



# NEWS

Dr. Nelson Ying Center • 1940 Cannery Way • Orlando, FL 32804  
Phone (407) 835-0900 • Fax (407) 244-2805

Heart of Florida United Way

## For Immediate Release

Contact:

Ashley Blasewitz

Senior Vice President, Donor and Volunteer Experience

E: [Ashley.Blasewitz@HFUW.org](mailto:Ashley.Blasewitz@HFUW.org)

P: (407) 227-7048

## Heart of Florida United Way Launches Initiative to Create More Mental Wellness Ambassadors in Central Florida

***First Mental Wellness Skillshop to be Held May 12; Certification Trains for Discussion Tools and Coping Mechanisms to Support Others***

**ORLANDO, FL (April 17, 2023)** – Today, Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) announced the latest in a series of community initiatives aimed at supporting mental health and wellness in Central Florida. The program being called “Getting to the Heart of It: A Mental Wellness Skillshop” is a certification program designed to train community members through behavioral, psychological, and holistic wellness practices so that they can support their colleagues, family members, and friends. Participants will gain the tools and skills to lead impactful discussions around mental wellness, techniques for rapid stress reduction, develop mechanisms for one's own mental wellness, as well as learn methods to best support family, friends, colleagues in the environments we live, work, learn and play in.

Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings, City of Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer as well as other community stakeholders joined together for the announcement at the Center for Health & Wellbeing in Winter Park. This initiative comes as a result of the findings in the Orange County Mental & Behavioral Health Report HFUW completed on behalf of the Board of County Commissioner and Mayor Demings.

“A significant challenge is overcoming the barrier of stigma around mental health and promoting mental wellness,” said Jeff Hayward, President & CEO, Heart of Florida United Way. “As outlined in a recommendation of the Orange County Report, mental health promotion activities and interventions are delivered in settings where people live, learn and work. To promote mental wellness throughout the whole community, we’re going to need lots of ambassadors to help normalize the conversation.”

“I am thrilled to see the directives outlined in the HFUW Mental and Behavioral Report we commissioned, begin to come to fruition,” said Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings. “Orange County has devoted \$10 million in the past year alone to get our most vulnerable residents and their families the help they need. Our goal along with United Way is to promote healthy behaviors and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.”



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With the help of the business sector, health and human service providers, nonprofits agencies, school districts, and others, the hope is that Central Florida will become more aware of positive mental wellness practices and implement them into everyday life – like practicing good physical fitness by exercising and eating healthy.

"Heart of Florida United Way's Mental Wellness Skillsshop is an example of the power of collaboration and compassion in our Central Florida community," said Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer. "This training resource will help to reduce the stigma of receiving mental health services and empower members of our community to be able identify those who might be struggling and offer support."

The program was developed in partnership with licensed mental health counselor Dwight Bain of The Lifeworks Group. Bain notes that although this program is designed to bring a general awareness of mental wellness to everyday life, it does not replace the need to access clinical support.

"This is not counseling – it is a structured conversation for community leaders to reduce dangerous stress from harming their organizations," said Bain. "It's normal to feel stress at work, and when it's okay to talk about pressure, instead of pretending it's not there, the risk of burnout decreases. When a leader normalizes stress without the risk of stigma it reduces pressure and is a powerful way to build mental wellness throughout the organization. Everyone feels stress, but not everyone knows how to convert it over to mental wellness, and our Skillsshop will equip leaders to change that."

The first "Getting to the Heart of It: Mental Wellness Skillsshop" will be held May 12 from 8:30-11:30 at the Center for Health & Wellbeing. Registration is required and space is limited. The cost for \$9.88, a nod to the 988 Suicide Prevention Lifeline HFUW operates for Central Florida. To register, visit [www.HFUW.org](http://www.HFUW.org).

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### **About Heart of Florida United Way:**

*Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is Central Florida's most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region's most critical health and human service programs. In 2019-20, it raised and managed more than \$34.7 million in total resources, including \$29.5 million raised for the Community Fund that invests in dozens of vitally important programs in the community throughout Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. HFUW fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person in Central Florida. It operates United Way 211, Central Florida's information and assistance, crisis, suicide and referral helpline; Volunteer Resource Center and the Ryan White program, which administers nearly \$3.2 million to provide HIV/AIDS services and referrals. HFUW impacts more than 400,000 individuals annually through its direct service and funded programs. United Way partners with local businesses, government, other charities to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options and create possibilities for people in need. Visit [www.HFUW.org](http://www.HFUW.org) for more information, or call (407) 835-0900. Follow us on Facebook at Heart of Florida United Way and on Twitter and Instagram @hfuw.*



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