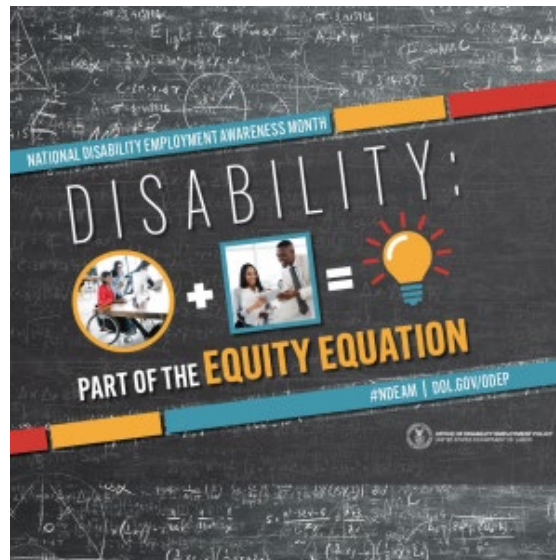


TN CIVIL RIGHTS NEWSLETTER

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National Native American Heritage Month

November is National Native American History Month! Beginning in 1990 when President George H.W. Bush signed a resolution designating November as “National American Indian Heritage Month,” with the name eventually turning into “National Native American Heritage Month” to better encompass native people¹. 2022 marks the 31st year since the United States officially recognized the entire month of November to honor indigenous people and their continuing impact².

Indigenous people and cultures have a wide-ranging impact on the state of Tennessee, and the following highlights their history to the state¹:

- ❖ Murfreesboro: just off Manchester Highway lays the former hunting grounds of Cherokee Chief Black Fox. The area was one of the first settled in Rutherford County, and the Murfree Spring was a resting site for some Cherokee on the Trail of Tears, according to Vanderbilt University.
- ❖ In Tennessee, names used today still speak to the lasting influence of native communities: Etowah, Chattanooga, Hiwassee and Tullahoma, to name a few.
- ❖ The land upon which the University of Tennessee-Knoxville is built is part of the traditional territory of the Tsalagi peoples (now Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and a few other Cherokee communities), Tsoyohá peoples (Yuchi, Muscogee Creek), and Shawnee peoples.
- ❖ The Chickasaw Treaty of 1783 in Nashville was an agreement between tribal leaders and white settlers regarding land settlement. The Cumberland area would be occupied by the colonists and the Tennessee River land beyond Duck River was allocated to the Chickasaw

1 The Tennessean: <https://www.tennessean.com/story/life/2021/11/02/native-american-indian-heritage-month-tennessee-history/6246485001/>

2. Tennessee River Valley: <https://tennesseerivervalleygeotourism.org/entries/november-is-native-american-heritage-month/a71e2462-be0c-48da-9053-08cfff65530a>



A Generational Perspective on Mental Health

Article Submitted by Katherine Brewer, TN CRAC Chair

Even though mental health has become a common phrase, often used when describing overall wellness, there are still many different views on it within our community. These varied perspectives can impact our interactions with coworkers and customers. Stereotypically, we think of Baby Boomers and Gen X as being emotionally closed which can come off as cold and unfeeling to their younger counterparts. Conversely, we think of Millennials and Gen Zs as being too emotionally open which may lead their older peers to think they weak or complaining. Even recognizing that these are broad generalizations the differing views on mental health between generations is worth examining because they have been clearly identified and measured.

Discussing the generational divide in viewpoints on mental health in reference to the workplace is important because the work environment is a large contributor to an employee's wellbeing. It is also specifically important to the work we do because our customers are likely to experience some form of Farm Stress. The recent disabilities survey distributed to KY and TN NRCS employees showed that we have employees experiencing depression and anxiety and that there is interest in receiving more support and education on these topics. To understand the generational difference in perspectives on mental health it is helpful to examine the context in which we have developed our mentalities.

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) lived through the Vietnam War which was close to inescapable as it was the first televised war. The war along with other stressful events caused trauma and economic turmoil. Those suffering from illnesses that we view as common and treatable today, including post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, were often sent away to asylums to remove them from society. Additionally, during this time there was no mental health education or awareness.

Generation X (born 1965-1980) is also known as the lost generation as they are defined by the fact that they have been so overlooked. They are described as being rushed through childhood due to expectations that they take care of themselves while their parents focused on work and dealt with political and economic upheaval. This self-reliance is certainly a strength but also led to a tough love mindset that can clash with our current views on mental health. They also did not receive education on mental health, or even have access to the internet where many find mental health resources today.

