



April 17, 2015

Dear Rep. Jenkins:

Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center in Lawrence, Kan., is proud to support the Mental Health First Aid Act, introduced by Reps. Lynn Jenkins (R-Kan.) and Doris Matsui (D-Calif.).

Bert Nash, which serves about 5,000 Douglas County residents every year, has been at the forefront of Mental Health First Aid since 2008, when the Center was one of seven pilot sites in the country. Myself, our COO as well as several other staff were among the first certified Mental Health First Aid trainers in the nation. Since that time, the Bert Nash Center has certified more than 1,200 Douglas County, Kan., residents, including local law enforcement, first responders, church staff, University of Kansas faculty and staff, and members of the Leadership Lawrence classes. In 2013, Bert Nash also began offering training in Youth Mental Health First Aid, aimed at those who work with young people.

Every day, we see the impact this training has on people's lives. Just one example involves one of our Bert Nash board members. Using the Mental Health First Aid he received, the board member asked a professional colleague who was going through a personal crisis if he was thinking about killing himself. The man said he was. The board member offered encouragement, telling the man he wasn't alone and that help was available. Later, when the man didn't return phone calls, the board member called 911. A sheriff's officer found the man in a remote area with a gun — but unharmed. The officer took the man to a medical facility for evaluation and help. Another example of a life saved because someone was equipped with the knowledge and training to help someone who was going through a mental health crisis. There are many stories, just like this one.

Mental Health First Aid training helps people with no clinical background know how to intervene when someone is experiencing a mental health crisis, such as contemplating suicide. It gives them the knowledge and the confidence to act. Just as CPR training helps a layperson with no clinical training assist an individual following a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid training helps a layperson assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis, such as contemplating suicide. In both situations, the goal is to help support an individual until appropriate professional help arrives.

With this important legislation, more and more people will be able to learn these critical skills. The Bert Nash Center is proud to support the Mental Health First Aid Act, so more people will have the tools they need to help those who are struggling with mental illness, and help save lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David E. Johnson".

David E. Johnson
Chief Executive Officer