

Think Tank: Older adults & mental health – Resources & support

Speakers:

Amy Hopkins, LCSW

Brig Dunsmore, CMHC

Mark Madison, Director of Community Impact, United Way

Amy Talking about mental health concerns can feel difficult at any age. Saying I'm depressed or I need help. Is hard for anyone. But it may be even harder for those from older generations, those who were told to just buck up or pull themselves up by their bootstraps. But no matter your age, it's important to take care of your mental well-being. Today we're talking about older adults, Mental health and resources that are available to help. Welcome to the Think Tank Podcast.

Hi, everyone. This is Amy Hopkins and I'm here with Brig Dunsmore. We're both licensed mental health therapist. How are you doing, Brig?

Brig I'm great, Amy. I'm great. How are you doing today?

Amy I'm doing pretty good. Today we're talking about mental health and the older generation and resources. And you had the opportunity to interview a very special guest. Why don't you tell us about that?

Brig Great. Thank you. I did I spoke with Mark, who works for United Way in Georgia. And we had a great conversation about older adults, some of the challenges they face, some of the things that put them at risk for mental health issues. And we really focused a lot on some of the resources that are available to them.

Amy That sounds awesome, Brig. Let's check it out.

Brig Well, I'm very glad to be joined today by Mark Madison. Mark serves as the director of Community Impact with United Way of Northeast Georgia. He coordinates the community impact grant process and volunteers. He oversees two on one and facilitates collaborations with local nonprofits. Mark moved to Athens, Georgia, to attend the University of Georgia, where he obtained both his bachelor's and master's degrees in communications and public administration, respectively.

With the desire to connect non-profits to each other and people in need, he started answering 211 calls as a volunteer. While in college, he officially joined

the staff of United Way of Northeast Georgia in 2016. Mark works with the community organizations, lending his perspective and connections wherever he can. Mark, so glad to have you with us today. Welcome to the podcast.

Mark Thanks so much, Brig. I'm excited to be here. I appreciate it.

Brig Yeah, maybe the place to start, I mean, I talked a little bit about you and kind of how you got your start here, but can you tell us a little bit more about you and kind of your work with aging adults the first year?

Mark So, I'm Mark, as you already know, but I get to work at United Way Northeast Georgia. And the coolest thing about United Way is you get to look at work with a community level challenge. And so we don't just look at what's impacting one particular individual or small or isolated issue. We look at how issues kind of overlap with one another. And so a lot of what we've seen with older adults is as we try to look at early child success, we see grandparents raising grandchildren, we see workforce development, we see poverty in communities, and also we talk about equity and inclusion. We see how easy it is to overlook some who might be aging and somebody who's not as connected into the workforce. One of the interesting pieces of having worked with folks that are aging is a lot of people actually connect, especially with the workplace. In fact, our biggest thing is connecting with workplaces. And lots of folks reach out to say, how do we still take an hour after we leave the workforce?

And that's a big part of what it's all about today, people who are aging and mental health is that comradery, that sense of belonging, that sense of place and space when you're working alongside of people who are accomplishing things at the workplace. And so we've gotten to connect with some senior volunteers. In fact, some awesome folks that help us answer or do follow up calls for 211, which is a help line that checks in on people, seeing did you get the help you need or can we help make that connection.

They just absolutely love making that phone call and being able to check up on somebody. And so we've had some really great experience with that. We've had some awesome connections with Meals on Wheels. The Agency on Aging is the organization we get to offer folks to through 211. And that's one of the biggest connection is getting to chat with people and see what's going on. It's probably not just one thing, probably a few things, but there is somebody on the other line that can help figure it out.

Brig That's great And I think you're so right. It's bigger than just one thing. And I really love how you talked about United Way and being able to look at multiple factors that are impacting our seniors and aging adults. That's fantastic.

Mark, maybe just to throw out some statistics for people who may not know, you know, just talking about the numbers of people. So according to the World Health Organization, as of 2019, there were 709 million adults 60 and over. So that's a lot of people. And I think more importantly is when you talk about such a large number of people, it's important for us to recognize also that over 20% of our adults age 60 and over suffer from some sort of mental or neurological disorder that isn't a normal part of their aging, depression, dementia, seemed to be the most common there. They affect 5 and 7% of the world's older population respectively. Anxiety disorders also impact 3.8% also. Also another thing that's a huge concern is the rates of death by suicide in the older population. 25% of deaths by suicides occur in people age 65 and older, which is by far the largest, the largest group. In fact, men over the age of 85 have a suicide rate of 45.23 per 100,000 compared to 11 per 100,000 for all ages.