Millennials (born 1981-1996) were born during a time of positive change in the mental health community and they rejected the tough love mentality of the previous generations. They experienced the rise of technology and social media which brought with it many previously unavailable resources, but also the insecurity of comparison on a scale never possible before. They are now known as the anxious generation but are far more likely to seek help than their parents and grandparents.

Gen Z (born 1997-2012) is considered the most depressed generation, however the statistics on this are lacking, due to the previous taboos on seeking therapy. They are the first generation to be completely raised with smartphones and advanced technology, which has given them a global connection to a diverse range of people, but also continuous and immediate access to tragic world news. They have lived through 9/11, mass shootings, the rise of climate change, political unrest, a mental health revolution, and now a global pandemic.

With an increased understanding of our coworkers' and customers perspectives, we can aim to reduce the stress we are all experiencing by striving to relate better to one another. Below are a few helpful hints of what not to say to someone experiencing anxiety.

- **"Calm down"**- As well intended as this is, it is not helpful. Instead try modeling calm, by speaking gently and slowing your breathing. You can say something like "I'm here for you," "I'm here to listen," or "I'll stay with you."
- **"It's not a big deal"**- Anxious thoughts can be out of proportion for the situation but in the moment, it is a big deal the person experiencing it. A better response would be, "I can see you're really worried."
- **"Why are you so anxious?"**- Anxiety and panic attacks can strike for no apparent reason, so this is not helpful. Also, it's not helpful to try to explain why you think someone is anxious. Often it is best not to say anything, but to just listen and be present.
- **"I know how you feel"**- You may or may not have experienced the same level of anxiety as the person you're trying to help, but either way sharing your experiences with them during a panic attack or acute anxiety is not helpful. It's better to express that you're there for them.
- **"Stop worrying"**- Similarly to "calm down" this is not helpful because the emotions they are experiencing are not voluntary. It's best if you can challenge their anxious thoughts. For example, if a coworker is stressed about an important presentation, you could say "it's totally normal to feel stressed. But I know you've prepared and have given great presentations in the past."
- **"Have you tried [fill in the blank]"**- Just because something works for you, or someone you know, it doesn't mean it will work for others. Anxiety is a very individual experience. Instead, you can ask "what can I do to help you?"
- **"It's all in your head"**- This may be true, but it doesn't make their worry and fears any less real for them. You could try to help to connect them to the physical world by offering to walk with them or finding them a quiet place.
- **"Get over it"**- Anxiety is a health condition, similar to diabetes, asthma, or high blood pressure, which you probably wouldn't tell someone to "get over." Even if you don't understand what they're experiencing, it is helpful to show your support.

Please remember that there are resources if you are experiencing any mental health concerns and a good place to start is our Employee Assistance Program: <https://care.espyr.com/> password usdafpac.

References used for this article include:

<https://www.healthgrades.com/right-care/anxiety-disorders/9-things-not-to-say-to-someone-with-anxiety>
<https://uofvoyager.com/1132/campus-life/mental-health-perceptions-across-generations/>
<https://www.ncmh.info/2020/02/12/generational-differences-in-perceptions-of-mental-health/>



¡Día De Los Muertos!



Submitted by Dre Funk, TN Hispanic SEPM

Every year we get to enjoy celebrating Hispanic heritage with Hispanic Heritage Month spanning from September 15- October 15. Then just a few weeks after, a major celebration from within the Mexican culture begins: Día de los Muertos. Directly translating to “The Day Of The Dead,” this two-day celebration encompasses honoring loved ones who passed away and that death is a vital part to life. The following excerpt from History.com further explains the meaning of Día De Los Muertos:

“The Day of the Dead (el Día de los Muertos), is a Mexican holiday where families welcome back the souls of their deceased relatives for a brief reunion that includes food, drink and celebration. A blend of Mesoamerican ritual, European religion and Spanish culture, the holiday is celebrated each year from October 31-November 2. While October 31 is Halloween, November 2 is All Souls Day or the Day of the Dead. According to tradition, the gates of heaven are opened at midnight on October 31 and the spirits of children can rejoin their families for 24 hours. The spirits of adults can do the same on November 2.”

Origins of Day of the Dead¹

The roots of the Day of the Dead, celebrated in contemporary Mexico and among those of Mexican heritage in the United States and around the world, go back some 3,000 years, to the rituals honoring the dead in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. The Aztecs and other Nahua people living in what is now central Mexico held a cyclical view of the universe, and saw death as an integral, ever-present part of life.

