

THE SPECTRUM

Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance of Greater Chicago

10/10 is World Mental Health Day!



This year's theme: **Mental Health Care for All: Let's Make It a Reality**

- Purpose: The overall objective of World Mental Health Day is to raise awareness of mental health issues around the world and to mobilize efforts in support of mental health. The day provides an opportunity for all stakeholders working on mental health issues to talk about their work, and what more needs to be done to make mental health care a reality for people worldwide.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on people's mental health. Some groups, including health and other frontline workers, students, people living alone, and those with pre-existing mental health conditions, have been particularly affected. And services for mental, neurological and substance use disorders have been significantly disrupted.
- Yet there is cause for optimism. During the World Health Assembly in May 2021, governments from around the world recognized the need to scale up quality mental health services at all levels.

Behind the Board **Bridget Maul, DBSA-GC President**



What makes you feel good for your mental health?

- Sleep! I find if I get my rest I feel more mentally present. Also, spending time with loved ones helps me maintain mental wellness.

What motivates you?

- Things I care about - the things I am passionate about motivate me to be a better person and meet goals I set for myself, even if they are small.

What are you proud of about DBSA-GC?

- When I joined our chapter 7 years ago, we had virtually no internet presence and programming. Since then, we've built a brand new website, revamped our Spectrum content/layout and brought it virtual, built a board with younger board members to carry out our mission and we've hosted several different programs since the pandemic in an attempt to make our members feel less isolated. I am proud of everything DBSA-GC is today and I have my fellow board members to thank for that.

And some countries have found new ways of providing mental health care to their populations.

- During this year's World Mental Health Day campaign, the WHO (World Health Organization) will showcase the efforts made in some of these countries and encourage you to highlight positive stories as part of your own activities, as an inspiration to others. WHO will also provide new materials, in easy-to-read formats, of how to take care of your own mental health and provide support to others too. We hope you will find them useful.

- **This year DBSA-GC is sending out this newsletter to honor 10/10 in our community to get the word out that it is important to take care of your mental health. You are supported and are not alone.**

- The short documents posted on this link provide information about depression and suicide and guidance on prevention and treatment. [Resources](#)

- NAMI is featuring videos from real people sharing their lived experience with some of the symptoms and conditions we are focusing on during MIAW. Watch and share the videos here

A Message From Our DBSA-GC President

Hello Fall! The temperature is changing and the leaves are falling. So many pumpkins out there and Halloween decorations on display.

The DBSA-Greater Chicago Board and I would like to share the most recent Spectrum newsletter. The main focus of this newsletter is to celebrate World Mental Health Day, which is October 10th! There are plenty of in this issue to honor the day and provide you with informative material. There are chapter updates, a recap of the 2021 DBSA National Leadership Summit, as well as an article about mental health and social media. We hope you find this issue interesting and useful to promote mental health.

- Bridget Maul, DBSA-GC President

DBSA-GC

Announcements

- We are still hosting free virtual events! Our general peer support groups are Wednesdays and Sundays at 7pm, and we host an ages 50+ group on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month at 7pm. Learn more about our groups and register for our Sunday and Wednesday groups [here](#) (no registration necessary for Thursday group). We also host music therapy on Tuesdays at noon and meditation on Mondays at noon. Please join us when you can. Check out our [virtual events calendar](#) for more details.
- **IN-PERSON PEER SUPPORT GROUPS:** We had every intention of bringing back in-person peer support groups in September but, due to the pandemic, we are keeping our groups virtual until further notice. Stay tuned for details announcements about in-person groups and events.
- **COOKING WITH Q:** After a summer break, Chef Q is ready to jump back in with some great fall recipes! Stay tuned for Chef Q's first fall recipe - Cooking with Q is BACK the 3rd week of October!
- **BUDDY PROJECT:** Our Buddy Project is still running! Buddy Project was formed by Board Member Margaux Shain and it's mission is to connect people in our community one-on-one with others in our community who have similar interests. Please reach out to Margaux@dbsa-gc.org if you are interested in joining the Buddy Project!



