



# CONNECT

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## Celebrating Heritage, Honoring Healing: A September to Remember

Welcome to the September edition of Connect! As we turn the page into this new season, we are reminded of the strength and resilience that define our diverse community. This month, we celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month, from September 15 to October 15, a time to honor the rich cultural contributions of Latino and Hispanic Americans. Their stories, traditions, and unwavering spirit have deeply enriched the fabric of our nation.

September is also National Recovery Month, a crucial time for raising awareness about the importance of mental health and substance use treatment. At Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare, we believe in the power of community and the importance of lifting each other up. Our mission, "Improving Lives Together," resonates deeply with the essence of these celebrations. Just as we honor the vibrant heritage of our Hispanic and Latino brothers and sisters, we also stand in solidarity with those on their journey to recovery, offering hope, support, and the resources necessary for healing. Together, let's continue to build a community where every story is celebrated, every struggle is acknowledged, and every person has the opportunity to thrive.

### DIVERSITY EQUITY & ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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# HISPANIC HERITAGE

## Recovery & Resilience



**By: Cedralia Ellis**

Every year from September 15 to October 15, Hispanic Heritage Month provides an opportunity to celebrate the rich cultural traditions and significant contributions of Hispanic Americans. In Southwestern Indiana, this month is not only a celebration of culture and history but also an essential time to highlight the importance of mental health and recovery within the Hispanic community.

Hispanic Heritage Month starts on the independence days of several Latin American countries and spans important national commemorations, providing a strong symbolic period to reflect on the contributions of Hispanics in the United States. For the diverse Hispanic population in Southwestern Indiana, this month is a vibrant celebration of their traditions, achievements, and contributions to the local community's fabric.

Over the past few decades, Southwestern Indiana has seen significant growth in its Hispanic population. This community has enriched the area with entrepreneurial ventures, educational advancements, and cultural richness. However, like many communities, Hispanics in Southwestern Indiana face unique challenges, particularly in the area of mental health.



Mental health awareness and recovery are crucial issues within the Hispanic community. Cultural stigmas, economic barriers, and a lack of culturally competent healthcare providers often prevent many from seeking the help they need. Hispanic Heritage Month provides a pivotal platform to address these challenges, promoting mental health awareness and the importance of recovery as part of overall well-being.

Culture plays a significant role in how mental health is perceived and treated. Traditional Hispanic values such as 'familismo' (the importance of family) can provide strong support networks but may also pressure individuals to prioritize family needs over personal mental health. Hispanic Heritage Month events can serve as critical touchpoints for disseminating information about mental health resources and encouraging community members to prioritize their psychological well-being.

Recovery from mental health issues is a journey of healing and growth. In the Hispanic community of Southwestern Indiana, celebrating recovery involves acknowledging the courage it takes to seek help and the resilience to overcome challenges. Events during Hispanic Heritage Month can highlight success stories, offer resources for mental health support, and break down the stigmas associated with mental illness.

Several initiatives can be highlighted during Hispanic Heritage Month to promote mental health and recovery:

1. Educational Workshops and Seminars: These events can educate the community about mental health issues, treatment options, and the importance of recovery, tailored to the cultural sensitivities and specific needs of the Hispanic population.
2. Support Groups: Culturally relevant support groups can provide a space for sharing experiences and coping strategies, emphasizing the community's collective strength.
3. Health Fairs: Local health fairs can include mental health screenings and consultations with bilingual professionals to improve access and engagement.
4. Art and Expression: Art exhibits and performances can be powerful mediums for expressing mental health struggles and recovery, offering profound insights into personal journeys and fostering community solidarity.

Hispanic Heritage Month in Southwestern Indiana is more than a celebration of culture and history—it's an essential time to spotlight the mental health needs of the Hispanic community. By integrating mental health awareness and recovery into the month's celebrations, we not only honor the full spectrum of the Hispanic experience but also build stronger, healthier communities equipped to support each other in times of need. This month reminds us of the importance of cultural competence in mental health services and the significant role community solidarity plays in fostering recovery and resilience.





# HONORING OUR HEROES

By: Haley Archer

Every year on August 7, we come together to observe Purple Heart Day, a poignant reminder of the bravery and sacrifices made by the valiant individuals of the U.S. military who were wounded or killed in action. This day is dedicated to honoring those who have endured unimaginable hardships in service to our nation, ensuring their sacrifices are never forgotten.