Upon dying, a person was believed to travel to Chicunamictlán, the Land of the Dead. Only after getting through nine challenging levels, a journey of several years, could the person’s soul finally reach Mictlán, the final resting place. In Nahua rituals honoring the dead, traditionally held in August, family members provided food, water and tools to aid the deceased in this difficult journey. This inspired the contemporary Day of the Dead practice in which people leave food or other offerings on their loved ones’ graves, or set them out on makeshift altars called *ofrendas* in their homes.

How Is the Day of the Dead Celebrated?¹

El Día de los Muertos is not, as is commonly thought, a Mexican version of Halloween, though the two holidays do share some traditions, including costumes and parades. On the Day of the Dead, it’s believed that the border between the spirit world and the real-world dissolve. During this brief period, the souls of the dead awaken and return to the living world to feast, drink, dance and play music with their loved ones. In turn, the living family members treat the deceased as honored guests in their celebrations and leave the deceased’s favorite foods and other offerings at gravesites or on the *ofrendas* built in their homes. *Ofrendas* can be decorated with candles, bright marigolds called *cempasuchil* and red cock’s combs alongside food like stacks of tortillas and fruit.”

¹ <https://www.history.com/topics/halloween/day-of-the-dead>

Back in May of this year, I had the opportunity to attend the PBS taping of Dia De Lose Muertos held at the Caverns subterranean amphitheater in Pelham, TN. Our group sang and danced to modern and traditional music performed by Los Lobos, Ozomatli, and the all-female mariachi band Flor de Toloache alongside local Mexican heritage groups from around Tennessee who came to celebrate the occasion in traditional dress. The concert was joyous and was an entirely different experience, especially being a part of a taped special that required audience participation. It was wonderful to experience traditional Mexican heritage in my own backyard and I hope others will find local events within their own communities next year and all the years to come!

The PBS special was released on Halloween weekend this year and is available with a PBS membership to view here: <https://www.pbs.org/show/dia-de-los-muertos/>



From left to right: Los Lobos; Concertgoers in traditional dress; Flor de Toloache// Photos courtesy of Dre Funk

Reducing Loneliness: How to Help Seniors During the Holidays

Submitted by Tammy Swihart, TN Disabilities SEPM

There is a lot of pressure on people to enjoy themselves during the holidays. The season is supposed to be merry and bright, but many elders feel increasingly isolated and unhappy this time of year—even before the coronavirus pandemic complicated everyday life and special occasions. Understandably, families are still concerned about how minimizing COVID-19 risk will affect their holiday plans with aging loved ones this year.

Why Seniors Experience Holiday Loneliness

While aging can bring wisdom and experience, there are inevitable losses that even the healthiest seniors face. Loved ones and friends fall ill and pass away. Energy and mobility levels often decrease, resulting in feelings of lost independence and opportunities. Neighborhoods change over time, leaving even those well enough to remain in their own homes feeling lonely and disconnected from their communities. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), socially isolated older adults are at higher risk for depression. The focus on family, friends, and togetherness during this time of year can actually bring melancholy feelings to the forefront for many elders. It's more important than ever to be supportive of and attentive to our loved ones, but in ways that keep everyone as safe and healthy as possible. If you believe that an aging parent, friend or neighbor may be feeling lonely or depressed, there are steps you can take to help lift their spirits. You are probably busy with adapting your own holiday plans and traditions, but we must remind ourselves what the holiday season is truly about. Simplifying some things will allow you to focus on what really matters: the important people in your life. Use these ideas to brighten up a loved one's winter season.

