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New campaign plans to raise awareness of mental disorders in young adults.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK – The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has launched a new campaign, “I wish you knew...” that aims to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of mental disorders in young adults and to connect them with available services and support regardless of their ability to pay. The campaign is a part of the department’s initiative, “Oklahoma Now is the Time” (ONIT). Oklahoma is one of only 17 states awarded with a “Now the the Time,” five-year grant through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

“We want to start a community conversation,” says ONIT project director, Katie Harrison. “When thinking about serious mental disorders, I think it’s easy for many to dismiss our young people. Thinking ‘that’s not our kids,’ but in fact, we have the data that shows it is our kids who are struggling. In the three counties we’re targeting, suicide is the second leading cause of death for young adults ages 16 - 25. We’ve got to start talking about it and letting our young people know that help is available.”

The Chalkboard Campaign is the community outreach program funded by the ONIT campaign. ONIT providers will be distributing mobile chalkboards to be set up in highly trafficked areas around town in Oklahoma, Okmulgee and Washington Counties. The Chalkboard poses a simple question, one that you fill in the blank. The Chalkboard states mental health and substance abuse issues can affect anyone, but we dont talk about it. Use this space to share a statement about your experience.

The participant will then use the chalk provided to write on the board, completely anonymous. The result will be a board filled with responses, some funny, some poignant, some even sad. We want the community to see, that they are not the only ones out there. Mental health is not something to be afraid of. Getting help, seeking treatment, no longer has the stigma it used to.

Harrison says “The look and feel of the Chalkboard campaign and the tone of message are all important factors we considered and discussed at great length with service providers and young people. The result is a campaign that engages our audience in a way that is non-threatening and without judgement. The best way to determine if someone is suffering is to ask them. That’s the reason behind our message, I wish you knew...”

The campaign includes materials that will be distributed by service providers at locations where young adults in transition frequent. ODMHSAS has also launched a new page on their website, oknowisthetime.org to serve as a resource for individuals affected by mental disorders and their friends and family members to ultimately help connect them with services. Information about the Chalkboard campaign, chalkboard locations, and photos of the chalkboard at their sites will be shared as well. Texting is also an important part of the campaign. Individuals are asked to text “IWISH” to 55155 for a message of hope and next steps to engage in service.

The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services is responsible for providing services to Oklahomans who are affected by mental illness and substance abuse. In FY13, ODMHSAS provided services to approximately 187,000 individuals. For additional information about the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, please visit: ok.gov/odmhsas or call 405-248-9353.

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