The Purple Heart Medal, the oldest military decoration still awarded, was established by George Washington in 1782. Originally known as the Badge of Military Merit, it was revived in 1932 on the 200th birthday of George Washington. The medal honors those wounded or killed in combat, recognizing their valor and dedication to protecting our freedoms. The modern Purple Heart is awarded not only for injuries sustained in battle but also during acts of terrorism or as part of peacekeeping forces. The medal itself is a purple heart-shaped piece with a gold border, featuring the profile of George Washington, symbolizing courage and sacrifice.

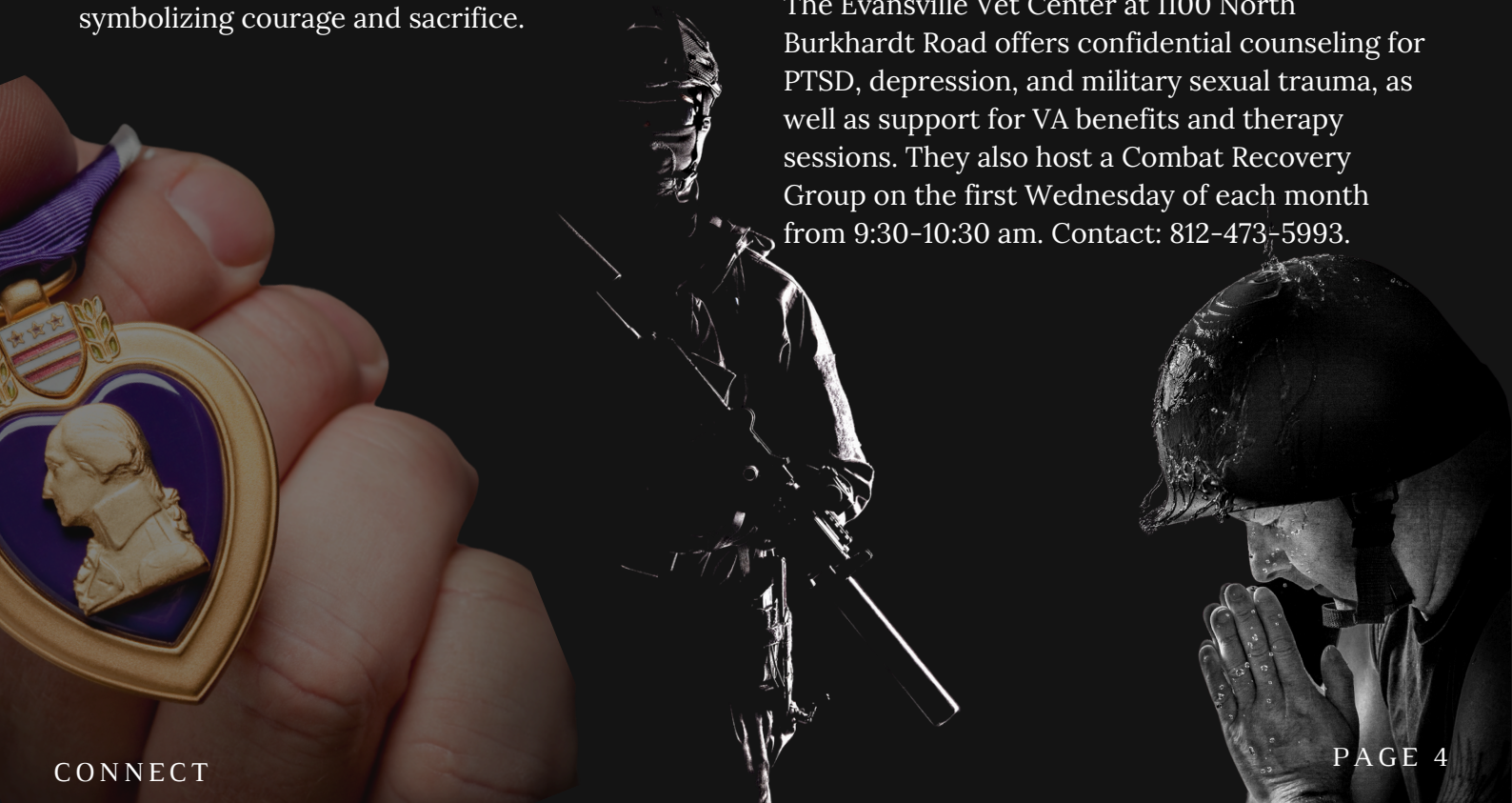
Purple Heart Day serves as a crucial reminder of the immense sacrifices made by our service members. It encourages us to reflect on their bravery and dedication, ensuring their sacrifices are never forgotten. This day also urges us to support and honor our veterans, ensuring they receive the recognition and assistance they deserve. In Vanderburgh County, several resources are available to support our veterans, offering a wide range of services tailored to their needs.

