

SPECIAL SECTION

The RESTAURANT
**MENTAL
 HEALTH**
 TOOLKIT

No matter what brings you to restaurants—whether it's passion or a paycheck—there's no denying just how tough the work can be on your mental health. While overcoming the industry's worst offenses (lack of health care, low pay, long hours, tyrannical behavior, etc.) will require a full cultural reset, there are small steps workers and owners can take to improve their mental well-being and create a culture that fosters kindness, compassion, and wellness. That's what this issue and toolkit are all about: learning how to take care of yourself and others, sharing resources, and starting hard, long-overdue conversations about mental health in restaurants.

2 It Begins with the Basics

4 Destigmatize Therapy

5 Mental Health Tools, Tips, and Training

7 How to Talk to Colleagues

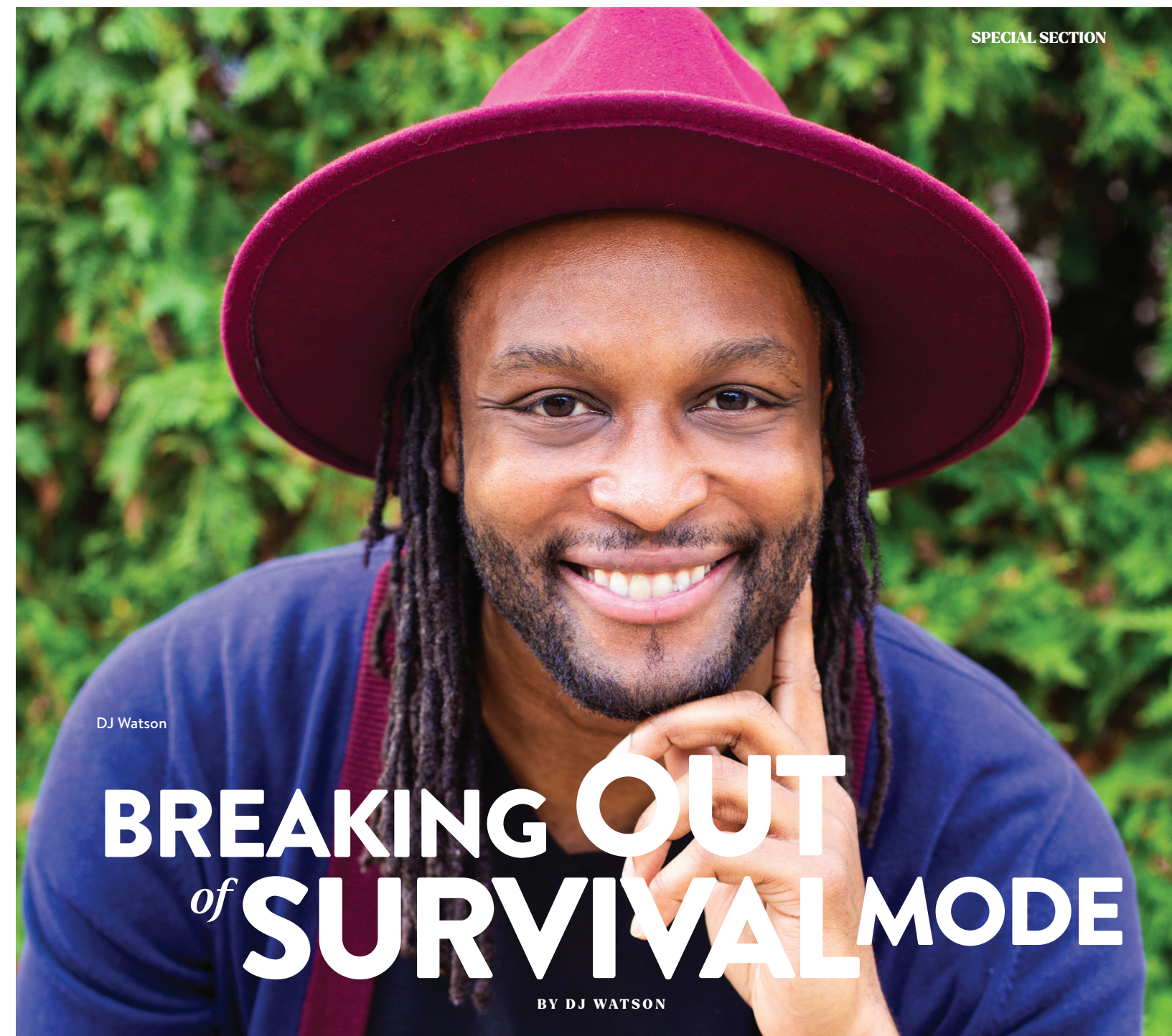
8 Industry Sobriety Network, Localized

9 Your Mental Health Plan

10 Crisis, Addiction, and Industry Resources



Scan here to login or register at *Plate* and download a PDF of the Mental Health Toolkit to share with your team.



DJ Watson

BREAKING OUT
of
SURVIVAL MODE

BY DJ WATSON

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a way of saying: what do we need to be our best selves? It starts at the bottom with physiological needs, which are all the things you need to exist. Above that comes safety and then love, belonging, and esteem. At the top, there's self-actualization. Basically, what Maslow is saying is if you're not getting the stuff at the bottom, it's really hard to be your best self.

The restaurant industry can be a great place to help us meet some of our basic needs. Restaurant jobs allow you to show up, do your job well, and make money. You don't necessarily have to have a bunch of connections. But it's a double-edged sword. It can also be a place that takes advantage of people, especially those who don't have anywhere else to

go. Maybe there's something on your record or you don't have citizenship. Owners can use those gaps to exploit people, make them work more hours or for less pay, or do things that are degrading.

It's really hard to be your best self when you're in survival mode. There's a lot of emotional strain, and our body makes all kinds of stress chemicals and hormones. So it becomes really hard to move up Maslow's ladder. A lot of times in the restaurant industry, there are long hours. You're thinking about trying to sleep and fitting laundry in. If you're trying to squeeze in a meal, you might not be thinking about your mental health.

