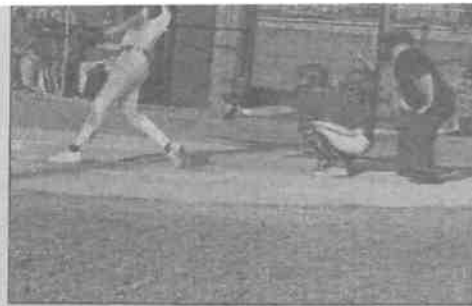
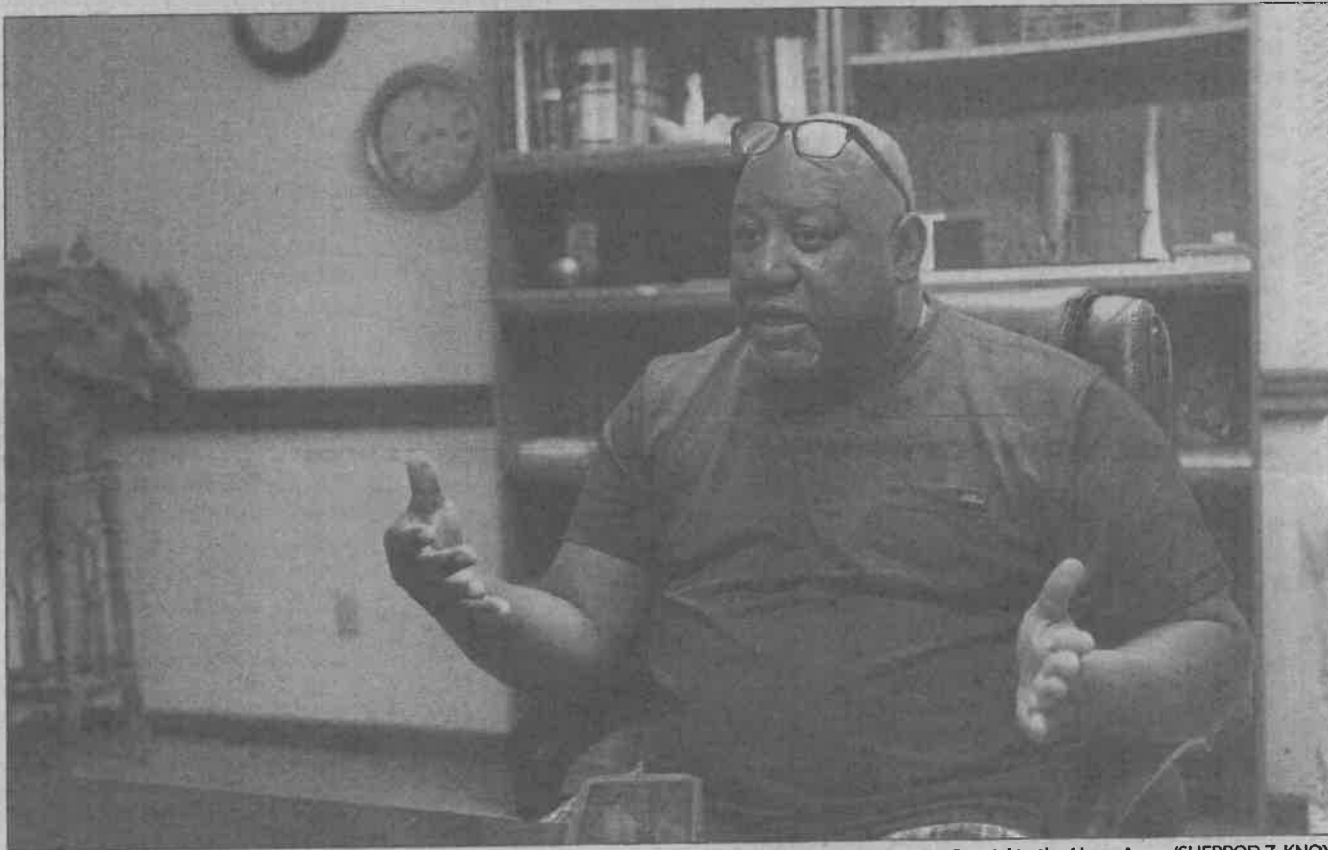


News Argus



BASEBALL
Wayne County Post 11
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39 in 7-inning thriller.

