

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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Summit County Celebrates Mental Health Awareness, Foster Care Months

SUMMIT COUNTY, OHIO—Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro and County Council designated May as Mental Health Awareness Month and Foster Care Month, affirming the role of awareness in supporting residents facing challenges to their mental health, and recognizing both the children and families involved in foster care.

Mental Health Awareness Month, also known as Mental Health Month, began in 1949 as a vehicle for awareness and advocacy around mental health. In observance of this month, Mental Health America releases an annual toolkit. This year's toolkit is "[Look Around, Look Within](#)," which includes information on how an individual's environment impacts their mental health.

Though there are many challenges facing the mental health of residents, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to ripple through the United States and Summit County. On May 2, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy sounded the alarm on the "[Epidemic of Loneliness](#)" exacerbated by the pandemic. Loneliness represents a threat to both mental and physical health, increasing depression, anxiety, and stress, and escalating the risk of heart disease, stroke, and dementia. The stigma surrounding mental health is a serious barrier to breaking the cycle of loneliness and poor mental health.

"As our community changes, so too do the challenges we face, and the importance of mental health has truly been brought to the forefront in recent years," said Executive Shapiro, "We hear you, our partners hear you, and we want you to know that you are not alone. I encourage our community to embrace each other with warmth and understanding, and if you are struggling, please, reach out."

Resources are available to Summit County residents who are struggling. The Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services (ADM) Board, organizations like NAMI Summit County, Red Oak Behavioral Health, Love Akron, and many other partners fund and offer crucial services to those in need. If you are experiencing a crisis or contemplating suicide, the ADM Board's Hotline is 330-434-9144 and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 9-8-8.

County Executive Shapiro and Council encourage all to join the conversation around mental wellness and health, celebrate the work of countless individuals and institutions, and continue to support family, friends, and neighbors.

May is also Foster Care Month, a time to recognize the important role that members from all parts of child welfare play in supporting children, youth, and families. This year's theme, "Strengthening Minds. Uplifting Families." highlights the importance of taking a holistic and culturally responsive approach to supporting the mental health needs of those involved with child welfare.

Throughout the nation, there are over 391,000 children and youth in foster care, including over 860 children and youth in the care of Summit County Children Services. SCCS works hard to support these children and place them with foster families when they cannot safely be with their own family. Currently, there are 180 foster families in Summit County that deserve appreciation for their commitment and care for children and youth.

"We are so grateful for our foster families here in Summit County, yet there is a need for even more foster families in order to keep children in familiar neighborhoods and schools. I urge anyone interested in becoming a foster family to reach out to SCCS to learn how they can provide a love, safe and nurturing home to a child in need," said County Executive Shapiro.

Visit <https://www.summitkids.org/Child-Services/Foster-Care> to learn how to become a foster family in Summit County.

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