2021 DBSA National Leadership Summit Highlights



- One week. 400+ mental health advocates. Countless lessons learned. Our Board of Directors attended the DBSA National Leadership Summit this year, and we learned a LOT!
- **Sign up for the DBSA National monthly newsletter.** You'll be the first to know about DBSA National news, events, and how you can help us advocate for policy changes.

- **Watch recorded sessions from this year's summit.** DBSA National will be making recordings of most sessions from the summit available through their YouTube Channel. Be on the lookout for an email to let you know that these recordings are available for streaming.
- **Share your story.** Your story has power! By [sharing your story](#) with DBSA, you amplify the voice of people living with mental health conditions and help to change hearts and minds. You can watch the segment our chapter President, Bridget Maul led focused on DBSA chapters and how they have worked together during the pandemic and also their creative ways to give back to the members. There are plenty of other interactive topics on the wellness wheel, sharing personal stories to chapter support and more.

Why I Post About My Mental Health on Facebook

By Sarah Heerbrandt

Editor's Note: *If you struggle with self-harm or experience suicidal thoughts, the following post could be potentially triggering. You can contact the [Crisis Text Line](#) by texting "START" to 741741. For a list of ways to cope with self-harm urges, visit this [resource](#).*



As a millennial, I spend a fair amount of my day on social media. The usage tracker on my phone says that I spend approximately two hours per day on Facebook alone, which, yes, seems excessive. But consider the fact that most of that time spent on Facebook happens in the wee small hours of the morning, when I'm consumed with [anxiety](#) about an argument I had on the playground when I was six, berating myself for what I should have said to that bully. Or when I'm so locked in by my crushing fear of abandonment, I wonder why my husband is even bothering to sleep next to me when he should be packing my bags to throw me out of the house. Or those nights when it's just plain old [insomnia](#) keeping me up, my physical body exhausted but my brain firing on all cylinders. Those are the nights I spend the most time on Facebook.

Those are also the nights I get really honest about my [mental health](#) on Facebook. Which, as has been brought to my attention, makes some people very uncomfortable. I've been told that I shouldn't be so open about such private matters on such a visible platform. Forget about family and friends; what if a potential employer takes a peek at my social media presence and decides they don't want to hire someone who constantly posts memes about how emotionally unstable she is?

There are a couple of reasons that I post so openly, so frequently, about the state of my [mental health](#). And none of them have anything to do with the people who don't want me to do it.

Firstly, and most importantly, I firmly believe that there are not enough people engaging in conversation about mental health. I was raised in a family rife with mental health issues — from a mother who more

than likely struggled with **bipolar disorder** and who experienced severe bouts of **depression**, to a father who spent a lifetime battling a raging alcohol dependency, to not one but two siblings who (like myself) attempted suicide at some point in their lives. But there was a simple solution to the problem: don't talk about it.

When I was around 13, my sister spent a week in the psychiatric ward of the local hospital after attempting suicide.

There was no conversation about why she did it, no call to arms amongst my family members to rally around my clearly unstable sister and help her get the long-term help she obviously needed. Nobody stayed with her after she was released from the hospital. A few days later, she was back at work as though nothing had happened.



It was never brought up again.

I had so many questions. Why did she do it? Was it an accident, or was she trying to kill herself? What about her kids? What would have happened to them if she had succeeded? Why wasn't anyone staying with her to make sure she didn't do it again? Would she do it again?

Why weren't we talking about this?

I felt as though the most significant thing to ever happen to my family had just occurred, and it was swept under the rug and forgotten about nearly as soon as it was over. I thought she was a coward, trying to take the "easy way" out of her problems instead of just dealing with them, as was expected of members of my family. I remember feeling angry at her for being so selfish, for completely ignoring the welfare of the three little ones who depended on her, who loved her, who needed her if they were going to grow up right.

The irony was not lost on me when, 20 years later, I would be sitting in the psych ward of my local hospital after swallowing my own bottle of sleeping pills while my two-year-old slept in the bedroom next door.

