Momentum Center is making an impact

Tribune Staff
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A group from the Momentum Center celebrates during the Coast Guard Festival this past year.

Courtesy photo / Jenna Vipond

In two years since its opening, the Momentum Center has become a second home for many, and is making a difference in peoples’ lives.
According to the 2017 Ottawa County Community Health Needs Assessment, 17 percent of adults reported having a depressive disorder and 15 percent reported having an anxiety disorder. About 15 percent of youth have thought about suicide in the past year, and almost 40 percent of those youth have made an attempt.

Although effective medical treatments exist, 60 percent of people with a mental illness never get treatment, according to the National Institute of Mental Health and National Alliance on Mental Illness. Stigma is the number one barrier, and that’s where The Momentum Center for Social Engagement comes in.

The Momentum Center is a grassroots movement aimed at creating a stigma-free community. It does this by hosting community conversations and operating The Momentum Center for Social Engagement that addresses mental illness, addictions, and disabilities. The Momentum Center also houses Just Goods Gifts and Café.

The beginnings

From Inspire! events focused on marginalized populations to town hall meetings with panelist presentations and community conversations, feedback led to discussions and the creation of the Mental Illness Task Force, and the initial concept of The Momentum Center for Social Engagement.

The Momentum Center serves youth ages 11 and older and adults with mental illness, addictions and other disabilities. There’s an annual $1 membership fee.

Within the Momentum Center, Just Goods Gifts and Café is open to the public and offers fair-trade goods. It’s a place for social integration where stereotypes are dismantled and stigma is eliminated.

Ben, a Momentum Center member, said he feels like he’s found his “second home.”

“It’s a place where I can go to be myself and not have anybody judge me,” added Lisa, a Momentum Center member. “It’s a safe place. No stigma.”

Data reflects positive change
Upon becoming members, individuals can voluntarily take a survey that includes questions about their well-being. Mental health experts developed the questions as a way to quantify the severity of various challenges like anxiety.

Every six months, they’re followed up to identify changes and evaluate program effectiveness. Some members also participate in interviews to help provide a broader qualitative context for the data.

The Center’s efforts to identify impact are possible through collaboration with Ottawa Community Mental Health and researchers from the University of Pennsylvania, Grand Valley State University, Hope College and ThenAtlas Analytics (ThenAtlas.org).

Recent findings suggest that members who reported symptoms associated with moderate to severe depression, anxiety or loneliness, saw significant improvements since joining The Momentum Center.

Members who reported moderate to severe depression upon joining, reported mild depression symptoms, on average after 1-year. In technical terms, their mean PQH-9 score dropped from 14.43 to 9.85 during their first year (seven members reporting), a 31 percent reduction. The same severe to mild transition occurred with anxiety (28 members reporting).

Jose said the Momentum Center has helped him go through hard times.

“It heals my heart so much. It really does. People treat me like another human being,” added Andrew, who is a Momentum Center member.

What’s next?

The Momentum Center is working to publish their data, revise data collection tools, measure how it builds personal resilience, and share their model with other communities.

The model can be replicated in other communities as a compliment to mental health clinical and therapeutic services to improve the quality of life for people who struggle with mental illness,
Barbara Lee VanHorsen, executive director at The Momentum Center, said they’re positioned to be a model for the state and country of what positive community space looks like as organizations such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), National Association on Mental Illness (NAMI), state initiatives on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and others look to connect clinical care to community resources and engagement.

“Being intentional in this relationship allows for early identification and referrals for clinical and therapeutic care, provides a space for healthy connection between therapeutic appointments, and returns individuals to healthy community for sustained wellbeing at any time care is considered to be completed,” she said.

For more information, contact VanHorsen at barbara@momentumcentergh.org or 616-414-9111.