



SMART



SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH BY
ADVOCATING FOR RESOURCES TOGETHER

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT 2026



School-Based Services



Spectrum Health's counselors can be on-site in your school on select days to provide convenient, accessible, and discreet counseling services for youth.

For more information, reach out to Shanese Mills, Supervisor of School-Based Services, millss@shswny.org

Spectrum Health C.A.R.E.S.



24/7 Crisis Hotline for youth and families in need

716-882-4357 (HELP)

shswny.org/services/cares/



WHAT IS SMART?

Nearly 80% of chronic mental health conditions emerge in childhood. While mental health concerns are frequently seen in public schools, the pandemic's combination of isolation plus other mental health issues, has exacerbated the need for added supports.

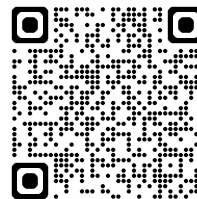
The Erie County SMART Collaborative is a professional learning community established to prioritize P-12 student mental health and social emotional learning. Comprised of Erie County School Districts, educators, community agencies and representatives from Erie County, SMART serves as a vital link between available mental health resources and students.

CONNECT

smart@e1b.org
e1b.org/smart

RESOURCES

e1b.org/smartresources



We believe that our community deserves to be...

SAFE



Students and caregivers feel safe and accepted when seeking mental health supports at school and in their community.

INFORMED



Students and caregivers are aware and knowledgeable about mental health and wellness, understanding all supports provided within the community.

ACCESSIBLE



SMART advocates for and improves student and caregiver connections to community supports by addressing individual community needs and reducing barriers.

CONNECTED



Students and caregivers are connected to resources and supports that foster relationships to promote a sense of belonging and wellness.

EMPOWERED



SMART uplifts students and caregivers to promote the growth and wellness of the community.

Conference at a Glance

8 AM

Registration/Light Breakfast/Networking

Register in the Lobby, then join us in the Ballroom for a light breakfast

9 AM

Welcome and Keynote

Ballroom

10:15 - 11:15 AM

Breakout Sessions #1

- Who Am I Without My Name Badge? Supporting Families Starts with Knowing Yourself
Room 103
- From Buy-In to Shared Governance: Civic Participation as a Youth Mental Health Strategy
Room 104
- Sculpting Wellness: Creatively Embedding Tiered Social-Emotional Supports for Whole-School Communities
Room 108
- The Mental Health Paradox
Room 109
- Keynote Discussion: Conversations with Ken
Ballroom

11:30 - 12:30 PM

Breakout Sessions #2

- Healthy Professionals, Healthy Schools: Addressing Educator Burnout with Compassion
Room 103
- A System for Synergy: Strengthening Collaboration Through Strategic Alignment
Room 104
- Building Safe & Connected School Communities Through Restorative Practices
Room 108
- Play Therapy: Purposeful Interventions for Children who have Experienced Trauma
Room 109
- Trauma Systems Therapy in Practice: Integrating Evidence-Based Models with Community-Informed Solutions
Ballroom

12:30 - 1:30 PM

Lunch + Awards Ceremony

Ballroom

1:30 - 2:30 PM

Breakout Sessions #3

- How to Be an Effective Coping Coach: Youth and Nicotine Prevention
Room 103
- Youth Mental Health in the Digital Age
Room 104
- Supporting Schools through Partnership with Community Agencies
Room 108
- The Leaders' Role with Restorative and Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools
Room 109
- Building Stronger Systems: Leveraging School Data to Support Youth Mental Health and Wellness
Ballroom

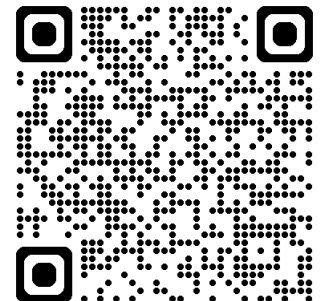
2:45 - 3:30 PM

Closing Panel: Results Count®: An Equity-Centered Model for Youth and Family Supports

Ballroom



Digital Agenda
e1b.org/smartconference





About Our Keynote: Ken E. Nwadike Jr.