It took a long time and quite a bit of therapy for me to come to terms with what I did and the real reasons behind it, for me to begin to crawl out of the darkness and see some semblance of light again. Is that what it was like for her? How could it have been? I had the support of my endlessly patient husband as well as my in-laws, a spot in an intensive partial-hospitalization program where my deteriorating **mental health** could no longer be ignored, as well as a private therapist and nurse practitioner to manage the fistful of medications I was prescribed. I had every resource available to me to get the help that I needed to make sure that I never looked down the barrel of a controlled substance again.

My sister had none of that.

Would things have turned out differently for me had there been a discussion at the time about my sister's suicide attempt? Might I have had some more insight about why I did it, about the consequences of my actions, if her silent screams for help hadn't been ignored? Would knowing more about why she did it have stopped me from doing it altogether?

I don't know the answers to any of those questions, but I know that I spent a very long time denying that there was anything wrong with me. I ignored the depressive episodes, convincing myself I was just sad. The 72-hour hold I was placed on (for self-harm and suicidal ideation) in college was just a result of the stress of trying to manage life on my own now that I was away from home. I paid no mind to the explosive outbursts of anger I would experience, or how that anger would suddenly dissipate as if nothing had happened. My self-harming was a childish habit that I would eventually grow out of (guess what – it wasn't). It would be years before I would hear the terms “splitting” or “dissociation” used to describe my all-or-nothing thinking and my feeling as though what is happening around me is happening to someone else (all of which are symptoms of [borderline personality disorder](#), which I was only just recently, at 34, diagnosed with). I brushed my husband aside when he begged me to get help because there was “nothing wrong with me.” I have spent the last 20 years avoiding getting help because, hey, if my sister didn't need it, then why would I?

I don't speak with my sister anymore (or anyone else in my family, but that's a story for a different day), so I can't ask her about it. I wish I could. I wish I could tell her how much more we should have done, as a family, to support her when she needed us most. I wish I could tell her about my own stint in the hospital and the seemingly endless ramifications that one impulsively stupid decision would have on the rest of my life. I would tell her that I don't think she's a coward, or selfish, that I now understand what it feels like to think you have nothing left to live for, even if what you're living for is sleeping in the next room. I want to tell her that, even now, I love her, and that I'm sorry she had to go through that alone.

This brings me to the second reason I talk so openly about [mental health](#), mine in particular, on social media.

No one should ever, ever, have to feel like they are battling mental health issues alone.

Mental illnesses are terrifying. They take up space in your mind and your soul and they make you feel like you are less than human. They tell you things that aren't true, and convince you that your own senses can't be trusted. They reach in and infect every aspect of your world, leaving you to desperately try to keep up, to desperately try to keep the pieces of your broken life intact. But you know that no matter how hard you fight, your illness is stronger than you. It is smarter than you. It is bigger than you.

You are the 6-year-old on the playground, and your very mind is the bully you are trying to defend yourself against.



Trying to navigate [mental illness](#) with a firm support system in place is hard enough. Trust me — it's been nearly two years since my suicide attempt and I am still nowhere near where I want to be in my recovery process. But to have to go through it all by yourself? No wonder there were more than 47,000 suicides in the United States in 2017 alone.

I belong to a number of [mental health](#) support groups on Facebook. We share silly memes and complain about our spouses, even share book recommendations and recipes (which would be helpful if I cooked, but whatever). But we also reach out for help when we're feeling like we just can't make it another day. We ask about side effects of the innumerable medications we are all on. We connect and we share and we support each other. We make sure that every single one of us knows that we are not alone. I know, without knowing a single one of those group members in person, that I could message them at any time,

day or night, and they would respond to help. Because they have been there. They know what it feels like to battle an entity so ingrained in your psyche that it can convince you it doesn't even exist. Talking about something makes that something seem smaller, more easily managed. Talking about something with someone who knows where you're coming from? That takes the scariness factor down a couple of much-appreciated notches.