Mental health challenges intensify



Special to the News Argus/SHERROD Z. KNOX

Danny King, founder of One To One With Youth in Goldsboro, shares some of the challenges of helping people who experience mental health challenges, which, for some, intensified during the pandemic.

Stigma, mistrust hinder some from seeking help

BY JANET CONNER-KNOX
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS ARGUS

It was about a year ago when Marie Vajana's life went topsy-turvy.

First she lost her job due to COVID. As her money ran out, she had a hard time paying the rent on her house and ended up in court fighting her eviction.

"What made things worse was I had a (difficult) landlord that despite Gov. (Roy) Cooper's moratorium, she evicted me anyway," Vajana said quietly. "We ended up in small claims court, and the judge told her not to evict me."

But Vajana said her landlord took the back door off of the house, mak-

ing it unsafe to live there. Since she had lost her job, she no longer had health insurance and could not see her therapist to talk to.

Vajana ended up couch surfing until she found a woman who generously allowed her to live with her

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while she looked for another job. She finally got a job. Although she is college-educated, she had to take a position paying \$15 per hour.

And even though her eviction was dismissed in court, finding a place to live was a challenge.

"With an eviction on my credit report, nice apartments were off-limits to me," she said. "It was as if I could not make anything work out. It felt like a personal failure."

Stories like this are common, said Danny King, founder of One To One With Youth Inc. in Goldsboro.

King said there were so many people needing all kinds of help during the pandemic that just didn't get any assistance.

King said there were newly homeless people who were struggling, and things got even worse for people who were already homeless.

"All of a sudden the places where homeless people used to be were closed," King explained. "So it was a challenge to see where they migrated. Now how do you serve them?"

Suddenly the library's lobby was closed. Restaurants where homeless people would wash up and get a cup of coffee were closed to the

public, he said. He said with almost everywhere shut down, homeless people turned to back alleys and sometimes dumpsters to live just like homeless people in large cities.

"We provide mental health services and once all of this happened, homeless people became more challenging to serve as they went into survival mode," King said. "And at the same time, you see all of the places they migrate — it becomes more populated."

"I don't want to speak negatively about the city of Goldsboro, the infrastructure for homeless people we just do not have here."

Now that things are opening up, King says things have only improved a little. He said many homeless people have multiple mental health issues and sometimes choose to sleep on the street rather than go into a recovery house.

"Let's say their diagnosis has something to do with substance abuse, and we say there is nothing available except for this recovery house over here," King explained. "Psychologically they don't want people accusing them of something they have not accepted yet. It is a tough situation."

King said for some homeless people, their mental illness makes

them not trust anyone.

"They may think they don't need help, but they do need the help," King said.

King said during the pandemic many people realized how helpful mental health assistance is. Unfortunately, he said, for many, mental health still has a stigma.

"We should not see getting mental health help as a negative thing," he said. "It is the same as getting help for any other problem you might have. We saw a lot of people during the last year who didn't

realize they needed help who really needed it."

One of the methods King says his office uses is to match people up

with their peers who have successfully come through a bad place.

"For example, a person may have had a death of someone they love dearly and they find they are extremely depressed," King said. "We would match them with a peer who had a similar experience to talk with and work toward goals with."

With having a peer, it lets the person see that the person's problem can be overcome, he said.

"We set goals for that person, and they can't help but feel relief as they meet the goals in their life and move toward having a more healthy life," King said.

"It was as if I could not make anything work out. It felt like a personal failure."

— Marie Vajana