It's hard to move towards those things that feel like they're the best for you when you're drowning. It can also feel like a slow drain, not so

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY of NEEDS



overwhelming that you feel like your life is in danger. But every day, you're feeling high levels of stress and anxiety. You're always worried about keeping your head above water.

Say you work at a restaurant where you're on your feet all the time. You never get a real break. It's a high-end place, and you have to be very nice to customers. That's going to be draining, and it's going to be difficult to have the physical energy you need later to do yoga or work out. It's going to be hard to sit down and read after work or engage mentally with things that are important.

If you're spending all your emotional energy at work, it's important to figure out how you can create more. Can you spend more time with family? Can you learn something to help process what you're experiencing, so your boss doesn't make you go straight to a 10, and you can stay at a six or a seven and not spiral?

If you can't quit your job, maybe that means working a different shift or fewer hours or setting different expectations. And if you go to a supervisor and ask for something you genuinely need, and every time they tell

you "no" or "it's not important," they're giving you really good information about whether you need to continue to be in that relationship.

It takes baby steps to create balance. It's about figuring out what you want more and less of and moving toward that. While small things can't solve problems, they can sometimes make a big difference. They can help us feel closer to our authentic selves and give us purpose. It's like, "I hate to do this, but I'm doing it for these people in my life, and I'm seeing the benefit."

No one is perfect. Even Maslow said you never fully reach self-actualization. I always joke with people: The pope's still praying. The Dalai Lama is still meditating. There's always going to be space to grow, and there will always be things outside of your control. So it's not about getting there and doing it perfectly. It's about putting in the effort. That thinking can help you push through the tough parts.

DJ Watson is a licensed therapist at Pinnacle Counseling Chicago and director of therapeutic support services at the nonprofit Support Staff. As told to Caroline Hatchett.

LET'S NORMALIZE THERAPY

THE STORY OF CHRISTOPHER LEMARK AND COFFEE, HIP-HOP & MENTAL HEALTH

ART BY OLIVIA DE CASTRO



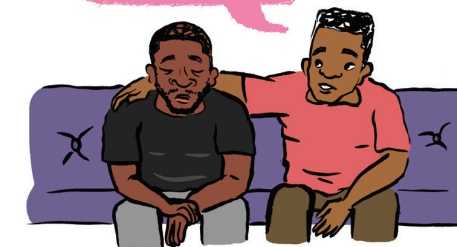
In 2018, Christopher LeMark found himself sobbing uncontrollably in a downtown Chicago Starbucks.



