



Advocate

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Giving Thanks: Volunteers, donors and program participants are the heart of MHAFC

by Maureen Traverse

When asked what she most appreciated about her experience as a Pro Bono Counselor, Nancy Watson described two clients who'd meant a great deal to her: "Those two were the most rewarding for me. For one woman who'd never had a counselor before, it was wonderful. For one woman who'd never had a success, she came out of it feeling like she could improve her own life."

Like Nancy, when we at Mental Health America of Franklin County reflect on what we appreciate about the work we do, our thoughts turn to the people who support our mission—our donors, volunteers, and program participants. As the holiday season approaches, we also want to say how grateful we are for Nancy; for Jenny Schoning—a donor and volunteer; for Louis—a support group attendee; and for all the individuals who share their passion for mental health in the form of monetary gifts, time and talent, and commitment to recovery.

In her years as a social worker in all kinds of settings—from child welfare to nursing home placement—Nancy says she's seen everything, but her first love has always been mental health. She heard about the Pro Bono Counseling Program from a colleague shortly before she retired from the OSU James Cancer Hospital. Her colleague suggested she fill her time by volunteering to see clients who cannot otherwise afford counseling. Nancy was glad to have the opportunity. "My joke is if I was in a nursing home, I'd be going up and down the hall asking, 'Does anyone have a problem?' I'm nosy. I need to know what others need." That desire has led her to see many clients in her seven years as a Pro Bono volunteer, and she continues using her wealth of experience to ensure financial barriers don't limit the help a person can access.

Jenny Schoning first connected with MHAFC when she began attending our annual *Laughing Away the Blues* fundraiser. Since her oldest son lives with severe mental illness, the cause was important to her. Once he'd begun to improve, she reached out to us looking for opportunities to give back to families traveling the same path of recovery. Since then, Jenny has volunteered to help MHAFC in many capacities. "The cool thing is you



Nancy



Jenny



say 'yes' when the opportunity comes up, but it's so much more than simply giving your time. You're giving back, but you're also learning new information and absorbing their enthusiasm and energy." Jenny, too, remembered a specific interaction with an attendee at the Families in *See Thanks on page 3.*

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To Your Mental Health

by Kenton Beachy

2019: A Look Back



At MHAFC our purpose is to transform how people think about mental illness, make it easier to get help, and give people the support they need to get better and stay better. We think our astonishing growth over the past year has contributed at least a small part to Ohio's continuing improvement in

nationwide ranking when it comes to lower prevalence of mental illness and higher rates of access to care for both youth and adults. Ohio now ranks 18th overall nationally, up from 20th the previous year and 37th the year before that.

Over the past year, the number of **POEM** (Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms) clients has doubled and continues to grow through consistent and intentional work with community partners. Even with POEM's client increase, the high percentage of clients connected to supportive mental health services has remained constant. POEM's **Equity Initiative** began its first peer support group—RISE, for Black and African-American mothers—and continues to design programming that meets the needs of this priority population.

After 17 years, our Ombudsman Program successfully re-branded to become **Get Connected**. We added a part-time Get Connected Coordinator. And we launched the adjunct **Family Advocate Program** at summer's end, with our growing volunteer team helping about 15 family members so far in navigating all aspects of the mental health system in Franklin County.

Our **Occumetrics** social enterprise, a workplace wellbeing assessment process, has more than doubled in revenue due to a two-year grant from the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation to conduct up to 20 workplace assessments and reassessments through 2022. We also received a \$100,000 grant from The Columbus Foundation for program expansion. In addition to assessments of Ohio behavioral health organizations through a grant from the Ohio Dept. of Mental Health and Addiction Services, we conducted assessments for Goodwill Columbus, The Columbus Foundation, and the provider network of a large managed care organization in Michigan. Our lead staff also started training to become a Board Certified Executive Coach in order to expand our consulting services to assessed organizations beyond only making recommendations for improvement.

The **Franklin County Suicide Prevention Coalition** (FCSPC) developed and released its first Data Report which is available on the new FCSPC website to support local professionals in ensuring their policies, programs, and services are data-driven. The FCSPC continued to provide suicide prevention training and partnered with the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation to co-host an evidence-based Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality training attended by 70 mental health professionals. The FCSPC also partnered with 1st Responder Conferences to host a Mental Health and Wellness Conference attended by over 200 first responders, active military, veterans, and their spouses.

