

THE FIRST ❁ THE ONLY

# Vero Beach

## Magazine

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*Christmas traditions old and new  
make the season bright for the*

### Curley Family





Talking to someone can make a world of difference when it comes to mental health. Resources are available to connect people with providers.

# When Life Is a Struggle, Get ‘Unstruggled’

A NEW MOVEMENT HAS BEEN LAUNCHED TO INCREASE USE OF LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

When life is a struggle, getting help should not be. In the new single “Cannibal” from his new album, *Self-Titled*, Marcus Mumford sings about a time when he struggled with the memories of a childhood trauma and was afraid to ask for help.

Of course I deny it  
Can hardly believe it  
Dismiss or demean it  
‘Cause I know I can’t speak it.

In an August interview with *The Guardian’s* Laura Snapes, Mumford, who is known worldwide as the front man and lead singer for the band Mumford & Sons, said

“Like lots of people . . . I was sexually abused as a child. Not by family and not in the church, which might be some people’s assumption. But I hadn’t told anyone about it for 30 years.”

Starting in 2018, with help from a therapist who specialized in trauma, Mumford began to talk



Deana Shatley, Meredith Egan, and Jessica Schmitt of the United Way attend the Mental Health Collaborative's Unstruggle campaign kickoff, held at First Presbyterian Church.

about the trauma and the lifelong impact it has had on him. After several years of therapy, he says that writing and recording *Self-Titled* helped him to peel away “layers of shame” and heal. A loving family, supportive friends and bandmates, access to care, and a shift in long-held cultural beliefs likely saved his life.

Unfortunately, this is not the outcome for everyone who struggles.

Here in Indian River County, we have one of the highest mental health provider-to-resident ratios in the state of Florida: one mental health provider for every 747 residents. Despite this relatively high level of access to care, hospi-

talizations due to mental health are at a rate 44 percent higher than the state average. Furthermore, suicides within the county are 11 percent higher than the state average, and hospitalizations of youth for mood/depressive disorders are 50 percent higher than the state average. These statistics are concerning, but thankfully the community is responding.

In October, the Mental Health Collaborative of Indian River County launched a new movement to make mental health care more accessible within the county, reduce barriers, and eliminate stigmas surrounding mental health. “All you need to do is ask for help,

and we’ll take care of the rest,” the campaign website [www.unstruggle.org](http://www.unstruggle.org) invites.

In addition to raising awareness, this community initiative will direct residents to the local providers and programs and/or the McCabe Connections Center, a central access point for supporting the mental health needs of the county. The center connects residents with local mental health care professionals, as well as other programs and services available in our community that can help anyone to “unstruggle.”

While I have enjoyed the music of Mumford & Sons for years, listening to the songs on Mumford’s new solo album was the

first time I learned of his experience of childhood sexual abuse. His story was similar to my own, and the songs on the new album have been the soundtrack as I prepared for the October release of my own account in a new book, *Better at the Broken Places*.

Like Mumford, I was sexually abused as a child and repressed the memory for years. I remembered the nearly 30-year-old abuse for the first time in October 2017, during a conversation with my wife, Stephanie, as the “Me Too” movement was emerging following news reports from across the country.

I asked Stephanie if she had ever experienced

**“All you need to do is ask for help,  
and we’ll take care of the rest.”**

- UNSTRUGGLE.ORG



Representatives of the Mental Health Association receive a grant from the Indian River Community Foundation.

anything like these examples of sexual abuse and assault being shared by actors and actresses and Olympic gymnasts, among others. She replied with a flat out “No.” Then she asked, “What about you?”

The question startled me. It prompted an involuntary reflex to repel the mere idea that some-

thing like that had ever happened to me. I sensed the words “of course not” on the tip of my tongue. Then, out of nowhere, the room spun, and a series of white-hot images flooded my mind with what I would eventually remember as 18 months of childhood sexual abuse by my own Orlando-area pediatric orthopedic sur-

geon following an injury in a high school baseball game.

At the time I remembered, I was 44 years old, married, a proud father of three beautiful children, living on the ocean, surfing every day, and at the peak of my career. For the first time in my life, however, I had just told someone that I remem-

bered being sexually abused as a child by my doctor. The shame was nearly unbearable. Like Mumford, I had a loving family, supportive friends and colleagues, access to care, and a shifting community perception of the importance of mental health. I still struggled, as Mumford did when he sings:

But when I began to tell,  
It became the hardest thing  
I said out loud.  
The words got locked in my  
throat  
Man, I choked.

Before asking for help, I was a cliché. In my mind, asking for help with my personal problems was something I associated with weakness. Depending on someone else to do something for me, rather than do it for myself, was unbecoming. There were and still are many societal influences that deter people who are struggling to reach out for help. They are an illusion, made up and made stronger by perpetual silence.

According to Brett Hall, executive director of the Mental Health Collaborative of Indian River County, “By definition, ‘unstruggle’ means help for community residents to see a path forward in which they do not need to struggle with mental health challenges—that through community support and professional care, their struggles can be addressed.”

Having an experienced doctor, an individual therapist, and group therapy to turn to, talk to, and to guide me through the process of unstruggling has been critical. It has helped me to stop feeling guilty about standing up for myself, and it has also



Brett Hall addresses the assembly on the concept of “unstruggling.”

given me the courage to speak out and seek justice for myself and others through statute of limitations reform in Florida and across the United States. Family and friends cannot, and should not, shoulder this.

Asking for help was nearly impossible for me, until it wasn’t. Being helped allowed me to experience grace and to learn empathy. Ultimately, I did the work, but

help from others to get unstruggled made the difference, just as Mumford sings, “And this is what it feels like to be free.”

If you or someone you know who lives in Indian River County is struggling, I encourage you to visit [www.unstruggle.org](http://www.unstruggle.org). Numerous resources are listed, including information about the McCabe Connections Center (772-217-3663) to access mental health or

substance abuse services, the 211 Helpline, the 988 Helpline for general suicide prevention and crisis intervention, and the Trevor Lifeline (888-488-7386) for LGBTQ or questioning youth who are struggling.

When life presents anyone with challenges that seem unmanageable, all we need to do is ask for help. A team of unstrugglers is standing by, ready to take care of the rest. ☀