Ken E. Nwadike, Jr is a documentary filmmaker, motivational speaker, and peace activist popularly known as the "Free Hugs Guy." Ken is the founder of the Free Hugs Project, which gained popularity as Nwadike made major news headlines for his peacekeeping efforts and de-escalation of violence during protests, riots, and political rallies. Ken was featured in Google's 2016 Year in Search video as a highlight among some of the year's most defining moments and he has made many appearances on news programs, including CNN, USA Today, Good Morning Britain, and BBC News.

Name: _____
Email: _____
Phone Number: _____

Play SMART BINGO! Mark each table you visit and try to get 5 in a row! Submit this BINGO sheet to the green box by 1:00 PM for a chance to win!

S	M	A	R	T
D&G Wellness	American Foundation for Suicide Prevention	Erie 2 BOCES	Be Your Own Hero	New Directions
GLYS Western New York	Peaceful Schools	Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention	UB School of Social Work	Erie County Office of Health Equity
Catholic Charities of Buffalo	Spectrum Health and Human Services	★	Charlie Health	The School Mental Health Resource and Training Center
WNY Compassion Connection	Starbridge, Inc.	Erie 1 BOCES	Peaceful Schools	Compass of Greater Buffalo
Horizon Health	Mental Health Advocates of WNY	BryLin Hospital	SunnySide Roadshow	SMART

PLAY BINGO!

1. Grab your BINGO Board
2. Mark each table you visit
3. Try and get 5 in a row
4. Submit your BINGO card by 1pm for a chance to win a prize

Learning Tracks



Embedding Best Practices



Leading and Reducing Barriers



Mental Health as a School Safety Strategy



Supporting Families

Agenda

8 AM
Registration/Light Breakfast/Networking
Ballroom

9 AM
Welcome and Keynote
Restoring Civility and Connection
Ken E. Nwadike Jr., Free Hugs Project
Ballroom

10:15 - 11:15 AM
Breakout Sessions #1



Who Am I Without My Name Badge? Supporting Families Starts with Knowing Yourself | Room 103

Sabrina Timm, Mental Health Advocates of WNY

Participants examine how personal experiences, values, beliefs, and identities shape their work with youth and families. Through reflection and discussion, they identify strengths and growth areas, explore authenticity and empathy, and develop sustainable self-awareness strategies that strengthen trust, relationships, well-being, supervision, and family-centered professional practice consistently in daily professional interactions.



From Buy-In to Shared Governance: Civic Participation as a Youth Mental Health Strategy | Room 104

Shane Keyes

This interactive session presents civic participation as a youth mental health and development strategy that builds agency, belonging, purpose, and connection. Using Hart's Ladder of Participation and a Buffalo youth advisory board, participants compare symbolic engagement with shared governance and consider institutional designs that strengthen youth voice and trust.



Sculpting Wellness: Creatively Embedding Tiered Social-Emotional Supports for Whole-School Communities
Room 108

Kimberly Luce and Joanna Thompson, Peaceful Schools

This interactive workshop shows how culturally responsive, tiered social-emotional supports can create safer, connected, resilient school communities. Grounded in Peaceful Schools frameworks, New York SEL Benchmarks, and CRSE principles, participants explore creative cross-sector strategies that build trust, psychological safety, collaboration, joy, and practical social-emotional learning across whole-school ecosystems and settings.



The Mental Health Paradox | Room 109

Karl Shallowhorn, Mental Health Association in NYS

This presentation is designed to help participants understand the role that stigma plays in youth seeking support, learn the myths and facts about violence and mental health, learn how adults can work to address the impact of stigma and you and how adults can be a protective factor and support youth.



Keynote Discussion: Conversations with Ken Ballroom

Ken Nwadike Jr., Free Hugs Project

Ken will continue the themes from his keynote address. He will share stories of de-escalating intense confrontations on the front-lines of riots and protests. He will describe ways that peacekeeping principles can be used proactively in the workplace and community to prevent heightened situations from occurring.



