

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

2019 marks the 70th year that May has been honored as Mental Health Awareness Month. In partnership with Each Mind Matters (EMM), California’s Mental Health Movement, the County of San Luis Obispo will be highlighting “Strength in Communities” by participating in community-wide events across the county and celebrating the diverse communities that help define the unique climate of the Central Coast.

As reported by EMM, California saw more than its fair share of devastation this past year, both natural and manmade. To better help communities build resiliency, this year and always, we want to encourage one another to seek out the commonalities we have, lend a helping hand to a neighbor in need, and encourage others to talk more about their emotional and mental health.

Mental Health Awareness month is also an opportunity to raise awareness about suicide. While the majority of individuals who have a mental health condition will not attempt or die by suicide, most people who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental illness at their time of death. Remember that depression is not a normal part of aging,. If yourself or someone you care about is experiencing signs of depression, or any mental health condition, talk to your doctor to learn more about medical and community resources that can help guide your path to recovery.



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COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT: SLO VILLAGE

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Aging is a difficult part of everyone's life. It's even more difficult when we are alone or don't have anyone to help us with what used to be simple tasks. As we age, we often lose family, friends, give up driving, have medical issues, and become isolated. SLO Village is working hard to fill that void for all seniors in SLO County.

"SLO Village represents the best of who we are as a community."

Dave Kuykendall, SLO Village Board President

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT

SLO Village is a non-profit, community-based membership organization focused on empowering older adults to live happily, healthfully, and successfully in their own homes as they age.

"SLO Village is a community-based membership organization focused on empowering older adults to live happily, healthfully, and successfully in their own homes as they age. SLO Village provides easy access to a screened network of volunteers and local businesses, in addition to organizing social events for members," according to the [SLO Village Website](#).

"GALA (LGBTQ+ non-profit) was instrumental in found the village," said Tauria Linala, one of the founding members and now Secretary. "The whole idea of the village movement began in the 70's. GALA started a list of those who can help each other because there was a definite need for the gay and lesbian community to be helped. Eventually they all aged out and the system fell apart after 15 years. So we're really carrying on a tradition of the LGBT people help LGBT seniors."

SLO Village opened its doors in November of 2017. In just two years, after a year of organizing, it has a virtual village of 42 members and 42 volunteers, and was recently honored as Senior Citizen Organization of the Year from [Area Agency on Aging](#). Though originally begun by the LGBTQ+ community, SLO Village is welcoming and available to all seniors.

“For me, SLO Village represents the best of who we are as a community,” said Dave Kuykendall, SLO Village Board President. “On a regular basis, people share their time by providing social connections and help. What drew me to the Village was it was based on a simple and compelling solution, direct involvement and kindness were the only critical ingredients.”

The membership fees for SLO Village are \$500 a year for a single person and \$750 for a household (2 people at the same location.) There is no additional cost for volunteer services. With the extremely high cost of living in SLO County, SLO Village offers a sliding scale for low-income households and individuals. In an effort to not turn any senior away for the inability to pay, SLO Village has received grants from [The Community Foundation](#) for SLO County among various other grants.

With the support of volunteers, they offer transportation, home repairs, technology help, in-home services, and courtesy calls. For the services not provided by volunteers, SLO Village provides vetted businesses to provide access to plumbers, painters, handymen, home health care, house-keeping, and more at a discounted rate. To date, every service call sent to SLO Village has been completed.

“We want to engage our seniors to stay in the community and not become isolated,” said Tauria. “We hold events to keep them engaged, offer walking companions and offer transportation for anything like seeing a show, visiting friends, and shopping.” The many other services provided are essential to help support their day to day living such as minor home repairs and technical support for phones, tablets, computers, stereos, home alarm systems, etc. “We want people to be able to age in their own home, rather than going to assisted living if they choose not to,” continued Tauria. (Continued on page 4)



SLO VILLAGE

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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: SLO VILLAGE CONTINUED

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

As any non-profit organization, SLO Village is always in need of volunteers who can work with older people. Volunteers just have to be 18 years or older and be able to pass an extensive background check. This is especially true outside of the current coverage area. As of now, the only members are south of the grade until they can get volunteers in the rest of the county.

