges and have been reunified with their children. John's role has been to train and coach the parent peers in how to most effectively connect and support other parents working to complete a court-ordered case plan for reunification with their children. John provides the parent peers with motivational interviewing skills, techniques on motivation and relationship building, and ways to create healthy boundaries while also being supportive. The program has worked with 85 parents involved in the child welfare system. It shows promising support for utilizing parent peers as a tool towards successful reunification and long-term permanency for children.

When asked what was next for him, John said he hoped to continue with his current work with P4P. He also hopes to eventually pursue work measuring the fidelity of delivering peer services. In terms of expansion, he'd like to see P4P expand and to assist NAMI Hillsborough to offer a similar style of peer support as the NAMI chapter in Sarasota Manatee. ■

Community Connections



Peer Support Coalition of Florida

The Peer Support Coalition of Florida (PSCF) is a statewide network that provides education and training, professional development, and technical assistance to recovery providers and government agencies to broaden the reach of recovery networks. Since its inception in 2012, PSCF has certified thousands of peer specialists and built over ten local and regional peer support networks. Over the last few years, the organization developed the Peer Leadership Academy of Florida. It partnered with the Department of Children and Families to provide training and system development to individuals with substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders. The PSCF was most recently awarded the National Consumer and Consumer Supporter National Technical Assistance Center grant, allowing the organization to build the Peer Experience National Technical Assistance Center program and support its goal to expand. ■

More Information

 <https://www.peersupportfl.org/>



Hillsborough Recovery Coalition

The Hillsborough Recovery Coalition (HRC) is committed to serving individuals and families in their fight to obtain, maintain, and sustain recovery regardless of their pathway while ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect. HRC supports people in long-term recovery, their families, friends, and allies, including recovery-focused addiction and recovery professionals, which also includes organizations whose members reflect religious, spiritual, and secular pathways of recovery. HRC assists individuals and their families to obtain, maintain, and sustain a path to recovery that works for them. They provide non-clinical services to individuals and families in recovery, such as telephone recovery support, recovery coaching for individuals and families, and peer-to-peer support. HRC educates the public about the science of addiction and the process of prevention and recovery through public awareness events by assisting individuals to find new outlets in recovery through community-oriented recreation. The services delivered by HRC support the mission by providing a safe space where individuals in recovery can find wellness and recovery support, as well as mobilize resources within and outside the recovery community to increase prevalence and quality of long-term recovery from substance use addiction. ■

More Information

 www.hillsrecoveryco.org



National Alliance on Mental Illness

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is a peer-led organization that supports, advocates, and educates individuals and families going through mental health challenges and related struggles. They offer education, support, and advocacy to individuals impacted by mental health challenges, including programs for individuals, youth, and families. All NAMI programs are led by people with that specific lived experience who can share the hope of recovery. NAMI supports numerous peer support programs such as NAMI Peer-to-Peer, a free, eight-session educational program for adults with mental health conditions who want to understand themselves and their recovery better. Sessions are led by peers with lived experience and aim to connect individuals with healthcare providers and help them learn about treatment options, set goals, strengthen relationships, and more. This interactive program promotes opportunities for growth and a safe space to build connections. Family navigation offers one-on-one family peer support and helps navigate parents/caregivers with a child under the age of 25 experiencing mental health challenges. In this program, parents/caregivers are offered support from a family navigator, a parent with lived experience who has been through something similar with their child and can share support, information, and education with the parents. Additionally, NAMI offers education, support, and advocacy groups. ■

More Information

 <https://nami.org/>

Community Connections



Success 4 Kids and Families

Success 4 Kids & Families (S4KF) was founded in 2005 to create a supportive environment to help individuals and families who need a helping hand reach personal success. They provide an array of services to individuals and families struggling with mental health and behavioral challenges, as well as pre- and post-natal support services to new and expectant mothers in Hillsborough County. They are a unique non-profit 501(c)(3) providing services in the home or community settings. To accommodate those in our community seeking help, their staff works flexible hours to account for all client schedules. S4KF provides quality care coordination through innovative mental wellness and educational services to strengthen and empower individuals and families. In addition to their direct service programs, S4KF provides training and consultation to local, state, and national organizations on a fee-for-service basis. A community is free of stigma where individuals and families have the support they need to live fully engaged and successful lives. ■