So why not just post in those groups? Why post on my main page, where anyone unlucky enough to follow me has to read about my daily struggle to keep my shit together?

Because some of you don't know that you're not alone.

For every 10 people who have told me that I shouldn't post such private material in a public forum, I've had one person message me to tell me that they appreciate the fact that I do it. I've had friends I haven't spoken to in years talk about their PTSD or their [depression](#), ask me for therapist recommendations or for more information about one of my Pandora's Box of diagnoses ([ADHD](#), [BPD](#), [postpartum depression](#), and [generalized anxiety disorder](#) for those keeping track). From people who don't suffer from a [mental illness](#), I've been thanked for opening their eyes to the difficulties faced by those who do.

I don't want to come across as though I think I'm doing the world a service by complaining about how awful my brain makes me feel sometimes. But, really? I kind of am. Because there are other people out there whose brains make them feel awful sometimes, too. I want those people to know that I feel them, that I feel for them, and that I am here for them.

I want you all to know that you are not alone.

I've been told that my constant posting of material related to my [mental health](#) (and mental health in general) is inappropriate. That it makes people uncomfortable.

Good.

It should make you uncomfortable. It should make the hair on the back of your neck stand up to know that a person you know is going through something so unfathomably bleak. You can never truly understand what it is like to be at war with your own mind, but you should understand that it's happening to people you love, to people you work with, to people you meet on the street. People who seem so together and so "with it" might be struggling with a demon you can't begin to comprehend. People you would never suspect may be holding a razor blade to their wrist at night, wondering if they can make it through just one more day. People you know are turning to drugs or alcohol to make the voices stop, to make the pain go away, to make their world make sense again.

People are hurting, and you need to know about it.

That's why I post.

About Sarah Heerbrandt: *I'm a mother to two precious little girls, for whom I want to be an example of what one can accomplish when faced with even the most insurmountable of odds. My driving force in life is to make sure that every single person who struggles with a mental illness knows that they are not alone. I am currently in school working towards a degree in psychology, with plans to achieve an eventual Ph.D. in psychology and counseling.*

We Need YOUR Help!

Are you a student? Researcher? Writer? Have some thoughts you want to share about your experience? Submit an article for our upcoming Spectrum! Send your writing to: Margaux@dbsa-gc.org with the subject "Spectrum" and we'll review your article and contact you for our next issue!

Article Reflection - Some Things to Think About

- Does social media make you feel accountability to share your mental health? Or does it cast negative feelings when looking at content online?
- You don't have to be for or against social media completely. You can create parameters of when you look at social media and for how long. You are the boss!
- Consider connecting with family and friends to share how you are feeling and the recent activities in your life, which can serve as an accountability partner but also to deepen relationships.

Fear and Settling in a Sometimes Non-Meritocratic America

By Ali Khan, DBSA-GC Member and Spectrum-Contributor

In the fall, I will be a fourth-year medical student at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. I began really mulling over the goals I have for my life after being accepted into medical school. Simultaneously, I began worrying about all of the possible sources of future failure. This period of back-and-forth introspection drew me to watch economist and professor Larry Smith's TED Talk, "Why You Will Fail to Have a Great Career." Three themes from Professor Smith's discussion that captured my attention were (1) how fear diminishes aspiration, (2) the importance of exploring alternative routes to one's passion, and (3) acknowledging and understanding how to respond to a sometimes non-meritocratic America. The TED Talk has helped me realize that I have a singular goal: the purpose of my life is to live it fearlessly, knowing each and every day I can't ever really fail if I follow my passions and my dreams.