As a kid, he suffered abuse and neglect and shuffled between homes and shelters. He spent some time homeless. That trauma still haunted him.

A friend encouraged him to go to therapy, where he heard for the first time:

It's not your fault.



That's when Christopher began a marathon of healing for himself and his community.

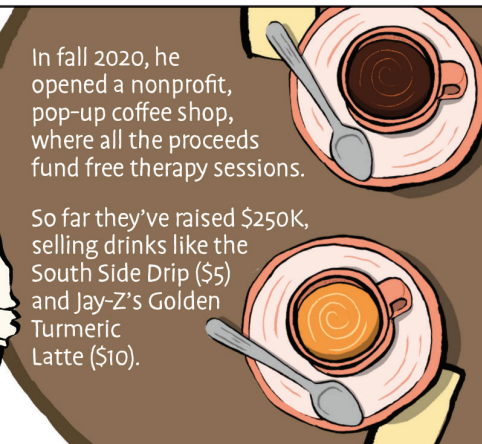


Coffee, Hip-Hop & Mental Health started as a three-hour event with coffee, music, storytelling, panel discussions, and therapists on hand.

Those events gave people permission to talk.

The reason people don't open up is because they don't feel safe. My advice is to release the shame and anxiety and reach out to people you do feel safe with: coworkers, family, friends.

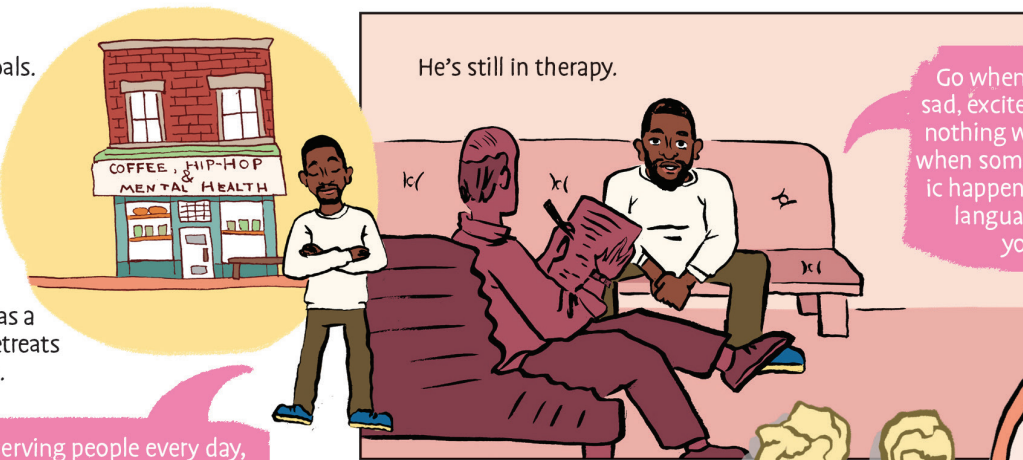
You can't come out of survival mode until you ask for help. You have to seek out community and find safe spaces, so you can grow the capacity of being vulnerable.



In fall 2020, he opened a nonprofit, pop-up coffee shop, where all the proceeds fund free therapy sessions.

So far they've raised \$250K, selling drinks like the South Side Drip (\$5) and Jay-Z's Golden Turmeric Latte (\$10).

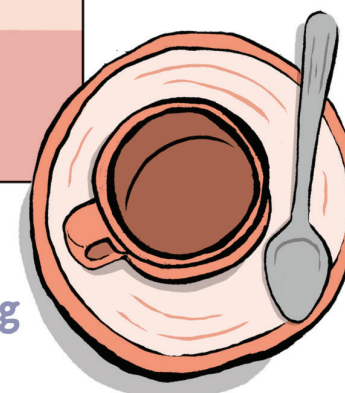
Christopher has big goals. He's building a permanent location for the coffee shop and expanding his network of therapists to offer services across the country. Christopher, who worked for years as a server, will also offer retreats for restaurant workers.