More Information


 <https://www.s4kf.org>



NAMI Sarasota & Manatee Counties — Parent 4 Parent Program

Hosted by NAMI and funded by the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, the Parents for Parents (P4P) program provides parents involved in the child welfare system with peer mentorship during and after a dependency case. Parents are paired with a partner who will help them advocate for themselves, become connected with community resources, and build resiliency in recovery. P4P offers additional weekly parenting support groups to educate parents on what to expect during the dependency case process. The peers at P4P pride themselves on meeting parents where they are and providing hope during the reunification process. ■

More Information

 <https://www.namisarasotamanatee.org/support-and-education/support-groups/parents-for-parents/>




U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The James A. Haley VA Mental Health Peer Support Program

The James A. Haley VA Mental Health Peer Support Program started in 2010 as a grassroots volunteer program. They've since built a talented cadre of full-time peer specialists who are valued members of treatment teams across the healthcare system. Their goals have remained steady, to offer the highest quality peer support services to veterans in mental health and/or substance use disorder recovery and, along with the Veterans Health Administration, stand up a new and necessary profession. The James A. Haley VA continues to better understand what is unique about peer support services and how much they add to an interdisciplinary mental health team and change the lives of veterans in recovery every day.

The James A. Haley VA Mental Health Peer Support Program team are committed to presenting the peer specialist profession as one that, like any other mental health professions, seeks and implements recovery-oriented, evidence-based interventions. A review of the research literature on peer support outcomes, combined with their experiences, has helped them recognize the importance of feeling empowered, having a sense of meaning, and how active engagement in their care can improve a veteran's physical and mental health and keep them on the path of recovery. They believe that this holistic approach, in concert with other aspects of recovery, are protective factors against suicide. Within their system, they continue to look for ways to expand their reach and cherish the opportunity to connect and help a veteran in the community. One way they have seen this happen is via veterans coffee socials. Their focus, among many others, is to address the national epidemic of loneliness and isolation by offering a veteran-to-veteran opportunity to connect in a non-clinical setting, such as a coffee shop. One thing they like most about the veterans coffee socials is that the only requirement to attend is being a veteran, and those who come take care of the rest, just like when they served. ■

More Information

 <https://www.va.gov/tampa-health-care/health-services/mental-health-care/>

Campus Programs & Centers

STigma Action Research (STAR) Lab

The mission of the STigma Action Research (STAR) Lab is to conduct community-engaged research in the area of stigma reduction, with a special emphasis on the stigma surrounding behavioral health conditions, which produces findings and identifies actions leading to real-world impact. The STAR Lab is directed by Dr. Kristin Kosyluk, assistant professor in the Department of Mental Health Law and Policy at the University of South Florida (USF). The lab's research focuses on promoting recovery among people with mental illness, with an emphasis on understanding and addressing stigma as a barrier to recovery. The STAR lab is currently conducting research on the following projects:



