

Eating disorders awareness walk set Feb. 27



Walkers leadoff at the fourth annual walk last year for eating disorders awareness, celebrating everyBODY. (submitted photo / FPG)

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The fifth annual walk to support Eating Disorders Awareness, Celebrating EveryBODY, moves from a pavilion to Sunset Cove Amphitheater in West Boca Feb. 27 as attendance at the event grows, according to The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness.

Some 800 people are expected in Burt Aaronson South County Regional Park, 11200 Park Access Road. Registration opens at 9 a.m. for the 1-mile walk and program with speakers, yoga, refreshments and music. Advance registration for adults is \$20 or \$25 day of and \$10 or \$15 for students or children younger than 18 at allianceforeatingdisorders.com/portal/2016-alliance-walk-main.

"The walk is a morning of hope, inspiration and recovery," said Johanna Kandel, CEO of The Alliance, which is based in West Palm Beach. "The beauty of the walk is, it's an opportunity for people to come together, no matter where they are on their journey to recovery. There is help and hope, and people do recover."

Kandel estimates 30 million Americans struggle with eating disorders. The Alliance started 15 years ago to encourage early intervention, going into schools to educate students and teachers, and medical offices for help identify eating disorders and referrals for treatment.

"Our main goal is access to care," Kandel said.

It offers support groups at the office and in Plantation for people struggling with eating disorders, teens, binge-eating disorders, pro-recovery adults and friends and families.

"Since October 2000 we have talked to over 250,000 people," she said.

"One of the things we know, they do not discriminate," Kandel said about eating disorders. "There's so much miscommunication that they are a lifestyle choice. They are genetic in nature and...they're extremely deadly. They kill more people than drunk driving and they cost more, and the [National Institutes of Health] declares them an epidemic."

"I see both men and women of all ages who struggle with any type of eating disorder," said Terri Michael, a nutritionist and registered dietitian whose practice A Balanced Approach Nutritional Counseling Services is in Boca Raton. That can be anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa or binge-eating disorder. She is also clinical director of A Safe Harbour Eating Disorder Intensive Outpatient Program in West Palm Beach.

McCall Dempsey will speak at the walk about how eating disorders "ruled my mind with numbers, scales, sizes and calories" until she sought help with therapy and a treatment center in 2010, according to her website.

Congressman Ted Deutch will be honored.

"Ted is our biggest champion on [Capitol Hill]," Kandel said. "We've been advocating since he was a state senator and introduced two pieces of legislation."

"The Anna Westin Act will provide early intervention education for primary care and calls for a clarification of the Mental Health Parity Act. It's a zero-cost bill and the money is already there for the education piece," she said. "The intent of that bill is for all mental health diagnosis, including eating disorders. Many with eating disorders aren't getting access to care."

"Receiving this honor means a lot to me, because it was the stories of people struggling with eating disorders and the advocacy going on right here in our community that led me to take on this issue in Congress," Deutch said in an email.

"Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness, and yet so many Americans are left to fight this battle without the coverage, support and resources they need."

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