He's still in therapy.

Go when you're happy, sad, excited, when there's nothing wrong. That way when something traumatic happens, you have the language and tools you need.

You're serving people every day, but no one's serving you.

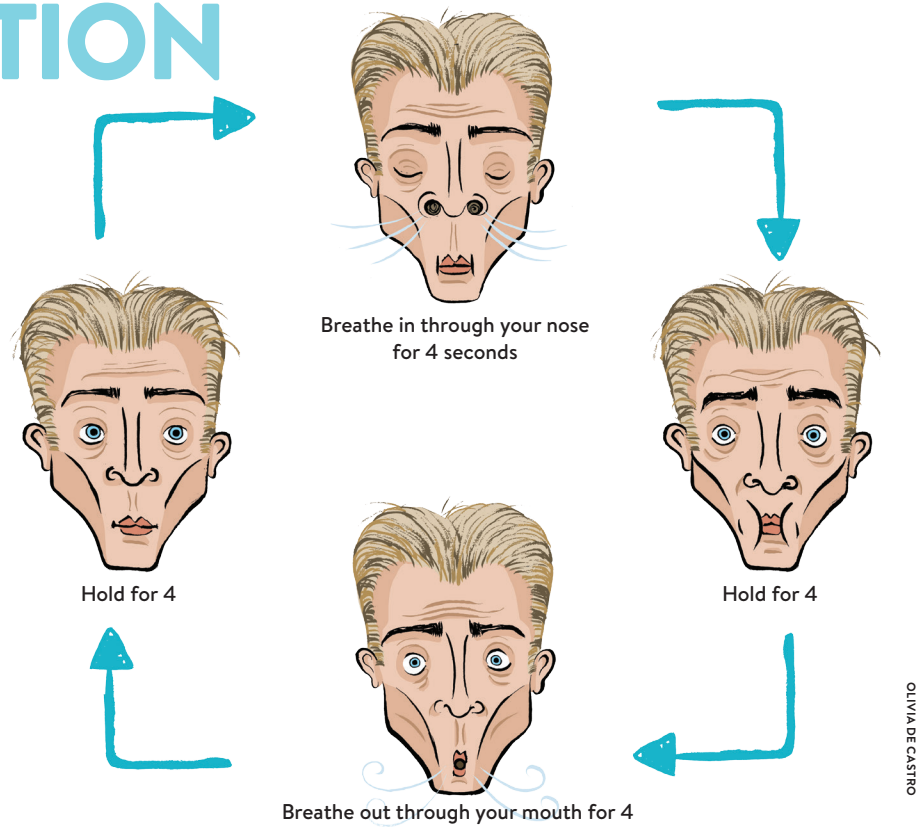


Learn more at chhamh.org. You can also find affordable therapists, who accept sliding scale payments, at openpathcollective.org or psychologytoday.com.

BREATHE with INTENTION

Screaming in the walk-in is a classic move, but there's a better way to manage frustrations at work. "Taking time to intentionally breathe can be one of our biggest, most helpful coping mechanisms," says Zach Verwey, a licensed therapist and head of business development at nonprofit Khesed Wellness. "When we get anxious, we don't take time to breathe. But slow, intentional breathing can bring our nervous system down to a grounded place."

Square breathing, also known as box breathing, is a technique practiced by Navy Seals to help them stay calm under pressure and dampen their fight-or-flight response. You can do it anywhere, anytime—no soundproof room required. Just repeat the steps for four to five minutes, until you feel more relaxed.



In 2018, the Sacramento restaurant community lost 15 people to suicide. It was an urgent moment for the city's restaurateurs, who reached out to local healthcare organizations, and, soon after, launched "I Got Your Back." The program provides workers with mental health resources and peer support, plus

a simple tool to gauge how everyone is feeling. The idea is that it's OK not to be OK.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

- Place a box next to the POS system or another high-traffic spot.
- Two to three times a week, employees

anonymously drop in color-coded slips of paper with emotive icons to share if they're feeling happy, neutral, angry, or in the weeds.