Stigma Action Research Lab

- **TABITHA chatbot:** Dr. Kristin Kosyluk and Dr. Jerome Galea, associate professor in USF's School of Social Work, were awarded a grant in 2020 from the USF Pandemic Research Response Network to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on COVID first responders (emergency personnel, doctors, nurses, and other front liners). Drs. Kosyluk and Galea aimed to develop chatbot technology to screen and refer COVID first responders to existing, appropriate mental health services that match their needs and preferences. Three iterative rounds of modifications were implemented to the chatbot between September 2020 and September 2021, incorporating feedback from first responders and other community stakeholders (people living with mental health conditions, providers, managing entities, and mental health advocates). The current version of TABATHA aims to map existing mental health services best suited for first responders by creating a prototype and pilot test for feasibility and acceptability.
- **NAMI Peer-to-Peer:** This research, funded by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, examines the impact of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Peer-to-Peer program on recovery-oriented outcomes among individuals with serious mental illness in a US-Mexico border region. This was the first randomized control trial of the NAMI Peer-to-Peer program and one of few studies to date to examine the impact of peer support with a predominantly Hispanic/Latino sample.
- **Cope Notes:** Cope Notes uses daily text messages to train the brain to think healthier thoughts. Combining peer support, digital journaling, and positive psychology, each text interrupts negative thought patterns with an exercise, a psychological fact, or another catalyst for positive growth. Cope Notes' unique application of ecological momentary intervention delivers preventative support at opportune moments, in real-world settings, to individuals living with or without diagnoses, acute symptoms, smartphones, data plans, or broadband internet access. The STAR Lab conducted a preliminary effectiveness trial of the Cope Notes program, documenting the impact of Cope Notes on symptoms, perceived stress, emotional intelligence, and coping. This project was a collaboration with Cope Notes founder and chief executive officer Johnny Crowder, a suicide/abuse survivor and certified recovery peer specialist. ■



Johnny Crowder,
Cope Notes Founder

Campus Programs & Centers

Peer Advisor Leaders (PAL)

The mission of New Student Connections (NSC) is to cultivate community, foster a sense of belonging, and provide individualized support so each person feels cared for and that they matter, see possibilities and hope, and access knowledge and resources at USF. They have an empowered, well-trained, caring staff and student leaders who invest their time and energy to support USF students and families.

Peer advisement and coaching connect students to NSC's student leaders to help them develop strategies for academic success and a successful transition into college life, as well as show students how to get involved and connected. Part of the NSC team, Peer Advisor Leaders (PALs) help new students transition to the university. PALs provide outreach to hundreds of students to help connect them to resources and build relationships. Individualized peer-to-peer coaching is available to give students more support academically, personally, financially, and more as they transition into USF. ■



Togetherall

Togetherall is a free online platform for USF students to connect with peers about mental health and gain support. The platform is anonymous and is moderated by professionals 24/7. Togetherall allows students to share their stories, start broader discussions, and enroll in courses on managing mental health, improving sleep, and problem-solving. In addition, the platform has features such as journaling, goal trackers, and self-assessments for mental health. Whether you're struggling to cope, feeling low, or just need a place to talk, Togetherall can help students explore their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. USF students can use their USF-assigned emails to sign up. Within the Togetherall platform, members are anonymous, so no one will know you're using it unless you tell them. ■





Training for Peer Specialists Working in Homeless and Veterans Justice Programs

The Department of Veteran Affairs collaborates with USF and the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans to lead a 20-hour online training curriculum for peer specialists working in homeless-related and veterans justice programs. This curriculum was developed to provide peers with a foundation of knowledge related to issues that veterans commonly face, most notably homelessness, substance use, mental health, and more. Dr. Scott Young, research associate professor in the USF Department of Mental Health Law and Policy, played an instrumental role in designing the program used in veteran and non-veteran systems. Since its launch over ten years ago, Dr. Young and his collaborators have continued to update the program to align with community needs related to issues such as the opioid crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and advances in promoting diversity and equity. ■



Scott Young, PhD,
Research Associate Professor
USF Department of Mental
Health Law and Policy

Events & Happenings at FMHI

SRI@FMHI

The Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI) is dedicated to research and education related to substance use and mental health co-occurring disorders. FMHI invites undergraduate students to apply for a highly selective Summer Research Institute (SRI) funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). SRI@FMHI is designed for undergraduate students interested in building their research skills within the context of substance use, co-occurring disorders, and criminal justice to help them prepare for a senior thesis and/or graduate school.

In early August, SRI@FMHI Scholar Research Day 2023 showcased and celebrated the work of this year's cohort of undergraduate researchers. Scholar Research Day marked the end of 11 weeks of intense in-person instruction in which each scholar was matched with a faculty mentor with whom to conduct a research study. Students also participated in various activities, including community field experiences, research seminars, and a skill workshop series coordinated by the institute's core faculty, Dr. Kathleen Moore, Dr. Khary Rigg, supportive administrative staff, and USF graduate students.