10 Tips for Reducing Loneliness During the Holidays

1. Make a point of actively listening when your loved one wants to talk, even if the discussion is negative. An honest and empathetic conversation can help them process what is bothering them, whether they are mourning a loss or coming to terms with new challenges in life. It may also reveal why they are feeling down and inspire other ways of lifting their spirits.
2. Remind them how important they are as a part of your life, your family members' lives, and these annual holiday celebrations. They may feel useless or burdensome if they cannot contribute to or fully participate in the festivities like they used to. Encourage them to do what they are capable of and be especially careful not to act like what you do for them is done out of a sense of duty. Show them they are loved.
3. Over the years, holiday cards often bring bad news and diminish in quantity. I used to sit with my mom when she opened her cards because so many of them brought news of illness or death. She was also keenly aware of the people she didn't hear from. Be gentle with your loved ones if these annual greetings are an important tradition of theirs. If possible, ask family members and friends to contribute cards, photographs, or drawings to help keep the senior's seasonal mail more upbeat. My mom needed this connection with her life-long friends, so I helped her write her own outgoing cards each year as well.
4. Help your loved one see that you are trying to simplify your holiday plans to focus on the real meaning of these celebrations. Let them know you are trying to ignore the increasing hype over food, gifts, decorations, and parties in order to focus on the people and values you cherish. Remind them that they have taught you the importance of family and friendship and thank them for that.
5. If a senior is in a long-term care facility, check with the activities director and local schools or extracurricular programs to see if they can arrange for children to do virtual or distanced visits with or performances for the residents. New activities and interactions with younger generations can be very uplifting for elders who are in physical or emotional pain. Visiting pet therapy is another source of entertainment and socialization that can bring joy to seniors whose social lives have been significantly impacted by COVID-19.
6. Check with your loved one's religious organization to see if they can offer extra social and/or spiritual support. Many houses of worship can arrange for a congregant or leader to visit a senior in need, either in person or virtually. Just having someone to talk to can go a long way toward relieving depression.
7. Help them add festive touches to their home or room in the long-term care facility. Ensure that these items do not present a safety hazard and try to decorate in stages to prolong the fun and give them something to look forward to. Many seniors enjoy reflecting on past holidays as they unpack cherished decorations, so be sure to listen to their stories and ask about special pieces. If you can't be there in person, at least phone or video call while they're decking the halls. Some small, easy-to-use decorations in senior apartments include removable window clings, garland, and artificial wreaths or floral arrangements.
8. Cook traditional baked goods or treats with your loved one if it is safe to get together in person. If they reside in an assisted living facility or nursing home, bring familiar treats that represent your holiday customs for your elder to enjoy and share with their friends. Try to make their dining table festive, too, by offering to send themed decor, appropriate colors, and seasonal flavors.
9. Check into the nursing facility as to whether they would have a small conference room that could be used to host a small get-together for them and their friends. Just be sure to follow current CDC guidelines for minimizing COVID-19 risk at holiday gatherings. If traditional holiday parties or gatherings can't be held in a safe way, call your elder's friends and/or family to see if they would be able to attend a virtual gathering instead. Keep in mind that it doesn't necessarily have to be on a particular holiday. Realizing that the people they care about dialed in to spend time with them is priceless for an elder. Consider keeping virtual get-togethers small for elders with dementia so they do not get confused or overwhelmed. Technology can be disorienting and too many participants may cause them to become frustrated.
10. The most important thing you can do with a senior to make them feel loved and included this season is to simply spend time with them in a safe way. Look at family photos, watch home videos or holiday movies, listen to seasonal music, or do crafts together. For some, these traditions may need to take place outside (weather permitting), via FaceTime or Zoom, or while you social distance and wear masks. Regardless of what you decide to do together, any time you can spare is a precious gift.

By Carol Bradley Bursack, Minding Our Elders

November LGBTQI+ Update

Submitted by Lauren Carter, TN LGBTQI+ SEPM

In 2022, The Human Rights Campaign reported more than 30 transgender individuals in the US were severely injured or lost their lives to hate-violence. On November 20th, we honored these individuals and all who have experienced the impact of anti-transgender hate-crimes. This past Transgender Day of Remembrance was especially somber, as on November 19th at least five individuals died in a shooting at Club Q, a LGBTQ safehouse and nightclub, in Colorado Springs. The deadly shooting left at least two dozen others injured before the shooter was restrained and arrested. Congressman David N Cicilline, Chair of the Congressional LGBTQ+ Equality Caucus, released a statement that morning on the news of the shooting. He said, “[a]s we mark Transgender Day of Remembrance today, we are further reminded that deadly violence against members of our community is sadly not new.” Hate-violence is an epidemic in our country; one that we must fight to end. Our hearts go out to the victims and their families.

In honor of the 5 victims that lost their lives:

Raymond Green Vance

Kelly Loving

Daniel Aston

Derrick Rump

Ashley Paugh

In lighter news, on November 29th the Senate passed legislation to order federal protection for same-sex and interracial marriage; additionally the Respect for Marriage Act has the support of President Joe Biden. The president said, “[t]he Respect for Marriage Act will ensure that LGBTQI+ couples and interracial couples are respected and protected equally under federal law, and provide more certainty to these families since the Supreme Court’s decision in Dobbs.” The bill requires that people be considered married in any state as long as the marriage was valid in the state where it was performed.

Information found from:

Statement on Shooting at Club Q in Colorado Springs | LGBTQ+ Equality Caucus (house.gov)

Colorado Springs mass shooting: 5 dead, 25 injured at LGBTQ nightclub; Anderson Lee Aldrich identified as suspect - CBS News

Same-sex marriage legislation clears key Senate hurdle (nypost.com)

Veteran SEPM Update

Submitted by Elizabeth Bezinque, TN Veterans SEPM

[Onward to Opportunity](#) – Free Career Development Training for Veterans, National Guard / Reservists, and their Spouses Hosted by Syracuse University

Supported by grants from JPMorgan Chase & Co. and the Schultz Family Foundation, Onward to Opportunity – formerly known as the Veterans Career Transition Program – utilizes an online learning platform to help active duty, selected reserve, veterans, and military spouses learn business, technology, and other relevant skills to accomplish their personal and professional goals.

