



Advocate

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Transforming Lives Through Peer Support

by Maureen Traverse, *Education Manager*

When applicants to MHAOhio's Peer Recovery Supporter (PRS) training program are asked why they want to become certified PRS, they speak overwhelmingly of a passion to help others, finding meaning in their own lived experience of mental illness or substance use disorder, and most of all hope. They know first-hand what it means to have someone extend a lifeline during dark times, and they want to be that lifeline for others on the same journey. As certified PRS Mark Kemp said on his application, "I now get to be a fountain again and pour out my life in helping others not just to recover, but to thrive." Since 2017, with support from the ADAMH Board of Franklin County, MHAOhio has hosted the state certification training and helped over 250 people take steps toward a career in peer support.

Peer recovery support – the support provided by a person with lived experience of mental illness and/or substance use disorder – is not a new phenomenon. According to Larry Davidson, Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine, the first published account of peer support as a form of mental healthcare came in 1991, but the earliest known use of peer support was at an 18th century French mental hospital where former patients were hired as hospital staff because, as the chief physician explained, they were "gentle, honest, and humane" and "averse from active cruelty." Sadly, humane treatment of patients with mental illness remained an anomaly for most of the next two centuries. Modern peer support owes its existence to the mental health consumer movement of the 1970s. At a time when many marginalized groups were fighting for civil rights and social change, those who had survived abuse in psychiatric hospitals found hope and healing by coming together, supporting each other, and fighting for change.

Mental Health America national reports that "peer support specialists have a transformative effect on both individuals and systems." A growing body of evidence finds that peer support is associated with reduced hospitalization rates, reduced days inpatient, increased use of outpatient services, increased quality of life outcomes, and lower overall cost of services. One notable finding from a 2006 study indicated, "Participants who received peer-based



services felt that their providers communicated in ways that were more validating and reported more positive provider relationship qualities compared with participants in the control condition." The presence of peer support may improve a client's ability to manage symptoms and in turn improve service provider perceptions, which has a positive impact on the client and the system as a whole.

Even as peer services grow in popularity, stigma still exists for PRS who may find themselves in a system that sees them, and people like them, as broken. In a recent editorial for *STAT News*, a PRS recalled his first day working in a hospital emergency room when the charge nurse sarcastically referred to a patient who had overdosed as "a real winner," unaware that the PRS had once been in the same position. In interviews conducted by Resources for Integrated Care, peer program managers, supervisors, and PRS describe a range of issues, from being shut out of team meetings to staff members expressing concern over sharing a bathroom with PRS. Issues like low pay and poorly defined roles can also make it difficult for PRS to remain in the profession.

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To Your Mental Health

by Kenton Beachy, *Executive Director*



It Takes a Village

MHAOhio makes it easier to get help and give people the support they need to get better and stay better. We're building out our own services to do that, and we're also connected with the rich tapestry of services available in our community. It takes a village, so to speak, to meet the many needs.

It also takes a village when it comes to the funding that's needed to support our services, and over the past year the village has turned out to help. Our partners at The Osteopathic Heritage Foundations (OHF) first began funding MHAOhio for our Occumetrics workplace wellbeing assessment, making it available to a full cohort of behavioral health grant recipients to support their workforce. And most recently OHF turned to us again by offering a sizable grant for 2021 to meet our priority needs for peer recovery support services, maternal mental health (POEM), Mental Health First Aid, and a consulting project to help us build MHAOhio into an equitable organization that is culturally responsive, inclusive, and anti-racist.

Our partners at The Columbus Foundation also recently provided a generous capacity building grant for Occumetrics and in response to our funding challenges, due to the COVID-19 crisis, helped us offset lost revenue from canceling our 2020 fundraising event. The Foundation also funded a new virtual meeting platform for our support groups.

Occumetrics is also receiving additional attention and growth from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), whose vision for how Occumetrics can help support Ohio's behavioral health workforce continues to expand.

Columbus Public Health has been a great partner, most recently passing Ohio Department of Health funds through to our POEM program to help meet the burgeoning needs we're seeing for maternal mental health.

The Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health (ADAMH) Board of Franklin County continues to undergird many of our services. This partnership has helped us start/host new programming such as the Franklin County Suicide Prevention Coalition, the Black Community

Ambassador Support Program, Mental Health First Aid for Adults and Youth, peer recovery support services, and expanded POEM programming. Last November's additional tax levy millage, passed overwhelmingly by Franklin County voters, will allow the ADAMH Board of Franklin County to continue this expanded support for MHAOhio and the entire behavioral health system.

We're also very grateful to the Dassell Family Foundation Fund for the generous ongoing support of our work. Rosemary Dassell was a champion for mental health services until her recent passing in 2019, and her dedication remains through her family fund generously administered through The Columbus Foundation under the instruction of Pastor and Mrs. Floyd L. Stolzenburg. We remain indebted to the Stolzenburgs for their ongoing vision of supporting mental health services in our community.

Later in this edition you'll see the list of individuals who reached deep during this past year and who underscore the extent to which we rely on their/your help to sustain and grow our mental health work in Central Ohio and throughout the state. Along with our many other generous funders and contributors, this village of supporters has indeed helped MHAOhio expand services to more people, for which we're very grateful!

New Leadership Training for PRS

by Maureen Traverse, *Education Manager*

MHAOhio is pleased to join OhioMHAS and the ADAMH Board of Franklin County on coordinating leadership training for local Peer Recovery Supporters (PRS). Three virtual sessions, two topic-specific workshops, and six months of leadership coaching will be provided by The Communities Project. With a focus on leadership as a natural expression and investment in skills and qualities participants already possess, this training is an ideal opportunity for PRS to hone their leadership potential.