- Talk about the results at line-up, something like: "OK, we have nine happy, three neutral, one angry, and three people in the weeds. What do we do today to be successful?"

"Then the magic happens," says Patrick Mulvaney, chef/owner of Mulvaney's B&L and founder of I Got Your Back. "People start having conversations while they're rolling napkins. Then you start to say, 'How are you, really?'"

While it can take time for workers to buy in, once they do, the effects are profound. I Got Your Back's pilot led to a 22 percent increase in staff members reaching out for mental health resources.



Scan here to login or register at *Plate* to read more about how I Got Your Back can work in your restaurant.

GET CERTIFIED

The restaurant industry now has its own dedicated, specialized mental health curriculum, and if you want to change the way your team addresses mental health challenges, taking these courses and offering them to staff is a great way to start.

NOT 9 TO 5 CNECTING | NOT9TO5.ORG

CNECTing is an education platform for everyone from culinary students to owners. Access free tools and resources, or sign up for one of two paid courses. Primary Concerns (\$28) offers a practical education on five issues that plague restaurant workers: depression, anxiety, trauma, substance abuse, and disordered eating. The new CNECTed



OLIVIA DE CASTRO

certification program (\$35) takes a more intersectional approach and has a pass/fail quiz at the end to assess learning.

HEALTHY POUR INSTITUTE | HEALTHYPOUR.ORG

Designed by hospitality pro-turned-clinician Laura Louise Green, workers can take classes on topics like emotional intelligence, stress and coping, and hospitality's relationship with alcohol. Or sign up for level 1 and 2 mental health certifications with three pricing tiers (\$5 to \$25 for classes and \$30 to \$100 for packages) so individuals can pay what they can afford. Green will also launch a live, 12-week leadership certification January 31.

BETTER LISTENING FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Expand the scope of your mental health education with these podcast recommendations from Kristina Magro, a Chicago bartender/co-founder of Support Staff, a nonprofit working to make big structural changes in the industry.



OLIVIA DE CASTRO

IMANI STATE OF MIND

Dr. Imani Walker talks about mental illness through a pop-cultural lens, shares advice, and diagnoses what's going down in America.

PLEASE HUSTLE RESPONSIBLY

This podcast from Support

Staff brings together mental health pros and restaurant workers to discuss topics like navigating healthcare, pursuing happiness, learning from mistakes, and using CBD.

FOCUS ON HEALTH

Bartender/mental health advocate Alex Jump talks with industry pros about creating balance, managing anxiety, emotional labor, accountability, and more.

GRIEFCAST

Each week, British comedian Cariad Lloyd talks to a different guest about death and loss, all to help listeners feel a little less alone in their grief.

THERAPY FOR BLACK GIRLS

Dr. Joy Harden Bradford shares resources and ideas on how to become your best self. With more than 250 episodes, there's something for everyone—whether you're interested in getting better sleep or learning how horror films can help you process life.

5 AREAS that FOSTER RESILIENCE

PHYSICAL

Participate in joyful movement, get enough rest, use meals to connect with your support network, keep up with doctor's appointments, and stay hydrated.

EMOTIONAL

Radical acceptance guides us to be present and accept our current circumstances, hold space for uncomfortable emotions, and bring ourselves additional love and care.

SPIRITUAL

Slowing down and mindfulness increase meaning in day-to-day life, while shifting our perspective to the bigger picture helps us feel connected to the world in a new way.

COMMUNITY

Connect and advocate for your community, whether it's your neighborhood, family, cultural group, or healing team (aka the people who contribute to your wellness and happiness).

COGNITIVE

Our brains have natural resilience and continuously create new pathways to learn and adapt. Foster neuroplasticity with solving puzzles, playing word games, and trying new things.

Erin Reifsnyder and Julie D'Amico are clinicians for the nonprofit Restaurant After Hours.



Scan here to login or register at *Plate* and learn more about building resilience.