### [Hoofbeats Therapeutic Riding Center](#)

Located in Newburgh, this non-profit organization provides free therapeutic horseback riding for veterans, helping to enhance their physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. Through equine-assisted activities, the center aims to improve the quality of life for veterans, offering a supportive and healing environment.

### [Evansville Vet Center](#)

The Evansville Vet Center at 1100 North Burkhardt Road offers confidential counseling for PTSD, depression, and military sexual trauma, as well as support for VA benefits and therapy sessions. They also host a Combat Recovery Group on the first Wednesday of each month from 9:30-10:30 am. Contact: 812-473-5993.



**Continued**

[VFW Post 1114](#)

VFW Post 1114 in Evansville supports veterans with VA benefits and community events, including bingo, karaoke, and trivia nights. It's a place where veterans can find camaraderie and support among peers.

[Evansville VA Clinic](#)

At 6211 East Waterford Boulevard, the Evansville VA Clinic provides primary and mental health care, transportation services, and an on-site pharmacy, open Monday through Friday.

[Indiana Legal Services](#)

Indiana Legal Services offers free civil legal aid to low-income residents and veterans, covering family law, landlord/tenant disputes, consumer law, and public benefits.

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[Vanderburgh County Veterans Services](#)

This office in Evansville helps veterans and families file claims for benefits, with personalized assistance from a County Veterans Service Officer.

[Crisis Services](#)

- Southwestern Crisis Services: (812) 422-1100
- Veterans Crisis Line: Dial 988, then press 1
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- Vanderburgh County Crisis Line: 812-422-1100



# Employee Spotlight

Bedjamin “Bedji” Joseph

## Mobile Crisis Team Responder

I’m originally from Haiti, where I spent my early years before moving to the U.S. as a child. My family settled in Florida, where I grew up. After high school, I attended Polk State College for a semester and was later accepted into Florida Atlantic University (FAU). However, when my dad got a job opportunity in Indiana, he decided to move there as it offered better prospects compared to Florida, especially since my mom had just given birth to my little brother. I chose to move to Indiana with them to support my family. After relocating in 2019, I enrolled at Vincennes University and later transferred to the University of Southern Indiana in 2021, where I’ve been living in Evansville ever since.

How many languages can you speak?

I’m fluent in Creole, English, and French.

How does the local Haitian community differ from those in more populated areas?

In more populated areas, there are more events and opportunities to meet people from diverse backgrounds. In smaller communities, like Evansville, the Haitian community is still emerging, and people often get caught up in their own lives, making it harder to connect.



## Continued

### What can Evansville do to become more welcoming and supportive to people of Haitian heritage?

- Recognize and treat us with respect as human beings.
- Stop perpetuating the stereotype that we practice Voodoo. I don't believe in it, and it's often used to demonize Haitian culture.
- Develop partnerships by setting up booths or tables at local events.
- Provide consistent ESOL classes with a steady schedule.
- Host a culture fest that celebrates all cultures, not just one.

### What are some ways Southwestern can celebrate the diverse backgrounds of its staff?

- Celebrate diversity by recognizing important cultural days, such as Haitian Independence Day on January 1st, Juneteenth on June 19th, and Native American or Latino Heritage Months. Southwestern could continue its current practices and/or continue the newsletter to acknowledge these cultural events.
- Introduce job shadowing programs to inspire younger people to consider careers in the field.





# NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH





# LIVING WITH OCD

Navigating Daily Challenges and Dispelling Misconceptions

By: Haley Archer



Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is often misunderstood and mischaracterized, but for those of us living with it, the reality is far more complex and challenging. As someone diagnosed with OCD at the age of 32, I want to share my journey and shed light on what it's like to live with this condition, particularly focusing on contamination OCD, and its impact on daily life and work.

OCD is not a personality quirk or a simple case of being overly meticulous. It is a mental health disorder that affects millions of people worldwide. Common myths suggest that OCD is just about handwashing, cleanliness, or being excessively tidy, but the reality is far more nuanced. OCD involves persistent, intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors (compulsions) that individuals feel compelled to perform to alleviate the anxiety these thoughts cause.