Participants may choose to work towards one of our supported industry certifications administered by globally recognized organizations. O2O combines industry-validated curricula, strong partnerships, comprehensive career coaching and employer relations services to match program participants with job opportunities or professional development – leading to meaningful career opportunities.

The program costs only your time and effort! There are no monetary costs. O2O does not use your GI Bill or VA education benefits. The application process, advising support coursework, practice exams, one industry certification exam fee, and career services support are free of monetary cost to eligible participants.

Once enrolled, you do commit time to complete the program within the time limits stated by your IVMF Advisor or Installation Coordinator.

[Current O2O offerings](#) include IT (Cloud Practitioner, CompTIA, Systems Security, Programming Essentials, NDG Linux, Python), Business Management (Data Science, Agile Certifications, Project Management, Six Sigma, S/PHR) and Customer Service certifications – AND MORE.

[O2O FAQ](#) and [Application](#) pages have additional information. Don’t worry if you aren’t close to a military installation, online programs are available!

Have You Heard Of The NRCS Wellness Program?

Submitted by Gordon Counts, NRCS Wellness Champion SE Region, TN CRAC Vice Chair

NRCS Wellness Champions are a team made up of representatives from all levels of the agency and of vary disciplines. Individuals on this team have an interest in improving the health and wellness of NRCS employees and changing our culture to reducing unneeded work-related stress, improving access to health and wellness tools and information, and helping to create agency wide adoption of a Wellness Program. Below is a diagram of the areas that the Wellness Champions hope to explore:



The NRCS Wellness Team have started and will be presenting a series of Growing Wellness guides and activities to help NRCS employees improve their physical and mental wellness. These include:

- "WAIT! Stress is Good?" Presentation on January 10 @ 1:00p.m.
- ["Take 5! The Importance of Work Breaks."](#) Published November 30.



Join Us!

Upcoming Fiscal Year 2023 Quarterly Civil Rights Advisory Committee Meetings

- 2nd Quarter Meeting on February 1-2 in McMinnville
- 3rd Quarter Meeting on May 17-18 in Nashville
- 4th Quarter Meeting on August 16-17 in Jackson

You are invited to join us to present a topic or just to see how the committee operates. If you would like to attend, contact Katherine Brewer at Katherine.Brewer@usda.gov with your supervisor's approval. *We look forward to seeing you there!*

Winter Celebrations

AROUND THE WORLD



BOXING DAY

- Became an official holiday in 1871, celebrated on Dec. 26th
- Mainly celebrated in the UK and former British colonies
- Now, this day often features shopping sales and sports



CHINESE NEW YEAR

- Celebrates the Lunar New Year and Chinese zodiac animals
- Starts on the first day of the new moon (Jan. 21 – Feb. 20)
- Children are often gifted red envelopes that contain money



CHRISTMAS

- Celebrated on Dec. 25 to mark the birth of Jesus Christ
- Often includes the decorating of evergreen trees, large family gatherings, and visits from Santa Claus
- Gifts are commonly exchanged



DIWALI

- Five-day festival of lights, celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains
- Celebrates light over darkness
- Often features fireworks and festivities, and sweet treats



HANUKKAH

- Eight-day Jewish festival, also known as the festival of lights
- One candle is lit on the menorah every day for eight days
- Features special prayers and fried foods such as latkes



KWANZAA

- Seven-day African-American festival
- Started in 1966 and celebrated from Dec. 26 – Jan. 1
- Light the *kinara*, one candle for seven days, with each representing a different value



LAS POSADAS

- Christmas tradition in Mexico, celebrated Dec. 16 – 24
- Involves processions to and from various houses as well as caroling
- Ends with breaking piñatas and lots of candy for kids



ST. LUCIA DAY

- Also known as St. Lucy Day, this festival of lights is celebrated in Scandinavia and Italy
- Girls are often dressed as shown above
- Often includes St. Lucia Crown Cake with seven candles



THREE KINGS DAY

- Celebrated on Jan. 6th
- In Mexico, children leave their shoes by the door so they can receive presents
- Sweet bread often contains lucky baby figures



WINTER SOLSTICE

- Official start to winter
- Longest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere
- Celebrates changing seasons and features an emphasis on nature and Earth