Our growing **Pro Bono Counseling Program's** 77 licensed volunteer counselors provided over 1,300 hours of free counseling to Delaware, Fairfield, and Franklin County residents who needed but could not afford counseling services. Twenty-five new volunteers joined the volunteer corps for the program during the year. We also partnered with The OSU School of Social Work to host our fourth social work intern.

Our **Support Groups** were well-attended, with new anxiety and bipolar disorder groups thriving. We added another depression support group session to an already existing schedule at Riverside Hospital's Dempsey Center. Evaluations from attendees have consistently shown that all groups are providing a consistent source of support and coping skills for participants.

Healthy Connections helped over 60 individuals learn to better manage their mental and physical health this year. The program now looks forward to reaching more individuals with drop-in style groups starting in March.

The **Client Advocate Program in Fairfield County** saw continued growth in 2019. MHAFC has an increasingly strong presence in the county among other agencies and community members, and many community members have been successfully navigated to mental health and/or substance use recovery services.

We continued to advocate for the rights of Delaware and Morrow County residents receiving mental health and/or substance use recovery services through our **Client Rights Advocate** position with the Delaware-Morrow Mental Health and Recovery Services Board.

Our education program grew this year as we added **Youth Mental Health First Aid** classes for adults who regularly interact with teenagers. We provided eleven courses for schools, churches, and other youth-serving

Community Matters

organizations in addition to six **Adult Mental Health First Aid** classes for the community at large. Overall, we certified around 400 individuals.

We provided four week-long **Peer Recovery Supporter** (PRS) certification trainings for 80 new PRS in Franklin County, established a twice-monthly group for PRS to support one another through personal and professional challenges and continued to convene the **Peer Employer Learning Collaborative**. We also conducted a survey and follow-up focus groups with PRS and their supervisors/employers in order to report on their experience, make recommendations for improvement, and provide guidance on best practices for effective employment of PRS. ♦

Thanks cont'd

Touch support group she co-facilitates. A woman whose older daughter lives with mental illness expressed that her younger son was angry about her daughter's return home. "I could totally relate to that," Jenny says. "I told her what had helped my son, and that night she texted her son that she'd learned a lot at the support group, not about helping her daughter, but helping him." For Jenny, it isn't about having all the answers but about being there. "You don't know what the future holds, but you can show them what hope looks like."

In addition to volunteering, Jenny has remained an active and generous donor. "Obviously, I believe in MHAFC's mission," she says, "especially making it easier for people to get help and giving people support—that's close to my heart. But I know like any of us, you can't do that alone. You need help from donors in the community to provide these programs, to give people the help and support they need."

Louis, a former Marine, has been attending the depression support group for nearly a year and says the opportunity to share his experiences is necessary and augments his treatment. "The sad part is that a lot of people who attend aren't necessarily getting any support outside the group—I wasn't. You have a tendency to feel isolated, but it's so important to feel that you're not alone." Louis values how much he learns from the group, too, saying it is sometimes like a mental health college course. "I get a lot of help from people in the group who've been living with depression a lot longer than I have. Their experience is invaluable."

In addition to knowledge, Louis says he's gained friendships through the group. "Even though we have issues, some of these people are really cool, fighting the good fight. You start seeing regular faces, and you start caring about them." But he also recognizes that not everyone who needs support is able to access it. "As

many people as who come to our meetings, just think of all the people who are out there hurting, struggling, don't know where to go, or they're afraid." Because he has experienced stigma himself, he knows too often it prevents people from reaching out. But untreated mental illness hurts us all, Louis says, when you have people who can't function at work or who make bad decisions. "There's no shame in getting help, but people see it as shameful. We have to acknowledge that because it's costing us as a society."