One crucial aspect to understand is that OCD can evolve and change over time. New triggers can arise, and what once seemed manageable can become a new source of anxiety. Additionally, there are many subsets of OCD, and not all of them involve cleanliness. For instance, some individuals may have obsessions related to symmetry, harm, or even moral and religious concerns, which are just as debilitating as those involving contamination.

Living with contamination OCD means constantly battling the fear of being contaminated or contaminating others. This fear can extend to real or perceived threats, including germs, chemicals, or even intangible sources like bad luck. My daily routine involves repetitive checking of door handles, avoiding certain places and objects, and seeking reassurance that I am not at risk of contamination.

## Continued

One of the most challenging aspects for me is being in the kitchen and touching things. I also avoid having my feet touch the floor whenever possible, often walking on my tiptoes or sitting crisscross to avoid it. When someone notices, I joke that "the floor is lava" because it's easier than explaining what's actually happening. This avoidance behavior is a coping mechanism, but it often leads others to misunderstand my actions. I am often concerned that others label me as crazy or lazy due to not doing certain things for myself, like cooking, or going into certain rooms based on my perception of them being dirty.

At home, OCD can affect relationships and routine activities. For example, I may avoid touching certain objects or spaces that I perceive as contaminated, making it difficult for others to share the same environment comfortably. This can strain relationships with family members who may not fully understand the extent of my fears or the reasons behind my behaviors. My contamination fears also affect my sleeping arrangements. I have a separate bedroom from my husband and use a lofted bed to minimize contamination. I monitor all blankets and pillows to ensure they never leave the bed and become contaminated by other surface. Sometimes, I feel that my sheets are dirty and clean them excessively, which can be wiping them off repeatedly for three or four hours before I can fall asleep.

In the workplace, OCD can hinder productivity and participation. The constant need to perform rituals or avoid certain tasks can make it challenging to meet deadlines or collaborate effectively with colleagues. For instance, I might spend excessive time checking door handles or be unable to handle specific materials, impacting my ability to perform my job efficiently.

Living with OCD requires support from family, friends, and the community. Educating others about the condition and reducing stigma can make a significant difference. Encouraging those with OCD to seek professional help and providing understanding and patience in their daily struggles is crucial.

Living with OCD is a daily battle, but understanding, effective management strategies, and support can make a profound difference. By sharing my experience and shedding light on the realities of OCD, I hope to foster greater empathy and awareness. Remember, OCD is not just about being tidy or meticulous; it is a serious condition that requires compassion and appropriate care.

For those looking for more in-depth understanding and guidance, I recommend the following books:

1. "Brain Lock" by Jeffrey M. Schwartz
2. This book offers a step-by-step method for managing OCD through self-directed cognitive-behavioral techniques.
3. "Turtles All The Way Down" by John Green
4. A novel that provides a poignant and personal look into the life of a young woman dealing with OCD, written by an author who has lived with the condition.
5. "Loving Someone with OCD: Help for You and Your Family" by Karen J. Landsman, Ph.D., Kathleen M. Rupertus, MA, MS, Cherry Pedrick, RN
6. This guide offers practical advice for family members and loved ones of individuals with OCD, helping them understand the disorder and provide effective support.

By raising awareness and dispelling myths, we can help create a more understanding and supportive environment for those living with OCD.





# Suicide Awareness

By: Nate Wire

With September being Suicide Awareness Month, I wanted to personally share some information as well as a bit of my own personal experiences dealing with suicide and mental health. As a lot of us know, suicide is one of the leading causes of lives lost here in the US, and it continues to grow more and more with children, young teens, and adults. Statistics show that men are more likely to successfully attempt suicide than women with it being the 11th biggest cause, as with children it being the second biggest cause. 94% of adults have voiced that suicide can be prevented, which I also agree with. I have seen more awareness, campaigns, and resources becoming accessible to those in need and new ways to reach those who are in crisis. With Southwestern's 24/7 Crisis Line, this is just one resource that our community has, as well as all over if needed.

As someone who struggled during childhood and into early adulthood with suicidal ideation, behaviors, and mental health, I feel very passionate about wanting to educate the world more on the importance of taking care of yourself mentally and emotionally to prevent this from happening more and more. I did not have as many resources growing up to help me with my suicidal ideation or behaviors outside of my immediate family, so now I am grateful of the work I get to do for kids and families, and the growing resources that continue to be available for our adult population as well.

I challenge everyone who reads this to continue educating themselves on the topic, and to find at least one new way to either prevent or support someone who is dealing with this world-wide problem. We as a team, unit, community need to decrease the number of lives lost, continue bringing awareness to suicide, and continue to provide the best care we can to all humans.



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