Over the past 15 years of federal funding, the SRI program has been highly successful, as evidenced by the accomplishments of our "alumni," including:

- 75% of scholars are currently enrolled in or have recently completed, advanced graduate degrees, and an additional 10% are currently submitting applications to graduate school
- Scholars published 273 articles in peer-reviewed journals
- Scholars presented their research at 602 state, regional, and national professional conferences
- 147 scholars received scholarships and awards, including several fellowships, and two scholars received Fulbright Awards
- Career paths include clinical psychologists, university professors, counselors, licensed clinical social workers, licensed mental health counselors, research analysts, and clinical research coordinators ■



Substance Use Data Subcommittee Meeting

As required by 394.9086, F.S., the Commission on Mental Health and Substance Use was established in 2021 by the Florida Legislature to examine the current methods of providing mental health and substance use services in the state. The commission also works to improve the effectiveness of current practices, procedures, programs, and initiatives in providing such services, identify any barriers or deficiencies in the delivery of such services, and recommend changes to existing laws, rules, and policies necessary to implement the group's recommendations. Recently, proposed legislation extended the commission's sunset date to September 2026.

The Commission on Mental Health and Substance Use appointed Dr. Kathleen Moore (executive director of the Florida Mental Health Institute, research professor in the University of South Florida Department of Mental Health Law and Policy, and fellow commissioner) as chairperson of the Data Analysis Subcommittee. This subcommittee was charged with the task of focusing on methods to improve and enhance data collection and reporting and devised strategies for alignment and storage. They have engaged all state agencies and entities that deliver behavioral health services and perform data collection.

The Data Analysis Subcommittee proposed various recommendations in their interim report, including the planning and development of a statewide behavioral health data repository. A planning session took place on Sept. 13, at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Fla., to discuss the planning, development, and implementation of a statewide behavioral health data repository. Subject matter experts and key stakeholders with experience with data system integration and developing this type of statewide initiative were invited.

Public comment was also held at the end of the planning session, allowing community members to share their opinions and thank the commission for their continued efforts focused on improving the behavioral health system. The Data Analysis Subcommittee plans to document their discussion and decisions in the Commission on Mental Health and Substance Use – Second Interim Legislative Report.

Subject Matter Experts included the following:



Dr. Cassandra Dorius

Assistant Professor, Iowa State University; Co-director of Iowa's Integrated Data System for Decision-Making (I2D2).



Dr. Jessie Tenenbaum

Associate Professor, Duke University School of Medicine; Chief data officer, Department of Health and Human Services.



Mark Hunowiecki, JD

Leads the Camden Coalition's National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs Initiative.



Dr. Sue Gallagher

Chief Innovation Officer, Children's Services Council of Broward County.



Dr. Paul Stiles, JD

Associate Professor & Associate Chair, Department of Mental Health Law and Policy, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida.




Dr. Heather Flynn

Professor and Chair, Department of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine, Florida State University.

Events & Happenings at FMHI

FMHI 2023 Annual Fall Colloquium

This year's annual fall colloquium will focus on Peer Support and Recovery in Behavioral Health. The event will bring together subject matter experts to discuss the domains of peer support and recovery, integrating practice, policy, and research. This year's keynote speaker will be Dr. Kristin Kosyluk, an assistant professor in the Department of Mental Health Law and Policy, director of the Stigma Action Research (STAR) Lab, and first vice president of National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Hillsborough. In addition, two-panel discussions with peer support agency directors and peer support specialists will be moderated by Wes Evans, a national certified peer specialist and statewide coordinator of integration and recovery services for the Florida Department of Children and Families. Participating agencies include Celebrate Recovery, James A. Haley Veterans Mental Health Peer Support Program, NAMI, Parents for Parents (P4P) Program, and Success 4 Kids & Families. Following the event discussion, a Q&A session will be led by University of South Florida (USF) faculty and community partners. The event will take place at the USF Marshall Center on Oct. 20 at 9:30 a.m. ■



Save the Date

Peer Support and Recovery in Behavioral Health

Friday, October 20, 2023

9:30 AM — 12:00 PM

About this Year's Colloquium

This year's annual Fall colloquium will bring together subject matter experts to discuss the domains of peer support and recovery, integrating practice, policy, and research. There will be individual speakers, panel discussions, and community partner information tables.