OLIVIA DE CASTRO

REACHING OUT

How to talk to a coworker who seems to be struggling

BY REGAN STEPHENS

When Matt Cahn opened Middle Child Clubhouse in Philadelphia last fall, the staff got the usual restaurant training, but Cahn added something extra: a series of mental health seminars for employees. "The mental health thing is an American issue, but restaurants deal with a lot of it," says Cahn. "We're around drinking, and we work weird hours on our feet every day."

Still, it can be tough to put training into action. A cook cuts herself? Most kitchen staff will rush in with a bandage. But when someone is struggling with mental health, folks have far less practice in helping out.

Rebecca Vlam, a trauma-informed licensed clinical social worker and professor at Widener University, says the first thing to know is mental and physical health are the same thing. "It's not some siloed system," she says. "It's neurobiological. Unfortunately, we treat them as two separate bodies, but everything is connected."

If you're having a problem broaching the subject, Vlam suggests starting with a simple comment like, "Hey, I've noticed you seem like you're not yourself lately. Can I support you in any way?"

"It's a gentle way to start the conversation," says Vlam, who also spent time working as a server. "If they don't want to open the door, there might be a reason, but you've shown them you're there."

Michael Gulotta agrees. The chef/partner at Mopho and Maypop in New Orleans has been running his own kitchen for nearly nine years. He calls navigating mental health issues in restaurants a learning curve, but one he's been committed to supporting. "It's amazing," he says, "even if you open the door, and guide the conversation, people are willing to open up and let it out."

A few tips to keep in mind:

- Don't try to diagnose or fix the problem; leave that to a professional.
- Don't tell someone they just need to "take care of themselves." People who are depressed often feel paralyzed, and asking them to take on that responsibility can make them feel worse. Instead, remind them they have a support system if they need it.
- Don't be reluctant to ask questions. Vlam notes that people are often afraid to say, "Are you feeling like hurting yourself?" "Are you feeling like you're not safe?"

"The more we talk about mental health issues," says Vlam, "the more we normalize it, and the less shame there is."

Regan Stephens is a Philadelphia-based freelance writer covering food, travel, and culture.

The SOBRIETY NETWORK



How Charlotte chef Sam Diminich started a Ben's Friends chapter and created a sense of community

BY MICHELE HERRMANN

In 2020, Sam Diminich went from defeating Bobby Flay on the Food Network in January to losing his job as executive chef at the now shuttered Upstream in March. But the Charlotte, N.C., chef had been through worse. Only this time around, he had the tools and community he needed to get through disaster and then start anew with a gourmet meal delivery business, Your Farms Your Table.

For more than three decades, Diminich struggled with alcoholism and was at one time homeless, until getting sober at a treatment center in 2014. Then in 2018, he started a local chapter of Ben's Friends, a fellowship organization for hospitality professionals struggling with substance abuse and addiction. Diminich wanted to help other hospitality workers who not only battled addiction but also the heavy demands of their jobs.

"When a guest walks in the door of our establishment, it's up to us to do whatever we have to do to make sure their experience is one of excellence," says Diminich. "For many years, we couldn't say the same [thing] about how we approached taking care of ourselves, our mental health, our struggles."

Founded by hospitality pros Steve Palmer and Mickey Bakst in honor of Ben Murray, a chef who took his own life after struggling with alcoholism, Ben's Friends welcomes people from every corner of the industry, no matter where they are in their personal journey toward sobriety.

"We want to talk publicly and openly about the struggle of sobriety in the hospitality industry, which has one of the highest rates of substance abuse in the country," says Bakst.

Chapter meetings follow a loose structure. The leader begins by reading a preamble, letting attendees know that if they have any issues they should feel free to speak up. The leader then chooses a topic to focus on throughout the meeting, which also varies depending on the challenges a chapter may be dealing with.

Diminich co-chairs his chapter with Thomas Lloyd, a butcher who worked in the restaurant industry for 15 years. Amid 2020 shutdowns, Lloyd tuned into Ben's Friends Zoom meetings, his only avenue of fellowship and recovery. "It was an integral part, and still is to this day, of how I stay sober."

Potential Ben's Friends chapter leaders begin by attending national meetings on Zoom and chatting with Bakst and Palmer by phone to get to know each other and share thoughts on early sobriety. "We do give each chapter the flexibility to discuss the needs that are unique to their city's industry and how to cater to their individual communities," says Bakst.

