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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY ANNOUNCES “TODAY I THRIVE,” SWEEPING  
MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS CAMPAIGN**

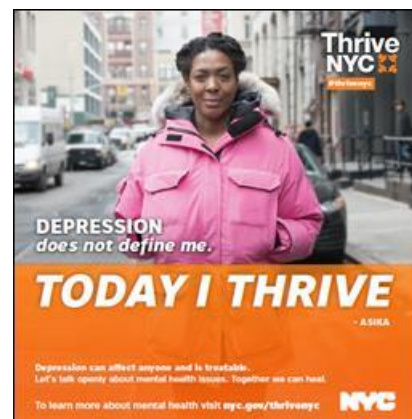
*New ads telling real stories of people suffering from mental health issues hit TV, newspapers,  
social media, bus shelters and subways today*

**NEW YORK**—First Lady Chirlane McCray today announced the launch of “Today I Thrive,” a comprehensive [ThriveNYC](#) campaign to raise awareness among New Yorkers about the prevalence and treatment of mental health issues. The [ads](#) aim to open the conversation about mental health illness, a problem affecting one in five New Yorkers. Promoting the notion that mental health issues do not define those who suffer from them, and inviting New Yorkers to talk openly about mental health issues, the campaign seeks to destigmatize mental health issues by reframing the way people think and talk about them.

“For too long, mental illness has been relegated to shadows and whispers. Because of this, so many hurt needlessly because they are afraid to reach out for the help that can dramatically improve lives. We must end this silence,” said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**, who spearheads [ThriveNYC](#), the city’s efforts to reform mental health care. “The only way we will erase continued stigma is with open, honest conversation. The stories of these New Yorkers show mental illness is not shameful and that recovery is possible. I hope this campaign encourages others to share their stories and talk honestly about mental health. Together, we can change the mindset around the mind. We can make it as easy to talk about anxiety as allergies, so no one else suffers in silence.”

"Changing the culture is one of ThriveNYC's guiding principles with good reason," said **Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives Richard Buery**. “‘Today I Thrive’ will serve to inspire open conversation about our mental health, to seek treatment when needed and begin to put an end to this public health crisis.”

“‘Today I Thrive’ is a wonderful campaign that highlights the challenges and possibilities of people in our City struggling with mental health conditions,” said **New York City Health Commissioner Dr. Mary T. Bassett**. “Educating New Yorkers about the importance of speaking up and seeking help is an invaluable public health message that can lead to healthier,



longer and happier lives. I invite New Yorkers to join this important and potentially life-saving conversation.”

The “Today I Thrive” ads highlight the stories of eight brave men and women of different ages and backgrounds who have struggled with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, alcohol misuse and drug addiction. This is the first of a series of campaigns designed to educate New Yorkers about mental illness and drive conversation.

“These on target clips offer help and a precious sense of hope and dignity to New Yorkers with mental health and addiction related conditions. Their cross cultural messages will help keep the promise the Mayor and First Lady made to help spare others the struggles their parents were forced to endure,” said **Harvey Rosenthal, Executive Director of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services.**

“We applaud the First Lady’s efforts to talk openly and frankly about mental health in New York City,” said **Christy Parque, Chief Executive Officer of The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies.** “Thrive NYC’s ‘Today I Thrive’ campaign will not only expand the dialogue around mental health, but it will help to reduce stigma and put a face on an issue that so rarely gets the attention it deserves. Our communities are stronger when they have access to the services and supports they need.”

"Mental health is entering a new era, the stigma that has clouded the issue is losing its stronghold and we finally have an open dialogue. 'Today I Thrive' will keep that open dialogue alive and continue to invite our diverse communities to talk openly about mental health issues. Thank you First Lady Chirlane McCray for working hard to increase awareness and to destigmatize mental health," said **Council Member Andrew Cohen, Chair of the Committee on Mental Health.**

"For too long, mental health issues have been missing from the conversation," said **Council Member Corey Johnson, Chair of the Council's Committee on Health.** “Thrive NYC is bringing new awareness to an issue that affects one in five New Yorkers. I applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray for her leadership on this important issue.”

“Mental health stigma keeps people from getting the care they need,” said **City Council Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer.** “The “Today I Thrive” campaign is an important step to end stigma by showing that recovery is possible and there is nothing shameful about mental illness. I applaud the eight brave New Yorkers featured in this campaign and First Lady Chirlane McCray for their commitment to ending stigma and fostering open, honest conversations about mental health.”

“I commend First Lady Chirlane McCray for bringing the prevalence and treatment of mental health issues to the forefront in New York City. The ThriveNYC campaign will reach all demographics in our city; pulling back the curtain and inviting all New Yorkers to engage in the mental health conversation,” **Councilman Vinny Gentile** said. “An educated New York is a healthier New York. ‘Today I Thrive’ seeks to break through the stigmatic clutter concerning mental health issues, revealing a light at the end of the tunnel for those affected.”

