

Naples Daily News

HEALTH

Free mental health sessions available to frontline workers in Southwest Florida

Liz Freeman Naples Daily News

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Naples-based Healthcare Network is offering free mental health support to Southwest Florida's frontline workers in schools and their families who are anxious about the start of school later this month.

The counseling is available to anyone in schools, from teachers to janitors, who cannot work from home.

The free mental health sessions are available to other essential workers not able to work from home, including people in healthcare, emergency services, grocery stores, agriculture, restaurants, maintenance, delivery services and retail.

The nonprofit network based in Collier County received a \$50,000 grant to provide up to 500 mental health visits before Nov. 14.

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And: Coronavirus anxiety has upended our lives, but take a moment to breathe

Individuals can have up to three free visits with a mental health professional either through telemedicine or socially distant in-person visits, said Emily Ptaszek, president and CEO of Healthcare Network.

The grant is from the medical aid organization, Direct Relief, in partnership with the National Association of Community Health Centers.

Direct Relief, based in Santa Barbara, California, has provided similar grants to 520 community health centers in 49 states, according to the organization. Healthcare Network is the only recipient in the region among the 27 organizations in Florida to receive grants.

The work of Healthcare Network and other nonprofit community health centers across is more critical than ever since the onset of COVID-19, Thomas Tighe, president and CEO of Direct Relief, said in a news release.

In case you missed it: Hundreds honor Naples firefighter who died of COVID-19

More COVID-19 news: 45 inmates test positive for COVID-19 at Naples Jail Center

“Direct Relief is doing everything possible to bolster the work and support the staffs at the safety-net health facilities on which so many patients and their families rely for excellent care and trust for advice in this public health emergency,” he said.

The COVID-19 pandemic is here for a while and is weighing on the mental health and well-being of workers in many industries, Ptaszek said.

“The impact from the perspective of mental health is becoming very significant,” she said.

The free sessions are ideal for people who have never sought behavioral health services or who have no idea how to pursue it, she said.

“We are trying to offer multiple points of entry to get this kind of support,” she said. “It is for people who need help and don’t know if they are in a danger zone or not.”

A baseline way to determine if someone is in trouble is how functional an individual is in daily activities, she said.

“If there is a functional change to their ability to sleep or perform or they are not feeling like themselves, those are triggers,” she said.

To make an appointment for one of the free mental health visits, call Healthcare Network at 239-658-3185.