

Tulane University School of Social Work and Send Me a Friend partner to survey musicians' behavioral health

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Anders Osborne, musician and co-founder of Send Me a Friend (pictured left), Patrick Bordnick, PhD, School of Social Work dean (pictured right), Bill Taylor, Send Me a Friend director, and other behavioral health clinicians have partnered to conduct to examine the behavioral health challenges that musicians face. (Photo provided by Patrick Bordnick)

To examine the behavioral health challenges that musicians face, Tulane University School of Social Work and Send Me a Friend are partnering on a nationwide survey.

The idea evolved from conversations with Patrick Bordnick, PhD, School of Social Work dean, Anders Osborne, musician and co-founder of Send Me a Friend, Bill Taylor, Send Me a Friend's director, and other behavioral health clinicians. Tonya Hansel, PhD, at the School of Social Work as well as musicians and industry experts added their insight to develop clarity into the ways performers experience and manage their unique lifestyles.

"We've worked with and have tragically lost so many musicians who have struggled with substance abuse, anxiety, depression and many other issues, but gathering data will both elevate the conversation and help identify and implement interventions that work for this particular community," says Taylor. "While some support systems exist, more could definitely be available."

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To gain feedback from musicians and industry professionals, the study presents a series of just over 30 questions to determine the lifestyle challenges they regularly face in their profession.

“The survey has been well-vetted, done with musician input, and employs best practices and ethical considerations,” says Bordnick. With 20 years of experience in clinical and laboratory research on addiction, he translates this knowledge into convenient, common-sense interventions.

Bordnick and Send Me A Friend envision a world where people who are in recovery interact seamlessly with those who are not.

“Our hope is that we can use the information to create inclusivity for all people making music or attending performances, regardless of their recovery status or behavioral health challenges,” Bordnick says.

“We (Send Me A Friend) realized that we were operating a little bit in the dark when it came down to further help with recovery and mental health issues in the music industry,” says Osborne. “So, we partnered up with Dean Patrick Bordnick here in New Orleans to gain world class expertise in putting together a comprehensive study to get the exact data we need. The sheer volume of knowledge will be invaluable and influential when implementing actual boots on the ground help around the country.”

Having this survey initiate from New Orleans makes sense within the music industry. “Our city has informed the music of the nation for hundreds of years,” says Taylor. “This endeavor helps preserve the musical heritage of the country by discovering and addressing musicians’ behavioral health needs here and around the world.”

Send Me a Friend will aid in getting the word out to musicians to participate in the survey, as well as helping those in crisis, which it has done since its inception in 2016. Inspired by Osborne’s early days of his own recovery, Send Me a Friend is the support network of “sober friends” he wished he had when he was getting out on the road and back to performing after finding sobriety.

“Being sober can be particularly challenging as a touring musician, and we want to pay close attention into exactly what that looks like and how to best address and support those who need the help,” Taylor says.

Osborne’s music and his willingness to tell his own story about addiction has provided a powerful voice in helping to reduce the stigma that surrounds these issues. That openness and authenticity has made him an ambassador for musicians but also for anyone in recovery. “When we started Send Me a Friend, hundreds of people signed up overnight,” says Taylor. “We hope to get the same sort of response with this survey.”

The survey is anonymous, and professional/touring musicians can begin providing their input on Jan. 6, 2020 at musiciansurvey.org. The survey will be open through at least June 2020.

Anyone needing free and confidential support can contact one of the following numbers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- National Helpline for substance abuse and mental health treatment referral: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)