“‘Today I Thrive’ is an urgent and priceless message that will go a long way to de-stigmatize mental illness and help families begin an open dialogue with their loved ones about treatment and recovery. Mental health disorders affect too many New Yorkers to be ignored, and we should not ostracize or leave those suffering to cope alone. I whole-heartedly support and applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray for her leadership in changing the culture around depression, anxiety, addiction and other challenges to our mental health,” said **Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, Chair of Finance Committee.**

"With one in five Americans experiencing a mental health issue in any given year, we all know someone who's coping. Deutsche Bank applauds New York City's efforts to decrease the stigma. When there is less stigma, more people will come forward to get the help they need," said **Jacques Brand, CEO of Deutsche Bank North America.**

### **Quotes from People Featured in “Today I Thrive” Campaign:**

“When you can talk about what you are experiencing, it draws you closer to others. Along with medication and counseling, it is important to take care of yourselves. Leading a good life with mental health illnesses is possible, wellness is possible,” said **Hakeem**, a black 35 year old who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at the age of 18 when he was a freshman at Harvard University. He was hospitalized and eventually went on medication to control his disorder. He has learned other ways to cope, including yoga, staying fit and keeping a vegan diet. Hakeem currently promotes mental health issues among youth, including at New York City schools, and recently received New York City's Mental Health First Aid training.

“Feeling completely alone and totally isolated in my own thoughts, I realized I was having a problem with mental health,” said **Asika**, and 38-year-old black New Yorker who has struggled with depression for most of her life. Asika believes it is important to never feel alone or ashamed of your problems and that people with mental health issues need to find the type of help that fits their lives. “Depression is a part of my life. It doesn't define me, it's not who I am, but it is a part of my life that I have to deal with.”

**Jimmy**, a 27-year-old Chinese-American who lives in Astoria, Queens, started dealing with severe depression in his early 20s and often used alcohol to cope with it. Depression kept him from spending time with his friends and family. “My parents had no idea how to tackle mental health because they were more worried about what the community thought,” he said. He eventually sought therapy and has been in recovery since. Jimmy believes that people can't deal with depression alone and should seek help when needed.

**Bernard**, a 58-year-old black New Yorker who lives in the Bronx, spoke candidly about his addiction problems and his initial reluctance to admit he had a problem: “I couldn't stop. I thought I was cool. I thought it was a way of life.” Bernard was addicted to crack for a number of years and spent time in jail. After getting out of prison, he decided to seek help. He has been sober since the early 2000s. He believes that it is up to each person to admit the need for help, and that help can change “your whole way of thinking.”

“When I was thirteen, I had my first panic attack and that was really when I started dealing with feelings of anxiety,” said **Kerri**, a 31-year-old white woman from Sunnyside, Queens. Finding the courage to ask for help allowed her to finally get her life back on track. “In therapy, I’ve learned how to retrain my brain to deal with anxiety. ...I felt like I was taking my life back... Getting help was worth it because it empowered me and I felt like I was taking my life back.”

“There was no reason to be an addict, but I was,” said **Chris**, a Greek-American from Washington Heights, Manhattan, who struggled with alcohol addiction since early in life to cope with mental health issues. His drinking helped him cope with excessive fear of not being able to connect with others. He says that only help can give people living with addiction the opportunity to “see” what life can be. “I allowed myself to be helped, to be teachable. You just wake up months down the road and realize I’m at peace with it; people want me around.”



**Nana**, a Latina immigrant mother of two who lives in Bayside, Queens, is now able to enjoy the company of her family thanks to the treatment she received and the confidence she gained in being able to talk about the depression that has affected her most of her life. Her depression often resulted in constant feelings of sadness, lack of energy, and questioning her own choices. She feels like counseling and medication have changed her life, allowing brighter days and the ability to enjoy time with her family. As she explained, “I no longer have the phobia I had with the word ‘depression’.”

**Alma**, a 59-year-old mother of Puerto Rican descent who was born and raised in Harlem, Manhattan, shared her experience with drug addiction. She started using alcohol and cocaine heavily at age 28 to cope with her mother’s death. Concerned about the impact that her addiction had on her family, she sought outpatient treatment. She has been sober for 20 years, and became a case manager to help others who are living with substance abuse. “I learned to focus on positive goals to improve my life and set a good example for my children.”

### **About ThriveNYC**

ThriveNYC is an unprecedented strategy and set of 54 initiatives by the City to approach mental health as a comprehensive public health challenge involving many City agencies. ThriveNYC aims to change the conversation and stigma surrounding mental illness and provide greater access to mental health care. For more information on ThriveNYC, visit

<https://thrivenyc.cityofnewyork.us>

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