Professor Smith devotes a significant portion of his TED Talk to reviewing different excuses we tell ourselves (e.g. 'great careers are a matter of luck,' 'only geniuses hold great careers') as we place a metaphysical wall between ourselves and our passions. He explains that these self-rationalizations diminish aspiration and can, for the most part, be distilled down to fear. During a first listen to the TED Talk, I understood what was being said as fear holding us back. However, when I replayed the example Professor Smith gives about a man speaking to his son about having given into fear, rather than following his dreams, I pieced together just how powerful a force fear is: fear is an intergenerational, socially

reproducible concept, and the fear that prevents one man from following his dreams is vertically transmitted, very much like a hereditary condition, so as to prevent another man from following his dreams, and so on. This makes it all the more important to surmount fear and, at the same time, act as our own and our children's proxy.

Moreover, when I was younger, I saw the journey from my present to a future great career as two points connected by a straight line. This idea evolved into two shores, and I would captain myself – sometimes swaying – until I sailed from shore A to shore B. Yet, Professor Smith advises people to reflect and look for alternative routes to one's passion, and I now recognize that my present is connected to a future great career like an uncharted and incomplete map, with infinitesimal routes, resting stops, detours, and even a couple dead ends. I am proud of the two gap years I took prior to entering medical school and the time I used therein. Not only was I able to strengthen my dedications with greater experience (testing the distinction between a passion, 'the greatest expression of something that grabs me,' and an interest, as Professor Smith puts it), but also I was able to explore allied fields.

Finally, Professor Smith deconstructs the notion of an always meritocratic America and instead emphasizes that working really, really hard does not guarantee a great career (nor does it guarantee a good career or even an alright career, he goes on to say). Rather, this is another one of the many excuses we tell ourselves to get through working fruitlessly in a position that we are not passionate about. I can recall learning in psychology courses at college that human beings are very adaptable and that they like to feel okay, minimizing self-dissonance. Similarly, Professor Smith says that there will always be work to be done, we have a tendency to settle, and that we should not settle.

Economist and Professor Larry Smith's TED Talk, "Why You Will Fail to Have a Great Career," encouraged me to reflect upon why I was worrying about future failure. His perspective is that failure is when someone finds their passion and lets it go; instead of traversing different routes to pursue it, they employ fear, settle, and work endlessly, believing that tireless labor will provide them with some sort of meaning and a justifiably alright career. I will take this with me as I set out on the beginning of my medical education and journey towards becoming a physician. Long-term, I hope to become an advocacy ambassador for both Feinberg and the society at-large, with regard to healthcare equity and accessibility. I would like to one day work on health outlines and initiatives for what cities can do to improve medical care for the future, especially in psychiatry. With my goals in mind, I will not settle. I will of course spend some of my time taking preventative measures to avoid pitfalls, but I will follow my ambitions and dreams. I am slowly fortifying myself to face the reality that as I pursue a great career I will not end up where I envision and still be able to accomplish my goals and be a change-maker. Professor Smith has therein helped show me that I must be defiant in the face of fear, not settle, chart for myself and unfinished map so as to reach success.

Fun Fall Activities to do in and around Chicago

If Covid-19 has you feeling stuck at home, think again! There's plenty of outdoor fall activities this season

Hop on a fall boat cruise! It's not too late to get out on the water! Chicago's boat tours are still setting sail through fall, like the [Chicago's First Lady](#) offering classic architecture river tours through Nov. 21 (weather permitting). Tours are led by the experts at the Chicago Architecture Center, and you can even BYOB (bring your own blanket!).



Celebrate Halloween at the Chicago Botanic Garden for Night of 1,000 Jack-o-Lanterns!

More than 1,000 hand-carved pumpkins—some as large as 150 pounds—will light up the night at Chicago Botanic Garden's Halloween event. In the crisp air of fall, Night of 1,000 Jack-o'-Lanterns features only real pumpkins.

Featured pumpkins—carved by professionals—include images of superheroes, celebrities, and nods

to Chicago. On a paved path, the evening takes on a festive air, with costumed entertainers and live carving demos, along with seasonal light fare and drinks for purchase. Runs October 13-17 & 20-24, 2021 6:30pm - 10:30pm. [Learn more and buy tickets here!](#)

Go to a Drive-In Movie!