So very, very big things. I think that another important thing to hold on to there is while we're talking about people that are experiencing a lot of mental health issues, studies also indicate that 80% of older adults recovered from depression after receiving treatment. So there's definitely hope if they don't have to stay there. Mark, in your work, what kinds of things do you see as far as mental health and how it affects our older adults?

Mark

Yeah, absolutely. And the thing that I think what you mentioned is it's a similar kind of scenario where we see a lot of the same folks when you especially you shared about four times the rate of individuals suffering from suicide, and we see a similar thing in veterans populations and even in millennial males, people who have had a camaraderie maybe through work or through military or through something or potentially they've experienced traumatic things and then move into a space outside of a social group or don't have as a high degree of connectedness that maybe their peers have or that have different work backgrounds but are still working.

And I think that's something that we see across the scope of our work. But what we especially want to try to do is make the access point for people as easy as possible. We saw this during a lot of rental assistance and even vaccine promotion at work that it's fabulous that there are rollouts and lots of online applications, but there's a lot of applications and different things to get signed up and registered online. It disproportionately made it challenging for folks who don't have as much experience with the Internet experience, using computer experience and then using their phone, which might be their only connection to the Internet to get resources able to access those, while humongous resources and available resources, may not be as accessible for them. So a lot of our work, when it comes to things, we really want to make things as accessible as possible, not just available is one thing for it to be there. It's another thing for that person to be able to reach it.

And so our biggest factor for doing that is 211, which actually is a help line to talk about it a little bit. But so anyone can call there's a 211 ready to answer the phone in over 95% of the United States right now. So if you dial the number 2-1-1 on your phone, another person, the person is actually waiting on the other end of that line. They either work for a local United Way or another local nonprofit running that you want to apply for your area and they can help connect the dots to what's your need, what's the local resource based on your zip code that can help you out.

So it's not just a massive national database, it is that, but it's also tailored for where person is. And they get to talk to somebody and I actually used to get to answer those calls. So I've spoken to many a senior and other people trying to figure out where do I go to get food. It's not just food this week that's the problem, it's actually something bigger. OK, well, let's talk about what we can do next to step in and try to figure that out.

That's a fantastic resource. I mean, it helps you to have another person on the line that actually will personally connect you with the resources that are out there. I mean, we know that often people don't they're not aware of the resources that are out there and having that kind of resources.

Brig Great. I think that one of the things I'm hearing you say is not only is it their ability to access those resources and connect, but it's also this sense of connection with others. You know, you mentioned people who have come out of the military. You talk about it in our older population. I think one of the things that is a significant risk factor is just the fact that they retire and they don't feel as connected to peers at work and maybe the supports and resources that they had access to through their work.

Mark That's, right. And I think a lot of us maybe and a lot of other folks, other groups got a taste of it during the pandemic. They're not maybe having that check in that moment. Just eye-to-eye, seeing another individual just makes a difference.

But I think that another thing to talk about that you mentioned, folks over 60 over 65 there is this remarkably diverse group when you're talking about people over 60-65 where there are some that are better at it and they're there ready raring to go physically and mentally. But that doesn't necessarily equate to everything being just fine. I think it's not necessarily a natural part of aging to experience depression and anxiety. That's one really powerful thing we like to talk about here, a lot of our social work friends talk about in our space, is the ability for someone to kind of engage themselves with their challenge and be a resource for themselves.

And I think that's something that while it's awesome for folks who are younger to reach out by phone, to connect with people, it's also, you know, there are

other peers in that same group that can call one another and be that social connector for them. I think it's my parents who are in their mid-late sixties themselves, and they do an awesome job serving their other friends who happen to have this or that occurring at this time. And those connections can make a huge difference just having that person that that consistently checks in.

Brig You talk a lot again about connection, and I think that as I mentioned earlier, there are some risk factors for older adults. Right? And definitely connection is a big one. I think that they lose often older adults when they hit retirement, they lose that connection with people that they see every day - friends, a lot of different relationships. And I think that also a struggle for them is that there may be a drop in their income when they retire, which creates a risk for them. So I think that our older adults really, they're more likely to experience isolation and loneliness, you know, I think that they also see things like a decline in functioning and just the things that they're able to do. And I think that they find themselves in a place where they're more likely to start losing friends or family members, and they may deal with bereavement and all of those things contribute a lot to, I think, the mental health issues and things that they are dealing with. Do you see that very often in the adults that you work with?