Interested in starting a chapter? Visit bensfriendshope.com.

Michele Herrmann is a New York City area-based lifestyle and travel writer.

HOW TO BUILD a PERSONAL CARE SYSTEM

BY KATY OSUNA

When I was working in restaurants, I knew that I should be taking better care of myself, but I had no idea where to begin. Plus, I didn't have the mental energy to think about proactive self-care.

When you're in a bad place, mentally speaking, it's so hard to find the energy or motivation to make healthy choices. But if you build a system or a plan ahead of time, it removes at least one barrier to helping your mental health.

TIME TO UNLEARN

"Our coping mechanisms are definitely learned," says Laura Louise Green, licensed professional counselor and founder of Healthy Pour. This is important to understand because since these behaviors are learned, that means we can also unlearn them and replace them with something healthier. "It's a forever process," Green adds. "This is not an overnight thing, to understand what your emotional life and needs are. So be gentle with yourself. Practice kindness."

MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-IN

The next step is to reflect on the activities or habits that are helpful and healthy for you. Hassel Aviles, executive director of the advocacy nonprofit Not 9 to 5, recommends starting with the basics. Answer questions in each category below, and list activities or habits that make you feel good.

DIET

When was the last time I ate? What did I eat? How does it make my body feel?

SLEEP

How am I sleeping? Am I sleeping enough?

MOVEMENT

*What kind of movement makes my body feel good?
What kind of movement am I going to do this week?*

SOMETHING TO CALM YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Have I done anything to calm my nervous system today? Have I taken time to breathe or relax?

SOMETHING TO SPARK JOY

What kinds of things make me feel joy? Have I done anything this week to spark joy?

This is just the starting point for some basic habits—things you can do for yourself. But sometimes, you need some help.

BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK

It can be really hard to build a personal care system on your own, so part of your system should also include a support network. Your support network can include a therapist, an accountability partner, someone you can call or text when you're in a moment of crisis (like an anxiety attack), or anyone else that is briefed on your plan. Just make sure you have conversations with those people first so they know what you need.

BE PROACTIVE

This industry is really hard on our mental health. So be prepared for those ups and downs by being proactive. We all have competing priorities, so it can be hard to carve out the time and focus to put our own mental health at the forefront. It takes work, yes, but you won't regret doing it.

Katy Osuna is the co-creator/executive producer of the James Beard Award-winning podcast *Copper & Heat*, which explores the unspoken rules and traditions of restaurants.

RESOURCES

"FIND OUT WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR YOU NOW, INSTEAD OF HAVING TO DO RESEARCH ONCE YOU'RE ALREADY IN A REALLY DIFFICULT SPOT OR YOU'RE REALLY ANGRY."

—DJ WATSON, CHICAGO

CRISIS

National Suicide Prevention Hotline (24/7)
800-273-8255; 888-628-9454 for Spanish
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Crisis Text Line (24/7)
Text "HOME" to 741741

National Sexual Assault Hotline (24/7)
800-656-4673
rainn.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline (24/7)
800-799-7233
thehotline.org

LGBT National Hotline
888-843-4564; help@GLBThotline.org
glbthotline.org/nationalhotline

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ADDICTION

Ben's Friends
bensfriendshope.com

SAMHSA's National Helpline (24/7)
800-662-4357
samhsa.gov

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Hopeline
800-622-2255
recovered.org

Al-Anon for Families of Alcoholics
800-344-2666
al-anon.org

INDUSTRY PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

CHOW (Culinary Hospitality Outreach and Wellness)
chowco.org

Heard
iheardyou.org

Restaurant After Hours
restaurantafterhours.org

INDUSTRY MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

A Balanced Glass
abalancedglass.com

Fair Kitchens
fairkitchens.com

I Got Your Back
igotyourback.info

Not 9 to 5
not9to5.org

Support Staff
pleasehustleresponsibly.org

Cooks Who Care
cookswhocareinspire.com

Focus on Health
fohealth.org

Healthy Pour
institute.healthypour.org