

# YMCA Provides Counseling For Back-to-School Stress

By Mia Glass

RED BANK – From distributing meals to providing revised summer camp programs for children to switching over to telehealth counseling services, the YMCA of Greater Monmouth County is continuing its long tradition of health and social services for the community during the coronavirus crisis.

As the school year approaches, the YMCA has made it clear that it is wholeheartedly committed to helping schools, students, teachers and parents gear up for a very different fall semester.

“Even before the pandemic began, the Y provided therapeutic counseling in partnership with 89 schools,” said LeeAnn Wagner, vice president of counseling and social services at the YMCA of Greater Monmouth County.

The Y recognizes the heightened stress that comes with the start of any school year, but especially one resuming in the midst of a pandemic. The Y of Monmouth County is unique in its mental health programs and wanted to keep that essential service through telehealth counseling.

“We are actually only one of a handful of YMCAs across the country that offers extensive counseling and social services,” said Wagner.

The counseling and social services team was able to fully switch over to online counseling in just one weekend, and now offers appointments on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

“I definitely think the pandemic has increased the need for mental health services,” said Teicia Gaupp, vice president of marketing and communications at the YMCA of Greater Monmouth County.

As part of their back-to-school stress management services, the Y hosted a Zoom conference Tuesday, Aug. 11, with speaker Alisha De Lorenzo, an education and health specialist who has been a longtime partner of the Y.

De Lorenzo has been in education for almost 20 years and is now a leader in supporting schools across New Jersey as the state’s first social and emotional learning coordinator. She also has her own private practice as a licensed therapist and serves as interim deputy director of Garden State Equality.



DEANNA RYAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Alisha De Lorenzo will lead a conversation on mental well-being, hosted by the YMCA of Greater Monmouth County Aug. 11.

“I see it really as three pandemics that we are facing as a society – one has always been the pandemic of trauma, the other being, obviously, COVID, and the third being the pandemic of racism in America. These three things have collided at such a time that has made everybody incredibly vulnerable to what’s happening in the world,” said De Lorenzo.

De Lorenzo spoke about the idea of healing starting with the self, but also the importance of building bridges between oneself and one’s community, school and family.

“I hope that people can see that we are all in this together. When we collectively experience trauma, the way that we heal is collectively also,” she said.

With the summer almost coming to an end, De Lorenzo involved participants in some exercises that they can continue to practice as the school year begins. Viewers were able to practice breathing techniques, as well as do a tense-and-release body scan that enabled them to be more in tune with the tension in their bodies.

Although the meeting was virtual, De Lorenzo and the Y were incredibly successful in reaching a wide variety of people. Participants were able to ask questions and make comments through the chat box.

“I am actually having really powerful experiences with each group that I am engaged with and it’s really showing that connection can happen through the digital landscape and healing can happen by any means,” said De Lorenzo.

The team at the Y wants to have De Lorenzo back for another talk and is very open to building new relationships and have new guest speakers as well.

“The Y is doing some really great work with supporting people’s mental health and well-being and I’m always happy to partner with the Y to expand our capacity of reaching more people,” said De Lorenzo.

The Y Academy is also already planning on offering academic support to children two or three times a week to help them adjust to remote learning, in addition to mental health counseling and other child care services. It will continue to develop more programs as the year goes on to keep supporting the community.

Originally, De Lorenzo was planning to host a mindfulness and self-care session for school leaders in the spring. However, with everyone dealing with stress during

tions to a really abnormal time. We’ve never been in this very moment before,” said De Lorenzo.

In her virtual chat, “Healing Self, Fami-

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– Teicia Gaupp

the pandemic, she and the team at the Y thought it would be more beneficial to provide a session for the community as a whole.

“I think it’s really important for people to realize that they are having normal reac-

lies and Communities,” De Lorenzo touched on topics such as good versus bad stress, trauma, adverse community environments and how to improve one’s well-being and immunity.



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