Join Us on the USF Campus

USF Marshall Student Center — MSC 2709
4103 USF Cedar Circle
Tampa FL 33620

For More Information

Contact Melissa Carlson at mbarongi@usf.edu

Register Today!

To register or reserve an information table, visit <https://bit.ly/FMHlpeersupport>

Featured Presentations

Keynote Speaker

Kristin Kosyluk, PhD Assistant Professor, Department of Mental Health Law & Policy, University of South Florida, Director of the Stigma Action Research (STAR) Lab, First Vice President of NAMI Hillsborough


Discussion Panel #1 — Peer Support Agency Program Directors

Participating Organizations: Hillsborough Recovery Coalition, James A. Haley VA Mental Health Peer Support Program, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Parents for Parents Program, and Success 4 Kids & Families

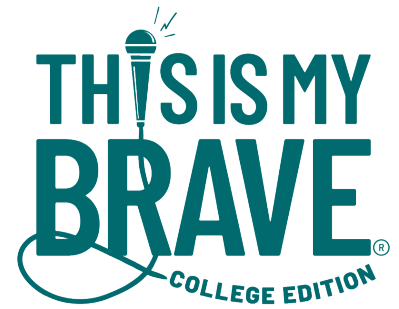
Discussion Panel #2 — Peer Support Specialists

Peer support specialists from each above-identified agency will discuss their experiences, role, and current work as a peer support specialist with lived experience.

Q&A

 **UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA**
College of Behavioral & Community Sciences

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Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute



This Is My Brave

This Is My Brave (TIMB) is a nonprofit organization that created the framework for a storytelling experience that first debuted in 2014. The organization’s mission is to combat stigma by sharing personal stories of individuals overcoming mental illness through poetry, essays, and original music, live on stage with the simple goal of saving lives through storytelling. The message and impact of TIMB has since grown across the United States and internationally.

TIMB approached Dr. Kristin Kosyluk, assistant professor in the University of South Florida (USF) Department of Mental Health, Law and Policy, and the USF STigma Action Research (STAR) Lab in 2016 about evaluating the effectiveness of their stigma reduction programming. The research collected so far shows that audience members experience a significant reduction in stigma and improved attitudes toward treatment seeking. For cast members, there’s an increased sense of empowerment, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism. According to the organization, the vision behind the productions is to “one day, live in a world where we don’t have to call it ‘brave’ to talk openly about mental illness. We’ll simply call it talking.”

In 2022, Dr. Kosyluk brought the college edition of TIMB to USF for the first time and in April 2023, the Florida Mental Health Institute co-sponsored the second annual empowering event of This Is My Brave: College Edition at USF. The cast used the power of storytelling to break down the stigma surrounding mental illness, normalize conversations about mental health, and offer hope within the USF community. After auditioning and months of preparation, USF students Kaylee Davis, Ella Dolce, Karla Evangelista De La Rosa, Enrique Luis A. Hartmann, Shawna Miller, Jaden Patel, Joseth Rivera, Bianca Romano, Emma Sadler, and Merita Thomas shared their stories in the production. The production was also supported by many CBCS faculty, staff, and students who served on the production team, including Amanda Clark, Kameron Talley, Patty Harrison, Molly Urnek, Ciara Spivey, Michelle Wilks, Precious Goodson, Fanni Green, Kathleen Moore, and Melissa Carlson.

