



# DAVID LAWRENCE CENTER

## FOR MENTAL WELLNESS

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### **Mental Health First Aid Puts the Power of Prevention in the Hands of the Public**

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*Guest Editorial Submitted By:*

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David Lawrence Center

With a dynamic organization like the David Lawrence Center, we are always evolving and looking for ways to improve. Many exciting program enhancements, new program developments and operational changes have taken place this summer - all designed to help more people in need, improve access, ensure continuity of care and increase treatment outcomes. But one new, community-wide initiative has me particularly excited and hopeful for the future, Mental Health First Aid. Mental Health First Aid is a unique and powerful vehicle for improved mental health literacy. It trains participants to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness on a first-aid basis. This program is our best hope for identifying and intervening at the early signs of possible illness.

Family members, friends, neighbors, teachers and co-workers are the people most likely to notice when an individual's behavior changes, but they usually don't know what those changes mean or how to help. Mental Health First Aid puts that information into the hands of the public to prevent terrible headline making tragedies.

Mental Health First Aid teaches how to help someone developing signs and symptoms of mental illness or an emotional crisis. The program introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs, builds understanding of their impact, overviews common treatments and teaches how to safely de-escalate a crisis situation.

This program dispels old myths and negative stereotypes, challenges harmful misconceptions and provides a venue for our community's determination to become empowered, take positive action and create meaningful positive change. As Southwest Florida's leading provider of

behavioral health solutions, several David Lawrence Center staff have already been certified in this nationally recognized program.

David Lawrence Center is partnering with our community partners who have also certified members of their staff, and as a team we will be making this invaluable program available to the community by targeting groups such as churches, schools, organizations and social service providers to invite them to send representatives to participate in the trainings. Two separate training programs are available to identify warning signs in the child and adolescent or adult populations. In the future, we also have plans to schedule classes that are open to the public. If you are interested in scheduling a training for your organization, or would like more information about Mental Health First Aid, please contact John Brehault at 239-455-8500 ext. 1437.

*David Schimmel is the Chief Executive Officer of the David Lawrence Center, the Southwest Florida-based, not-for-profit leading provider of innovative, behavioral health solutions including inpatient, outpatient, residential and community based prevention and treatment services for children, adults and families. For more information about David Lawrence Center call 239-455-8500 or visit [DavidLawrenceCenter.org](http://DavidLawrenceCenter.org).*