Our mission at MHAFC is to transform how people think about mental illness, make it easier to get help, and give people the support they need to get better and stay better. Jenny, Nancy, and all of our amazing donors and volunteers provide the funding, the time, and the skills that keep our programs functioning. Louis and all of the incredible people who participate in our programs break down stigma by showing us that asking for help is a powerful act and that no one is alone on their recovery journey. To all of you who have taken up this mission as your own, we thank you and wish you a joyous season of gratitude. ♦

Board Spotlight

Todd Lacksonen has been a lobbyist in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry for the past 22 years. In that time, he also did IT work representing Google, Symantec, and Intuit. Prior to that, he practiced law for six years and was also a hockey player agent. Todd was born in Columbus and received an economics and law degree from the University of Toledo and an MBA from THE Bowling Green State University.



Todd is married to his lovely wife, Cheryl, who Todd reports has put up with him and made him a better person. They are blessed with two sons (pictured), Brandon, 25, who attends BGSU and loves golf and snowboarding and Andrew, 15, who plays hockey and lacrosse and also skis and golfs.

Todd and Cheryl lost their 22-year-old son, Christopher, to opioid addiction five years ago. This has led to their passionate advocacy in the mental health and opioid addiction areas.

The family all loves to vacation on beaches for swimming and snorkeling and head to the mountains for skiing.

MHAFC News

Laughing Away the BLUES

Our eleventh (and final) *Laughing Away the Blues* fundraising event was a huge success! Thanks to our generous bidders and donors, we raised over \$83,000 to help support our life-

saving services. Guests enjoyed delicious food, drinks, and another impressive collection of auction packages to battle over online through our mobile bidding system.

We'd like to thank Board President, Matt Endress, for his wonderful job as emcee, the excellent staff of Auction Ohio, Annette Peters for sharing her inspiring story of recovery, and the hilarious Scott Long for helping us create a meaningful and fun-filled evening!



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Holiday Health and Giving Guide

Make this season bright with MHAFC!

When making your holiday gift list, please consider including MHAFC in your plans. With numerous avenues to give, your support is not only tax deductible—it also makes you a part of our life-saving mission to transform how people think about mental illness, make it easier to get help, and give people the support they need to get better and stay better.

Membership: Consider making a year-end gift. It will make a meaningful and immediate difference! You can also make a tribute gift in honor or in memory of someone special in your life.

Holiday Shopping: When you shop for the holidays at smile.amazon.com/ch/31-4412697, AmazonSmile donates to Mental Health America of Franklin County.

Volunteer: Our new Family Advocate Program is looking for volunteers! If you are a family member or loved one of someone living with mental illness and have knowledge of the local mental health system, you can help. • Our Pro Bono Counseling Program relies entirely on mental health professionals to meet the needs of uninsured and under-insured residents of Franklin County. • Or join our behind-the-scenes team and help us with a variety of projects. Your gifts of talent and time will be much appreciated. Learn more about all of these opportunities at mhafc.org.

Get Social: Like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter and Instagram. Share information about our programs and services with your social networks.

Thank You!

To Our Recent Members & Donors (July 1 - November 1)

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*Includes paddle raise contribution at *Laughing Away the Blues*.
We make every attempt to accurately acknowledge our donors. To report an error or omission, please contact Megan Daugherty 614-221-1441 or mdaugherty@mhafc.org.

Programs

Gratitude for Our 2019 Children's Mental Health Conference

by Maureen Traverse

When children and adolescents present with the early signs of bipolar disorder or experience a psychotic episode, symptoms may look different from those in adults, and there is a dearth of research on the effects of medication on youth. Given the complicated nature of these illnesses in childhood, we were pleased to have Dr. Mary Fristad, Dr. Nicholas Breitborde, and Dr. David Axelson present at our 2019 Children's Mental Health Conference: *Working with Children and Young Adults Who Experience Bipolar Disorder and Psychosis*.

On October 2, more than 240 mental health professionals and others in the community attended the conference and learned to identify the signs and symptoms of mania and psychosis in youth, the primary components of treatment, and the benefits of early intervention. Attendees expressed appreciation for the expertise of our nationally-recognized presenters, the scope of their combined specialties, and their attention to ensuring the material was relevant and accessible. One attendee shared, "I have learned a lot, [including] how to get my students the help that they need." Thank you to our wonderful presenters, to all who joined us, and to our generous sponsors who make the event possible. We'll see you next year!



Speakers, David Axelson, MD, Mary A. Fristad, PhD, ABPP, Nicholas Breitborde, PhD, and Executive Director, Kenton Beachy.

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