

# Project Connect Niagara offers 40-plus services to community

**BY KAREN CARR KEEFE**  
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A one-day, one-stop event in Niagara Falls next week will bring more than 40 agencies and health providers together to help area residents who are in need of services.

Project Connect Niagara invites individuals to learn more about how to receive needed services through a special event from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday, July 26, at Heart Love & Soul, 939 Ontario Ave., Niagara Falls. The day is especially targeted to help the homeless, and is a project of the Niagara County Coalition of Services to the Homeless.

Service providers will share information, resources and referrals to help people in Niagara Falls and Niagara County to navigate a system that can be confusing to those in crisis.

Christian Hoffman of Community Missions Inc. explained how the annual event will connect people with the providers who can help solve their problems.

“So often we may hear of different organizations out in the community that exist but, if a particular problem arises, we don’t know necessarily how to put it together so that this organization ‘could help me with this problem.’”

Hoffman said the day is aimed at providing connections for people who seek housing, legal services, employment and health services, as well offering help with problems involving substance abuse, mental health and other challenges.

Health care providers will be on hand at Wednesday’s event to offer medical services, vaccinations, screenings, referrals and other services. Employers for training programs also will be on-site for a job fair and to connect people with job opportunities in the community, Hoffman said.

All attendees will be offered lunch as part of the food program available weekdays at Heart, Love & Soul. They will also be able to take home produce from local farms, as well as a gift card



City of Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino addresses the media.

from Tops for participating in the event.

Hoffman said that, in previous years, as many as 300 people have attended the Project Connect event. It is hoped that this year’s event will exceed that number.

“Very often in the community, people don’t know how to access services” for mental health issues,” said State Senate Minority Leader Robert Ort. He said that, as state government representatives prepare the budget, they make sure to allocate the funds for services, but it’s important to get the information to those who need it. “It’s not always apparent how they can get help. We know the money is there, there’s funding there,” but very often, more is needed to connect people in the community with the agencies that can help them.

Ort said that many of the homeless in the area are dealing with some kind of mental health challenge that can spiral into substance abuse and other problems such as lack of employment. He noted that, sometimes, job loss is the root of the problem, as well.

“We’re here to let the community know we care about them,” Assemblyman Angelo Morinello said. He explained it’s important for everyone, neighbor to neighbor, to get the word out to those

who need it, as to the services available through Wednesday’s one-stop event.

Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino echoed that sentiment. He said Project Connect “is an opportunity to get everyone in the same location so that people aren’t wandering about trying to figure out where they have to go to get help.”

He added the goal is attacking poverty: “Until you zero in on doing that, you’ll always be chasing the same problems.”

Restaino said that, to improve the city’s economy and face unemployment problems head on, “it’s important to take the hospitality industry and make it a 12-month industry.”

Pam Dixon, assistant director of Heart, Love & Soul, said the agency is there for people as a follow-up to next week’s Project Connect event.

“That’s what we do every day,” she said. “So this is a day when all of the organizations are here together, but we have case managers that meet one-on-one with the guests and find out what their needs are and hook them up with these agencies that are also going to be here for this one-day event.”

Dixon also said agency representatives can come to Heart, Love & Soul to meet with the guests.

## Cornell Cooperative Extension, Niagara County Agricultural Rights Advisory Panel host safety event in preparation for County Fair



More than 70 4-H youth and their attended an animal safety event at the Niagara County fairgrounds.

Submitted by the Public Information Office

More than 70 4-H youth and their families attended an animal safety meeting last Wednesday night hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Niagara County (CCE-Niagara) and the Niagara County Agricultural Rights Ad-

visory Panel. The meeting was to discuss the upcoming Niagara County Fair and the proper protocols for the 4-H youth to interact with the public in a way that keeps both fairgoers and the animals safe.

Capt. Thomas Huff from the

Niagara County Sheriff’s Office addressed strategies to keep animals safe, keep each other safe, and how to get help when it is needed. Huff also communicated that there will be additional safety protocols in place at the Fair this year.



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