11:30 AM -12:30 PM Breakout Sessions #2



Healthy Professionals, Healthy Schools: Addressing Educator Burnout with Compassion | Room 103

Danielle Vallas, D&G Wellness Consulting

This evidence-informed workshop helps educators and school professionals recognize chronic stress, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout. Participants examine systemic workplace contributors, connect staff well-being to school climate and student outcomes, and practice sustainable resilience, boundary, recovery, and self-compassion strategies while creating an immediately usable personal wellness action plan



A System for Synergy: Strengthening Collaboration Through Strategic Alignment | Room 104

Alexander Andrzejewski and Carolyn Stewart, Lackawanna Stakeholder Coalition

Using the Lackawanna Stakeholder Coalition as a case study, this session explains how community input, strategic planning, and collaboration can align coalition work with school district goals. Participants explore collective impact, alignment tools, mission, vision, values, and data protocols, gaining an actionable process for sustainable cross-sector school-community coalition building efforts.



Building Safe & Connected School Communities Through Restorative Practices | Room 108

Brady Deunk and Alycia Bongiovanni, Erie 2 BOCES

Thriving school communities don't happen by chance: they are intentionally designed. Drawing from Trauma-Informed Care and Restorative Practices, this highly interactive session explores how welcoming environments, intentional relationships, and community-building practices create the conditions that promote well-being, strengthen school safety, and support learning for all.



Play Therapy: Purposeful Interventions for Children who have Experienced Trauma | Room 109

Dr. Nichole Barrett, The Rural Outreach Center

Participants learn how play therapy helps children process trauma, build resilience, regulate emotions, and restore well-being. The session connects trauma with brain development, attachment, behavior, and self-regulation, then introduces directive and nondirective approaches, sensory activities, expressive play, storytelling, therapeutic games, and attachment-focused strategies that foster safety, connection, mastery, and healing.



Trauma Systems Therapy in Practice: Integrating Evidence-Based Models with Community-Informed Solutions | Ballroom

Bijoux Bahati-Sr., Jewish Family Services of WNY

This session examines Jewish Family Services of Western New York's implementation of Trauma Systems Therapy, an evidence-based model connecting emotional regulation with social environments. Participants explore how schools, families, clinicians, cultural brokers, and community partners integrate community feedback, maintain fidelity, reduce access barriers, strengthen coordination, and promote culturally responsive resilience.

12:30 -1:30 PM Lunch + Awards Ceremony Room 106

The Mental Health Impact Awards recognizes individuals and organizations that have demonstrated exceptional dedication and made a significant positive impact in promoting mental health within our region. These impact and leadership award categories are for a person in higher education, P-12 schools, agencies (public or private), community, government/policy, journalists. There will be one award recipient per category.



1:30 PM TURN IN YOUR BINGO BOARDS!

1:30 -2:30 PM Breakout Sessions #3



How to Be an Effective Coping Coach: Youth and Nicotine Use **Room 103**

Terry Herring, Erie 1 BOCES and Erin Parr, Horizon Health SAFER Program

Participants learn to serve as effective coping coaches for people struggling with vaping and nicotine use. The session explains nicotine biology, tobacco and vapor-product regulations, available interventions and supports, practical coping skills, and helpful resources, equipping attendees to guide individuals toward healthier responses, informed choices, and sustainable behavior change efforts.



Youth Mental Health in the Digital Age | **Room 104**

Suzy-Amou Mawien, University at Buffalo, Institute for Social Policy Advancement (MISPA)

This session examines why youth use generative AI chatbots for emotional validation and crisis support, including bias and digital safety risks. Presenters contrast clinical therapy with evidence-based peer support, then provide school leaders with implementation templates, advocacy resources, funding guidance, and coalition strategies for safer, human-centered youth mental health supports.



