



Media Advisory

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Youth Mental Health Coalition Launches New Mental Health Awareness Campaign Campaign Launch Event to Take Place February 24, 2023

SPRINGFIELD — On **February 24, 2023**, the Springfield Youth Mental Health Coalition (YMHC), convened by the Public Health Institute of Western MA, will host a press conference to announce the launch of *I Am More Than My Mood (#MTMM)*, a new mental health awareness campaign. The press conference will take place at **5:30 pm** in the Robyn Newhouse Hall at the **Community Music School of Springfield**, 127 State Street, Springfield, Massachusetts. The press conference will be followed by a red-carpet presentation of the *I Am More Than My Mood* campaign ads. YMHC Youth Advisors, Beat the Odds, will present the ads and share the goals of this mental health awareness campaign.

Presenters will include:

- Mayor Domenic J. Sarno
- Health Commissioner Helen Caulton-Harris
- Azell Cavaan on behalf of Springfield Public Schools Superintendent Daniel Warwick
- City Councilor Zaida Govan
- Shabazz Wilson, Behavioral Health Network
- Zena Murray, Beat the Odds Program Leader at the South End Community Center
- Sabrina Marshall, President of Beat the Odds at Martin Luther King, Jr. Family Services

The goal of the *I Am More Than My Mood* campaign is to normalize healthy conversations about mental health and encourage youth and adults/caregivers in Greater Springfield to discuss stress, anxiety, and depression as common challenges that everyone goes through. The campaign directs community to morethanmymood.org for resources.

Health and Human Services Commissioner Helen Caulton-Harris states, “Mental illness knows no boundaries, no income status. It affects all of us. Just like physical health, it is normal and common to experience struggles when it comes to mental health. It is OK to seek help.”

Shabazz Wilson (partner from BHN) also noted, “Mental Health is Health. Check on Your Friends Today.”

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Commissioner Caulton-Harris further explained, “Socialization is key to mental and emotional health for adolescents. The COVID-19 pandemic caused extreme isolation that resulted in limited social and emotional contact with peers which had a devastating impact on the mental health of our youth, resulting in increased rates of suicide and trauma. This awareness campaign and the work behind it is crucial to reaching our youth and ensuring they know the importance of taking care of their mental health and where to turn when they are struggling.”

Data from the [Springfield youth health surveys](#) illustrate the need for expanding and destigmatizing youth mental health services locally. [In 2019](#), more than a third of eighth grade students (35%) reported sustained sadness or hopelessness that impacted their usual activities (31% in 2017, 34% in 2015). This rate was particularly high among students who identified as female (46%) and LGBTQ+ (65%). Another round of surveying is currently underway in Springfield Public Schools.

Superintendent Daniel Warwick shared, “With the prevalence of mental health issues in our society, it would be a misconception to think that youth are immune. In fact, research shows that mental health issues often begin during school-age years. The outstanding work of the Springfield Youth Mental Health Coalition will go a long way in helping to normalize conversations that youth may find difficult to approach. We hope that this campaign empowers youth to understand that they are so much more than their mood and that it is okay to reach out for help. Springfield Public Schools is extremely pleased and grateful for the opportunity the Springfield Youth Mental Health Coalition has provided to help our youth make those brave and powerful steps forward.”

The campaign was developed by **Axiom Blue Marketing**. Youth advisors from Beat the Odds, the YMHC’s youth advisory groups that are convened by Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services and the South End Community Center, lent their voices to the campaign via focus groups, and crafting mood boards with color swatches. The YMHC determined early in the campaign’s development the importance of local youth learning about the campaign production process. As a result, the youth attended several in-person and virtual conferences with the lead producer, CGI Artist, and wardrobe stylist. The youth ultimately opted to serve as print models for the MTMM campaign.

“Our production team, a combination of world class and local talent were all driven by the same experience, mental health obstacles as adolescents,” says **Angela D. Mack, CEO of Axiom Blue Marketing**, “We were those kids and our mission as a team was to make youth of color undergoing mental health challenges feel seen, empowered, and embraced for exactly who they are.”

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Mayor Domenic J. Sarno states, “This ‘More Than My Mood’ campaign brought many talented and dedicated people together and we are grateful for all their hard work and efforts toward strengthening and empowering our youth. Thank you to the Public Health Institute of Western Mass for spearheading this effort, and to “Beat the Odds” – the group of incredible young people who advised the coalition along the way, your work will impact youths and families throughout our city and beyond – thank you.”

“This truly is a campaign for Springfield youth and families, developed by youth and caregivers in Springfield”, said **Tiffany Rufino, Springfield Youth Mental Health Coalition Manager**. “The youth informed the campaign through focus groups and surveys, they chose the vibrant colorways, and met with the photographer and fashion designer to share insights and ideas on how the campaign should look and feel. We are extremely proud of our youth for their courage in spreading awareness about youth mental health.”

For many, this campaign is personal. **Ysabel Garcia, founder of Estoy Aquí LLC**, shared, “When I think about this campaign and the youth involved, I also think about the meaning behind my organization’s name, Estoy Aquí (I Am Here). If I had upstream community support growing up as an immigrant teen experiencing stress, trauma, and thoughts of death, it could have prevented a lot of guilt and shame from settling in my heart. I would have understood that there are multiple dimensions to healing and that, most importantly, I did not have to go through it alone.”

“I spent a lot of time praying and thinking what is my purpose here on earth?” shared **Zena Murray, Beat the Odds Program Leader at South End Community Center**. “Working with youth and teens is in fact not work at all, it is MY purpose. Being the person in the room that will show up for our future leaders means everything.”

Sabrina Marshall, President of Beat the Odds (BTO) at Martin Luther King Jr Family Services., says, “being a part of BTO is such a great way to connect with my community through mental health work. As President of this group, I aim to have our group more present in the community both virtually and physically. I want BTO youth to know how important it is to take care of their bodies physically and mentally so that they have more confidence and self-awareness.”

The #MTMM public awareness campaign will run on billboards, social and digital media, and on PVTA bus ads in the greater Springfield region through the summer of 2023.

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Community organizations, schools, and other entities in Greater Springfield are encouraged to attend and amplify the campaign. Posters and postcards will be available at the event for free and upon request.

Mayor Sarno states, “The Springfield Youth Mental Health Coalition is doing such a phenomenal job in continuing to address the stigma that surrounds mental health, especially when it comes to their work with young people. Stress, anxiety, and depression are issues that we all must face from time to time. It is important that everyone knows that there are resources and places to go that can help us through the toughest times. Remember that it is ok to seek out that help. Your mood, your zip code, or your current circumstances do not define who you are – you do.”

The mental health awareness campaign was made possible through funding from The Davis Foundation, Trinity Health of New England, The Whitcomb Foundation, City of Springfield, Women’s Fund of Western MA.

ABOUT THE SPRINGFIELD YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

The Springfield Youth Mental Health Coalition (YMHC) is convened by the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts, through funding from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Office of Problem Gambling Services. The YMHC consists of behavioral health, community, and youth-serving organizations who serve families across Greater Springfield, with representatives from African Diaspora Mental Health Association, Baystate Health, Behavioral Health Network, Davis Foundation, Estoy Aquí, Gándara Center, Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services, New North Citizens Council, Out Now, Public Health Institute of Western MA, Springfield Office of Health and Racial Equity, Springfield Public Schools, Square One, and Tools for Success Counseling, LLC. Other coalition activities include professional development and convening of peer mentoring organizations.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

The Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts formed over 25 years ago with the goal of building measurably healthier communities using data and its convening power to create collaborative partnerships. For more information, visit <https://www.publichealthwm.org/>

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