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Official News Release

For Immediate Release

MENDHAM TOWNSHIP JOINS MORRIS COUNTY “STIGMA FREE” INITIATIVE *COUNTYWIDE EFFORT FOSTERS TREATMENT AND RECOVERY* *FOR MENTAL ILLNESS AND ADDICTION*

The **Mendham Township Committee** has passed a resolution declaring the township Stigma-Free, making the total 34 of Morris County’s 39 towns, along with hospitals, schools, nonprofit agencies, and law enforcement groups that have joined the countywide “Stigma Free” initiative.

MENDHAM TWP
PROUD TO BE
STIGMA-FREE

morriscountystigmfree.org

The overriding goal is to help eradicate the stigma associated with mental illness and with substance abuse disorders. The goal is to get people who need help into treatment programs.

“We are planning to address a wide range of challenges, from substance abuse and mental health to supporting individuals with special needs,” said **Mendham Township Committeewoman Amalia**

Duarte.

“We want to be a welcoming community and make sure all families feel included and supported,” added Committeewoman Duarte, who is leading the Stigma-Free effort for Mendham Township.

Committeewoman Duarte said Mendham Township plans to work with neighboring Mendham Borough on the Stigma-Free initiative (Mendham Borough passed a Stigma-Free resolution in 2017) and create joint programs and activities to highlight the issues of mental illness and addiction.

“Mendham Township is pleased to join so many other towns in promoting mental health and encouraging a Stigma-Free community. Mental illness is a serious public health concern,” said **Mendham Township Mayor Rich Diegnan**.

“Research shows us that there is significant overlap in those with substance abuse disorders, as they also suffer from other mental health disorders. We can continue to fight stigma through meaningful conversations with one another and increasing awareness of these difficulties that so many people face. I am proud that Mendham Township has taken the pledge to be stigma-free,” added Mayor Deignan.

As part of the countywide initiative, residents are urged to **take the Stigma Free Pledge:** <https://morriscountystigmafree.org/take-the-pledge/>

Mendham Township is the latest member of a less-than-two-year-old grass roots movement that recognizes the high prevalence of mental illness and substance use disorders in our communities. The Stigma-Free initiative promotes re-education and understanding that can lead to treatment and recovery – minus the stigma associated with these illnesses.

Leaders of this movement from across the county are now working with school districts and faith-based groups to become active participants.



“The goal is to bring our entire county community together in a united effort to help people seek recovery, without fear of stigma or reprisal,” said **Morris County Freeholder Director Doug Cabana**. “We are glad to be members of the Stigma-Free community, along with Mendham Township.”

Mendham Township joins a vast majority of Morris County municipalities that have

signed on as Stigma-Free communities

Other Stigma-Free towns are Boonton, Boonton Township, Butler, Chatham Borough, Chatham Township, Chester Borough, Chester Township, Denville, Dover, East Hanover, Hanover, Jefferson, Lincoln Park, Long Hill, Madison, Mendham Borough, Mine Hill, Montville, Mount Olive, Morris Plains, Morristown, Morris Township, Mt. Arlington, Mountain Lakes, Netcong, Parsippany, Pequannock, Randolph, Rockaway Borough, Rockaway Township, Roxbury, Victory Gardens, and Washington Township, plus Morris County.

“It is support shown for this Stigma-Free initiative by towns like Mendham Township -- Mayor Rich Diegnan, Committeewoman Duarte and the full township committee -- and their residents that can make this grass roots effort succeed,” said **Freeholder Kathy DeFillippo**, the board’s liaison on Stigma-Free issues.

Here are just a few of many voices in Morris County supporting the initiative:

Mendham Borough Mayor Neil Henry: *“We have all been affected by mental illness in some way. Becoming Stigma-Free is the first step in fighting this disease as a community. Only by removing the perception of shame or embarrassment will we erase those feelings that prevent our neighbors, friends and family members from seeking help.”*

Mt. Arlington Mayor Michael Stanzilis: *“We want everyone to know help is available and no one should suffer alone. Establishing Stigma-Free communities will raise awareness of resources and encourage residents to engage in care as soon as a need is identified, so that recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided.”*

Chester Borough Mayor Janet Hoven: *“Mental illness and drug abuse touch the lives of many, not only in Chester Borough, but in all of society. No one should feel less of a person regardless of an illness or addiction. We support the initiative and hope that through this program, all residents will feel accepted and supported by all.”*

The **Morris County Board of Freeholders** in 2016 passed a [resolution](#) designating Morris County as a Stigma-Free County, **joining an already established movement** as a partner.

A **Stigma Free website** www.morriscountystigmfree.org provides a members-provided wealth of information and resources, and a calendar of upcoming events related to mental illness and substance abuse. A Stigma-Free Toolkit also is available for towns, schools, and faith-based communities.

As part of the countywide initiative, residents are urged to take the Stigma Free Pledge: <https://morriscountystigmfree.org/take-the-pledge/>

For information on the disease of mental illness, visit www.nami.org and for information on NAMI’s national Stigma Free effort, visit: <https://www.nami.org/stigmfree>

Stigma is defined as a mark of disgrace which results from the judgment by others. When an individual is labeled by their illness they experience judgment and prejudice. Stigma brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help.

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