In addition, Dr. Margaret McGladrey, former assistant professor in USF’s Department of Mental Health Law and Policy, brought a Photovoice project called Brave Takes to the lobby of the show. Photovoice is a participatory action research method that engages community members to photograph areas of strength and concern related to a health issue and then critically analyze in focus-group discussion how and why the health concern persists in their community. The goal of this project is co-identifying opportunities for change and health improvement. For the Brave Takes project in conjunction with This Is My Brave: College Edition at USF, the Photovoice method was applied to bring stories of mental illness and addiction into focus and to the attention of our campus community. The mission of Brave Takes was to empower USF students, faculty, and staff to share their personal stories of recovery and visions for change while controlling their level of disclosure of their identity in public. ■

This Is My Brave



An Interview with TIMB Exective Director **Erin Gallagher**

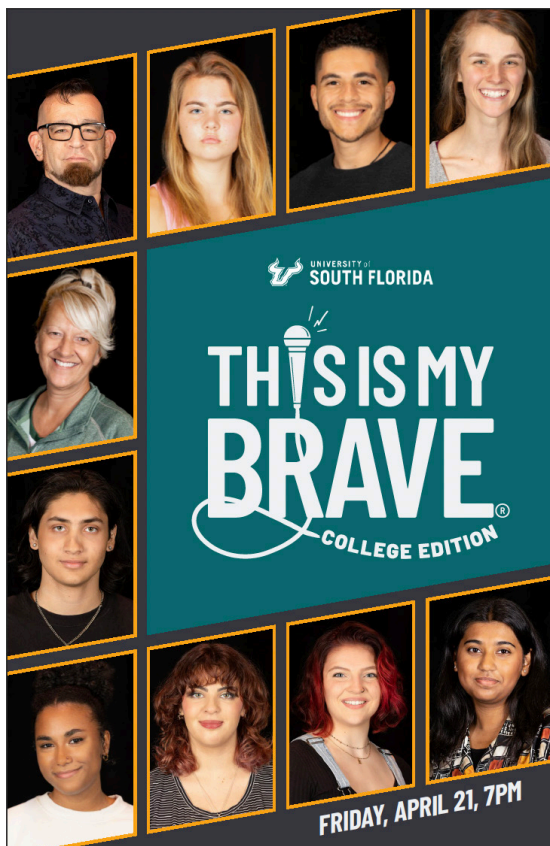
Erin Gallagher serves as the executive director of This Is My Brave, a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering people to talk openly about their mental health and recovery. Erin first became involved with TIMB after tragically losing her son to suicide in 2016. Since then, she's become a passionate mental health advocate, leading her to join TIMB.

TIMB aims to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and substance use through storytelling. Productions are staged across the country that provide individuals with a platform to share their experiences and messages of hope while empowering others to do the same. Since 2014, TIMB has produced over 90 shows nationwide with the help of more than 1,000 storytellers. "Storytelling saves lives," Erin says. TIMB allows individuals to take back their power, and their acts of braveness and courage are what make a difference.

When asked what we can do to fight stigma further, Erin replied that language around mental health and substance use must be normalized, neutral, and more frequently discussed. Like physical health issues, anyone can develop a mental health or substance use issue—they do not discriminate. Erin also shared how grateful she is to storytellers who have been able to resist stigma, overcome discomfort, and be brave. Since collaborating in 2016 with Dr. Kristin Kosyluk, an assistant professor in the University of South Florida Department of Mental Health Law and Policy, TIMB has become an evidence-based intervention for stigma reduction in audience members. Erin describes Dr. Kosyluk as being instrumental in helping secure funding, identifying the components of TIMB that make it effective, and articulating the capabilities of TIMB as an intervention.

Erin envisions TIMB to scale up in years to come by bringing the production to more cities each year and expanding its scope. For example, TIMB has started producing shows tailored to specific populations, such as the hard-of-hearing, high school students, and college students. This August, they launched an initiative to declare the month of August to be Teen Mental Health Month. The organization aims to give teens a platform to come together, share their stories, and advocate for holding these discussions early on. Above and beyond productions, TIMB hosts virtual 5ks such as Brave the Storm, among other initiatives aimed to raise funding and share their message of hope through social media. More recently, Erin launched the Jay Walkers Challenge in honor of her son, Jay, where individuals team up with the goal of walking 800,000 steps in the month of September, representing every life lost from suicide around the world. Erin's goal is to promote conversations about suicide, which is one of the most powerful ways to prevent it.