Mark Yeah, I think we see it, we have connection with some different organizations, particularly Meals on Wheels connecting to individuals, trying to be that person that shows up at the door, dropping off the meal, making a connection. See, it's not really just about that. You know, the provision of a meal for those folks that are experiencing that drop in income, they're also experiencing that no one's necessarily seeing them that day, that week, that month. We don't know how you're doing. We don't necessarily know if someone's calling to check in or find out and a lot of times when we can talk about those co-occurring factors, you know, someone who's experiencing anxiety or depression sometimes can not necessarily feel like eating; they lose their appetite. They may feel like not eating or not carrying on or things like that, which might impact your physical health even more so you can sometimes have those compounding factors when you talk about the adverse effects that people experience when they sort of have a mental health challenge.

But at the same time, we know that there are some ways to mitigate that, to potentially interject some of those connections, to hopefully be able to provide resources for folks not only in the space that they're currently in, but potentially even to move into a new space that has more connection for them. That could be something that would be really helpful for a lot of individuals as well.

Brig I love what you're talking about. You know, again, just the fact that you're able to look at multiple factors, multiple things, you're able to help engage people in programs and services that are attending to more than just one need. You know, I love that example of Meals on Wheels and just having a person be able to check on them, which is so much more than just providing a meal. So that that is incredible. That is incredible. Are there other resources that are out there that you're aware of that would be helpful to our older adults?

Mark Yeah, I mean, I know I've said it already, but I really I think 211, it's such a great connection. It's easy to remember there's a real person on the other end, and they're going to connect folks to that local resource right around them.

Also, right here, I'm based in Athens, Georgia, we have the Community Council on Aging that does a fabulous job, it's a Senior Center that helps those during the day. They operate the Meals on Wheels program that we are more than happy to get to fund right now as a grantee of ours. We have the Area Agency on Aging that is another organization in our area that provides specialty supports to the rural counties in our area.

Then we also know that across the country you can reach out to a lot of those same agencies on aging, elder care locators and things like that. But really, the best, the best connection point for folks is that number 211 or go 211.org. And the reason I say that is it's just so much easier to remember.

There's so many other ones I could rattle off right now. But reaching out to those either getting that local number from 211 or 211.org. Just dialing that number, they'll get you to the right place. I've been that person on the other end and I know the people that are right there now. They're always there to respond to what you're saying, they're organizations groups that are there and available to help them be resources.

Brig To what you're saying, they are organizations and groups that are there and available to help them be resources and the access point is 211. I agree. That's so simple. And I think sometimes we worry about some of our older adults in their memory. But to be quite honest, I think that all of us have a hard time remembering things and keeping it simple like that is fabulous and helpful for everyone for sure. Mark, is there anything else that you'd like to add as far as different things that are there for people or any advice that you would give our listeners?

Mark I'd say the only thing that I'd say is that as far as advice is that to remember, and people say this all the time in the social service sphere, it's just that everyone has something to give. It might be different or more. And so if there's somebody listening that isn't that older adult, remember that you reaching out to the person connecting with them isn't just a gift to them.

It will be one for you very much. I was such a gift for me to get to speak to my grandparents when they were alive. And even as my mom's dad went through dementia and my dad's dad went through Alzheimer's, just even getting to be near them, getting to speak and the moments of getting to connect with them were so huge that I wouldn't trade the time I was sitting there and neither of us having much to say. I would have that right over again. Just have those moments of them getting to say the little bits and moments of recognition that we're there. So it's for the person that is experiencing the trials, but also for the people who are willing to reach out and to connect. It's very easy for us to not see older adults that they're not in school, they're not working, but they're out there and they're some of the most critical folks that we get to interact with.

Brig That's so true. Mark, thank you so much. Mark Madison, the Director of Community Impact with United Way of Northeast Georgia. We appreciate your time today. Mark, thank you.

Amy No matter your age, your mental health matters, there's no extra points for suffering and it shows great strength to recognize and reach out for help when you need it. Thanks for joining me on the Think Tank podcast. See you next time.

Resources For Living

The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC. This material is for informational purposes only. Information is not a substitute for professional health care and is not meant to replace the advice of health care professionals. Contact a health care professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs.

©2022 Resources For Living | 1074655-01-01 (4/22)