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**The Wellbeing Partners Launches New Initiative to Address
Mental Health Stigma in Omaha and Surrounding Communities**
*Organization Uses Unique Approach to Decrease Mental Health Stigma
Featuring Local Pets and Community Members*

OMAHA, NEBRASKA - (July 30, 2020) - Today, The Wellbeing Partners, a local organization focused on building wellbeing into the way communities grow and do business, announced a new initiative to build support and understanding for mental health across the Omaha and Council Bluffs areas. Now more than ever, mental health has become a top priority across the country with [almost 40 percent of Americans now showing signs of clinical anxiety or depression](#). In Nebraska, that number is 30 percent.

"We know that mental health is at the root of wellbeing," emphasizes Sarah Sjolie, CEO of The Wellbeing Partners. "As this campaign amplifies the voices of everyday people, and their mental health journeys, we hope that more workplaces, families, friends and networks see mental health as a dimension of wellbeing that lives in all of us."

The project takes a unique digital-forward approach using the power of animals, shared stories and social media to not only spark the conversation about mental health, but also address what keeps many people from seeking help — stigma. Stigma is cited as one of the top reasons why individuals avoid or abandon treatment. In fact, less than half of adults with mental health conditions receive treatment.

The initiative includes the creation of two campaigns:

Spokesimals Midwest is an education-based campaign inspired by the unconditional love and understanding that animals provide. The campaign invites community members to submit pictures of their animals and/or pets, which are then paired with simple messages of encouragement, support, and facts about mental health. These messages are for everyone, not just people who have an interest in mental health or live with a mental health condition. The more people know about mental health, the less society will allow mental health conditions to be stigmatized. Individuals can submit their animal or pet at www.SpokesimalsMidwest.com.

WhatMakesUs is a contact-based campaign designed to challenge perceptions and change the conversation around mental health. This campaign is a collection of photo and video testimonials from community members living with mental health conditions and their allies, highlighting what makes them who they are — not defined by a mental health condition. These testimonials are then distributed across multiple social media platforms and by community partners. By sharing stories from real people in the community, stigma is reduced by highlighting shared interests, values and experiences, and showing that WhatMakesUs who we are is about so much more than whether or not we live with a mental health condition. Community members can share their story at WhatMakesUs.com.

The Wellbeing Partners is also offering opportunities for individuals and organizations across Douglas, Pottawattamie, Cass and Sarpy counties to support this campaign through working groups. These working groups fall into four (4) categories: Community Partner Organizations, Mental Health Advisory, Workplaces, and Individual Community Members. This grassroots engagement allows for community organizations, workplaces and individuals to share insights for a more strategic and targeted approach. The groups will also guide the creation of white-labeled content to disseminate through their own social and communication channels.

“As people submit testimonials, videos and infographics will be created and distributed throughout the region,” comments Sheena Helgenberger, Community Health and Wellbeing Director of The Wellbeing Partners.

“Community partners will get to customize materials to reflect the uniqueness of their clients,” Helgenberger continues. “These partners are key to ensuring everyone feels welcome and honored as they contribute their story. Yard signs, bumper stickers, and toolkits will also be available so that people can bring the campaigns into discussions at home, among friends, and within workplaces.”

Funding and support for these campaigns come from the Sherwood Foundation, Mutual of Omaha Foundation, CHI Health, Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare, and a growing list of public and private sponsors. These include: the Douglas, Sarpy/Cass, and Pottawattamie (Iowa) health departments, the Metro Area Planning Agency (MAPA), and the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Public Health.

To learn more about The Wellbeing Partners visit www.thewellbeingpartners.org. To join a working group or partner with the campaign email info@thewellbeingpartners.org.

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The Wellbeing Partners is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that seeks to build wellbeing into the way communities grow and do business by supporting the growth of a culture of wellbeing within organizations as well as acting as a convener to address local community health challenges. Relying on expertise and evidence in worksite wellness and public health, The Wellbeing Partners bridge the good work between worksite wellness initiatives and community health collaboration for the greatest impact in our communities. Based on applied practice and partner and community feedback, The Wellbeing Partners combines the eight dimensions of wellness with the social determinants of health model to shape its work so all people and places thrive.