Erin is excited to continue her work with TIMB and develop new partnerships as they expand. Ultimately, she'd like to see TIMB become an evidence-based intervention for stigma reduction in storytellers. She looks forward to continuing her relationship with Dr. Kosyluk and her team to conquer stigma. ■



Interview with 2023 TIMB Cast Member Emma Sadler

Emma Sadler is a senior at the University of South Florida (USF) where she is studying psychology and forensic behavioral health. She is extremely passionate about the field of psychology and mental health services and she hopes to attend a graduate program to further her education in the field. Emma first learned about This Is My Brave: College Edition at USF during a class with Dr. Kristin Kosyluk, showrunner and assistant professor in the USF Department of Mental Health Law and Policy, and felt immediately empowered to audition.

She explained that she had written a story for therapy. “I’ve come a long way to where that story still meant so much to me, but it wasn’t too hard to share anymore. I actually felt like I wanted to share it,” she said. Emma discussed the environment of rehearsal sessions in-depth, describing it as “an empowering stigma-free environment” and “therapeutic.”

When asked about her favorite part of participating in the program, Emma mentioned two things: the emotional bond created among the cast during rehearsals and feeling rewarded after conversing with others after the performance. “I had three freshmen girls come up to me talking about how much they loved my piece and how they loved the show. And I was like, ‘you guys should do it.’ But they were doing the whole, ‘oh, I don’t think I could.’ I said, ‘but you can, and you should.’”

Emma shared an intimate story about her mom, who was present in the audience on the night she took the stage. Emma felt compelled to share her story to acknowledge that no matter what they’d been through, she saw that her mom was struggling in a difficult situation. With her mom’s unwavering support, she explained that “just having that unspoken understanding that’s now spoken, it’s probably, I don’t know, it heals a lot.”

She also shared the close bond she developed with her castmates. She mentioned, “I have friends, family, and a significant other. But it just filled this hole in my heart I didn’t know that I had, and it’ll stick with you, honestly, forever. Like, I know that if I texted any one of those people, they would respond and be like, ‘what’s up?’” Emma says that, as a result of participating in This Is My Brave: College Edition at USF, she found the drive to write again. She also wants people to know about this experience.

“Having strangers be so open to your story or talking about people sharing their stories for the first time, their secrets, it makes me want to be vulnerable and let them into my life. It makes me want to let them in more, that’s how it stays with me.”

Emma hopes to participate as a member of the production team during next year’s This Is My Brave: College Edition at USF. ■



This Is My Brave

Interview with 2023 TIMB Cast Member **Shawna Miller**

Shawna Miller is a second-year graduate student at the University of South Florida (USF) studying cybercrime. She studied behavioral healthcare during her time as an undergraduate. Shawna says she recalled seeing audition advertisements for This Is My Brave: College Edition at USF in the past but waited to audition and share her story this year.

Her favorite part about participating in This Is My Brave: College Edition at USF was watching her fellow performers break out of their shells and feel comfort in sharing their stories. She even mentioned, “There’s an expression out there that says ‘shame dies when stories are told in safe places,’” and she says she was grateful to experience that firsthand. Shawna saw an opportunity for growth, and by joining the cast of This Is My Brave: College Edition at the University of South Florida, she learned that she wasn’t afraid to grow and felt that sharing her story helps her stay sober.

Shawna wanted to thank showrunners Dr. Kristin Kosyluk and Amanda Clark for providing a safe space for all of the performers to be vulnerable. “They told us that this is a safe place and this is a place where you can tell your story without shame and without whatever feelings that might accompany that. It gave us the ability to tell our stories and not be judged,” said Shawna. ■

“And, you know, if I can help just one person, and perhaps I did, that’s kind of what it’s about for me.”





Thank You

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