They are also hoping to hire staff in 2019 since the organization has been completely run by the board of directors. In an effort to raise funds, the board has a campaign to match up to \$25,000 donated. This would be especially helpful in hiring an Executive Director and support staff that can help manage the growth of SLO Village.

"We love our members, we try to do good things for them and do our best to help them in any way we can."

Tauria Linala, SLO Village Board Secretary and Founding Member

SLO Village currently serves members in Arroyo Grande, Avila Beach, Grover Beach, Los Osos, Morro Bay, Oceano, Pismo Beach, San Luis Obispo, and Shell Beach.

If you want to learn more, send SLO Village an email or give them a call. They would love to meet and learn about your needs and see if SLO Village is the right fit for you.

Phone: (805) 242-6440

INSTITUTE ON AGING: FRIENDSHIP LINE

According to their website, Institute on Aging's (IOA) 24-hour toll-free Friendship Line is both a crisis intervention hotline and a warmline for non emergency emotional support calls. It is also the only accredited crisis line in the country for people aged 60 years and older, and adults living with disabilities.

TOLL FREE - 800.971.0016

While there are other organizations that respond to the needs of people who may be contemplating suicide, none provides the type of services that IOA's Friendship Line offers to respond to the public health problem of suicide among the elderly.

In addition to receiving incoming calls, Friendship Line also offers outreach to eligible callers. They connect with people on a regular basis, and help monitor peoples' physical and mental health concerns. The call-out services act as an intervention to prevent suicide in the long term by improving the quality of life and connectedness of isolated callers.

Any aging adult or person living with disabilities, who suffers from depression, loneliness, isolation, anxiousness, or may be thinking about death or suicide, can benefit from completely confidential phone calls with Friendship Line volunteers. Sometimes the road to happiness begins by simply saying hello to someone who cares.



Friendship Line provides round-the-clock crisis support services including:

- Providing emotional support
- Elder abuse reporting
- Well-being checks
- Grief support
- Active suicide intervention
- Information and referrals for isolated older adults, and adults living with disabilities

Questions?

Call Institute on Aging Connect at:

415-750-4111 OR
650-424-1411

Community Connection

Community Connection is a one-stop-shop event connecting underrepresented groups to difficult-to-obtain benefits and services. The event is held 4 times a year at 4 different venues within the county of San Luis Obispo.

The County of San Luis Obispo Veterans Services Office and the County Department of Social Services have teamed up to bring together a huge variety of community partners to provide on-site services ranging from tuition assistance to mental health services.

What else can you expect to find at Community Connection?

- Supercuts
- DMV
- Community Health Center
- Eye Exams
- And much more!

Mark your calendars for the next Community Connection!

STRENGTH
IN
COMMUNITY

EVENTS CALENDAR

April 18th:

"Supper Club" with the Widowed Persons Association of California, SLO Chapter
4pm at Olive Garden
11966 Los Osos Valley Rd. San Luis Obispo
To participate, call Joan Jenkins at 805-439-0578

April 25th:

"Lunch Social" with the Widowed Persons Association of California, SLO Chapter
12:00 noon at Gina's Italian Restaurant
138 East Branch , Arroyo Grande
To participate, call 805-481-9999

May 14th:

"Senior Information Fair"
9:30am-12:00pm
Sierra Vista Hospital Auditorium
1010 Murray Ave., San Luis Obispo
For information, call 805-541-0384

May 29th:

"CommUNITY Connection"
10:00am-2:00pm
SLO Veterans Hall
801 Grand Ave., San Luis Obispo
For information, call John Aparicio at 805-781-5766

June 21st:

"The Longest Day" Alzheimer's Awareness Scrapbooking with Visiting Angels
For more information, contact Amy Goff
agoff@visitingangels.com

These events are not sponsored by the Older Adult Prevention Committee, but a selection of events highlight for your convenience



For more information about these events, email Alysia Hendry: aahendry@co.slo.ca.us or call 805-781-1357

COMMUNITY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

ERNIE CROOK

When we think of a 93-year-old, most people would not picture a man like Ernie Crook. He does not rely on a walker or cane, and his mind is very sharp. He can carry conversation very well and speak on an array of vast topics. He spent much of his career as a counselor for prisoners and before that, served in the U.S. Navy.