Fall in Chicago is an excellent time for movie lovers. In October, the city hosts the longest-running competitive film festival in North America, the [Chicago International Film Festival](#). And drive-in movies are back in a big way! These nostalgic outdoor theatres feature everything from kid-friendly flicks to spine-tingling horror films. Check out Music Box's Halloween event, [The Music Box of Horrors: Dawn of the Drive-In](#) which will once again



take over the [Chi-Town Movies Drive-In](#) for late shows Sunday-Thursday, and double-features every Friday and Saturday night. This year's themes include Nü-Metal Mondays, Thirsty Thursdays, Friday Night Double Features, Rip-Off Saturdays, and Serial Killer Sundays.



Visit a Pumpkin Patch!

Whether you want to carve jack-o-lanterns or bake a pie, these pumpkin patches around Chicago have what you need. Head out of town for a full day of fall activities at these pumpkin patches:

- **Goebbert's Pumpkin Patch and Apple Orchard**, *Pingree Grove*: Goebbert's Fall Festival

is what they are known for! They offer a full day of family-friendly activities that are sure to delight kids and grown-ups of all ages. The General Admission fee of \$20 includes almost all

of the activities on the Farm. Parking is free, and they are open rain or shine.

- **Richardson's Family Adventure Farm & Corn Maze**, *Spring Grove*:

Visit the World's Largest Corn Maze and celebrate the Farm's 20th anniversary this year! Richardson's Adventure Farm has activities for all ages - hay rides, farm carousel, zip lines, petting zoo, pig races, 150' giant slide, campfires, picnic areas, wagon rides and more!



The Spectrum

Thank you for reading! Have Spectrum Newsletter Feedback? Do you like what you are reading and/or do you want more? We would love to hear what's on your mind. Please reach out to us if there are topics and ideas you would like to include or share in the next quarterly Spectrum. Anything goes – events, memorials, celebrations, recognition, thank you's, etc.

2021 Spectrum Schedule

Q4: Nov-Dec: Holiday Issue

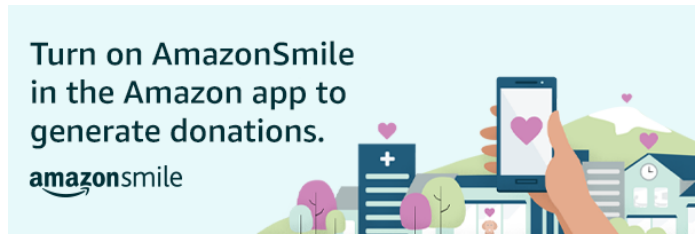
If you'd like to submit an article, event, celebration, recognition, etc. to be included in our Spectrum, please submit to Margaux@dbsa-gc.org and we'll be happy to review!

Get in Touch with Us

If you are feeling alone, please know we're here to support you. Your recovery matters to us. If you're experiencing a difficult time, please reach out and we'll do what we can to help you get back on track. Please join us for our virtual peer lead support groups. We have a group on Sunday evenings at 7pm, Wednesday evenings at 7pm, and we've added an Ages 50+ support group on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of every month at 7pm. All groups are currently on Zoom. For questions on our peer lead virtual support group or anything else on your mind to get more involved, please reach out to us at: wecanhelp@dbsa-gc.org and visit dbsa-gc.org. We'd love to speak with you and build our community foundation stronger.

Amazon Smile

Shopping online? Support DBSA-GC by shopping with Amazon Smile! At NO CHARGE to you, just choose DBSA-GC as your preferred charity and a portion of your purchases are donated directly to us every time you shop on Amazon! Follow this [LINK](#) to shop on Amazon and AmazonSmile gives back to DBSA-GC! Thank you.



Wrap Up

In closing, we wish you a good transition during this season. Take care of yourself and make time to do things that feel good. Stay connected with us since this community supports you.

For future Spectrum newsletters, if you want to share an article, testimonial or photo, please submit it to Bridget@dbsa-gc.org and Margaux@dbsa-gc.org.

Warm Regards,

DBSA Greater Chicago Board