Supporting Schools through Partnership with Community Agencies

Room 108

Shannon Farnung, Monroe 2 BOCES and Andrea McKenna, The Center for Youth

This session presents a model for collaboration between schools and community agencies, ranging from networking to full integration based on trust and commitment. Participants review partnership examples that reduce learning barriers, expand opportunities, support mental health, and strengthen family engagement, then assess needs and identify opportunities to build stronger partnerships.



The Leaders' Role with Restorative and Trauma-Informed Practices in Schools **Room 109**

Jessica Karches, Erie 1 BOCES and Melissa Rivers, Erie 2 BOCES

This session examines how school and district leaders can drive trauma-informed and restorative transformation. Participants connect leadership decisions with culture, policy, psychological safety, and educator retention; evaluate conduct codes and routines; replace punitive approaches with equitable relational systems; and use implementation road maps, toolkits, data, and accountability measures to sustain change.



Building Stronger Systems: Leveraging School Data to Support Youth Mental Health and Wellness **Ballroom**

Natasha Mehta, Buffalo Public Schools

This interactive session helps school and district teams turn data into coordinated mental health action. Participants connect YRBS, SEL Scale, and Tiered Fidelity Inventory insights within MTSS and WSCC frameworks, then use a three-lens protocol to identify needs, ask better questions, and select improvements that can begin within 30 days.

2:45 -3:30 PM Closing Panel

Ballroom

Kate Hilliman, Erie County Youth Bureau, and Leanne Tybor, Erie County Department of Probation

Results Count® is an equity-centered leadership model that strengthens decision-making and collaboration across youth-serving systems. This interactive session will provide an overview of Erie County supports and engage participants in meaningful dialogue to gather feedback, elevate youth and community voice, and strengthen services for youth and families.



University at Buffalo
School of Social Work

Social work is vital

→ and our research
makes life better





This event would not be possible without the vision, hard work, and dedication of the SMART Steering Committee

Ann Linder, Orchard Park Central School District
Anna Cieri, Suicide Prevention Coalition Of Erie County
Annahita (Anna) Ball, University at Buffalo, School of Social Work
April Slater, New Directions Youth and Family Services
Candace Reimer, Erie 1 BOCES
Catie Gavin, Erie County
David Evans, Cleveland Hill Union Free School District
Emily Sass, Erie 1 BOCES
Emily Schutte Watson, Erie 1 BOCES
Hannah Balfour, Erie 1 BOCES
Heather Wood, Erie County
Jean Sadowy, NYS Office of Mental Health
Jessica Karches, Erie 1 BOCES
Kailin Kucewicz, Erie 1 BOCES
Karen Rybicki, Erie County
Kelli Gaiser, New Directions Youth and Family Services
Lisa Chimera, Erie County
Mai Nguyen, Buffalo Public Schools
Marie Sly, Erie County Department of Mental Health
Matthew Bystrak, Ken-Ton UFSD
Melissa Brind'Amour, West Seneca Central School District
Melissa Rivers, Erie 2 BOCES
Michael Capuana, Erie 1 BOCES
Michael Cornell, Hilbert College
Sarah Bonk, Erie County Department of Mental Health
Talisa King, Live Well Erie
Tera Siegfried, Erie 1 BOCES
Tom Adams, Hamburg Central School District

Thank You to Our Sponsors!

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- WNY Compassion Connection
- University at Buffalo Alberti Center for Bullying and Abuse Prevention
- Be Your Own Hero
- Catholic Charities of Buffalo
- Compeer
- D&G Wellness
- Mental Health Advocates of WNY
- Peaceful Schools
- Starbridge
- Sunnyside Roadshow
- The School Mental Health Resource and Training Center



Charlie Health's virtual Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) is designed for people who need more than once-weekly therapy but don't require inpatient treatment. We offer specialized programs for kids, teens, and adults that combine curated groups, individual therapy, and family therapy into personalized treatment plans.



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Reach out to learn more
(986) 206-0414
charliehealth.com



SMART



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YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT 2026

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Concerned about a family member?

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