He maintains his health by drinking tea and walking regularly—six to seven miles a week. Ernie has had to adjust to some difficult life circumstances; including the passing of his wife, Virginia, a couple of years ago. The couple was married for almost 67 years. He also moved out of his home and into a senior residential community two months ago. In this article, you will find details about Ernie's life and what type of community and social connections he has, and what others can do to improve their quality of life and protective factors to help prevent suicide.

As time goes on, people age and can gain or lose certain attributes about themselves. In Ernie's case, he admits to being less abrasive now than when he was a young man. He says it's because of the fewer amounts of hormones and testosterone running through his body which makes him less bothered by the small things, stating, "when you're 18-26, your engine is running at a high RPM, you're wanting to challenge anything." Comparatively, he lost his youthful abrasiveness and gained a more pleasant demeanor decades later as a senior.

A great example of Ernie's change in attitude is when he voluntarily gave up his ability to drive a car. He had a couple of close calls while driving, and with his eyesight deteriorating, he also realized that, "my reaction time is way down when you're my age. I try to be realistic about things, so that's why I have it up."



COMMUNITY MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

ERNIE CROOK

I wanted to make sure I was not only endangering myself, but others too." Moreover, he lost his ability to drive but *gained* the safety of himself and his community.

Maintaining social connections and staying connected to the community is important, it helps both with feeling appreciated and avoids isolation, but there are often barriers and challenges in doing so. For Ernie, being in his 90's, he doesn't have his local friends that he knew 20, 30 years ago. Many have either passed away or moved out of the area. After becoming a widower, he felt extremely isolated and being at his home would sometime be torturous with the small reminders of his late wife.

To get out of his home, Ernie would walk down to Panera Bread to read his Leftist literature, drink coffee, and simply be closer to people because he loved "hearing the buzz of human conversation." Additionally, he hopes that he can make new friends at his new residence but reveals, "It takes time to progress from acquaintance to friend." He's been participating in morning exercise classes and goes to a Film Appreciation class on a weekly basis.

To further connection with others, Ernie is currently trying to recruit some walkers to join him in jaunts around town and has asked a few residents he eats with, but so far, no one has expressed interest.

He feels they might be intimidated by the prospect of walking the distance he does, but for the most part, by participating in the community and maintaining his social connections, he is growing his presence and purpose.

Younger people can also be a protective factor to seniors and help to prevent them from feeling depressed or suicidal. For Ernie, he loves it when his children and grand-children come visit him. He feels that phone conversations are not enough and that there is nothing quite like sitting with is family face-to-face, sharing a meal, and having a conversation with them.

He knows about other residents whose families live out-of-state and maybe see their loved one only once or twice a year and he says, "that would make me absolutely depressed." On Valentine's day, a Cal Poly Sorority came and handed out cards to all of the residents at his community dinner. He absolutely loved that a group of young women would go out of their way to make them feel special. Ernie feels that his life has meaning when people come to visit him and show their appreciation.

Ernie Crook tries his best to pursue social connections and embrace his community so he can live well as change continues to happen for him. We can all learn a little something from Ernie's ability to adapt and thrive in the face of change and challenge. If you see Ernie walking around town, be sure to say hello!

DEAR ABBY

OLDER ADULT SUICIDE PREVENTION COMMITTEE

The older adult suicide prevention committee is a newly formed group of community members, caretakers, and health professionals. This newsletter was produced by the committee members.

What is the most common sign of depression?

There is a common myth out there that *crying* is the most common sign of depression across the lifespan. However, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Denial* of mental health conditions is often more common and more predictable than any other symptom.

The last person to recognize a problem is often the person with the problem. Because of the strong negative prejudice and discrimination associated with mental health conditions, many older adults are afraid to seek help.

Other signs of depression include being easily upset and feeling fearful, forgetful, confused, hopeless, lonely, withdrawn, and tired. Loss of appetite is also common. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, don't feel like you need to 'suck it up', talk to your doctor today.

The Suicide Prevention Council meets every 4th Wednesday of the month. The Older Adult Suicide Prevention Committee meets every 4th Monday of the month. For more information or if you'd like to be on the email list for the council or committee, please email Alysia Hendry at aahendry@co.slo.ca.us or call 805-781-1357



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