The Communities Project is a national initiative with the mission of saving a million lives from substance use related deaths over the next two decades by investing in the community leadership of people with lived experience and individuals who lead substance use disorder-focused initiatives. Since 2017, The Communities Project has trained more than 2,500 leaders and organizers across 40 states. The training model focuses on guiding participants to recognize their own leadership qualities and the road blocks that prevent them from reaching their goals.

The PRS leadership training is planned for May 2021, with registration opening in March. For more information on PRS programming, join MHAOhio's PRS email list by contacting Maureen Traverse (mtraverse@mhaohio.org).

Community Matters

Peer Support cont'd

In 2019 MHAOhio conducted a Peer Workforce Analysis in Franklin County out of a desire to better understand the environment in which graduates of the PRS training program would be working. The analysis, which examined PRS experiences in a variety of settings, found that overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with pay and benefits were relatively high among Franklin County PRS, and turnover intention was relatively low. In fact, sense of wellbeing among PRS in the workplace was substantially higher than that of non-peer behavioral health colleagues across the state. Both PRS and their employers identified “dedicated, motivated, and engaged PRS staff” as a key strength of the county’s PRS system, along with supportive workplaces that value peer support and training. Challenges reported by PRS included a lack of consistently livable wages, understanding and acceptance of the PRS role in the workplace, and even some concerns about personal safety on the job. Still, these findings confirm that a major draw to this profession – despite low wages and other challenges – is the work itself, which PRS and employers find valuable and rewarding.

Peer supporters and their employers have responded to the pandemic with flexibility and innovation. A May 2020 article in *Mental Health Weekly* called PRS “a secret weapon in the fight against COVID-19,” explaining, “the peer ‘superpower’ of client engagement is showing itself to be a critical lifeline for people receiving services.” Among the innovative forms of engagement described were PRS joining clients on video calls with therapists and care managers, temporary pop-up warm lines, virtual lunch-and-learns to share resources and support, and sending handmade cards. One peer supporter described a team effort to call hundreds of clients in the first few weeks of lock-down in order to discern their needs and connect them with resources.

Like other forms of health care, peer support has largely shifted to virtual platforms, including phone, text, mobile apps, and video conferencing. While the shift to digital support has allowed PRS to continue reaching clients, it also presents challenges for low-income communities without access to technology who may be more significantly impacted by the pandemic. Researchers at the University of Maryland looking at retention in MAT programs that employ the peer model saw an opportunity to test peer program innovations in response to the COVID-19 crisis. A key factor in their research was to ensure these innovations do not exclude marginalized communities. They piloted the use of telephone-only interventions as well as tele-medicine stations at treatment centers, which would allow clients to video conference with a PRS. Innovations like increased use of

digital peer support may remain beyond the pandemic, but providers must be attentive to keeping these services accessible.

MHAOhio believes in peer support, and many of our programs utilize certified PRS professionals. We’ve also launched a support group exclusively for PRS professionals to serve as a place for sharing PRS experiences.

PRS professionals understand recovery, and they’ve chosen to use their experience to help others. Even as the pandemic made it more difficult to provide these services and increased demand, our peers pivoted to online groups and outreach, and have worked tirelessly to ensure those who needed help could still access support. PRS professionals have been essential during the pandemic, and we are grateful for their continued dedication.

Board Trustee Spotlight

Dr. Matthew Wilmot joined the board of MHAOhio in October 2020. He is a community health educator at the Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center, located at The Ohio State University’s Wexner Medical Center. Prior to this appointment, Dr. Wilmot completed



his Ph.D. in psychology, with a concentration on the intersection of institutional prejudice and health behaviors. Dr. Wilmot has had research published in some of the top journals in psychology and has given talks at various social psychological conferences on the topic of institutional prejudice.

As a community health educator, Dr. Wilmot orients toward providing seminars on HIV and COVID-19 to underserved communities in Columbus. His education on institutional prejudice has allowed him to recommend policies and services through the committees on which he serves.

When not trying to save the world, Dr. Wilmot can be found reading a good book, practicing his mixology skills on the monthly Facebook Live event “Hot Off the Press Q&A,” playing piano, or sharing cute photos of dogs.

MHAOhio Welcomes New Staff



Cassie Kelly, Marketing and Communications Manager

Cassie has been serving her community as a nonprofit communicator since 2017. Prior to joining MHAOhio, she worked with Action for Children, the Ohio Environmental Council, and others in her pursuit to make a positive impact. She spends her time volunteering for several organizations including Local Matters, Columbus Recreation and Parks, and Green Columbus. She is also a freelance writer for national publications, including the *American Society of Mechanical Engineers Magazine*.



Jon Bommarito, PRS Training Coordinator

Jon earned his Peer Recovery Supporter certification in 2019 after participating in MHAOhio's Goals for OCD support group. He is passionate about helping others along their recovery journey and removing the stigma surrounding mental health and substance use disorders. Outside of working at MHAOhio and advocating for mental health, Jon enjoys spending time with his wife and son, listening to podcasts and music, watching sports, and getting out in nature.

MHAOhio's Family Advocate Program: Restoring Hope to Families

by Cassie Kelly, Marketing & Communications Manager

Since launching the Family Advocate program in September 2019, MHAOhio's staff and volunteers have helped 42 families in Franklin County. Of those 42 families, many have strikingly similar stories.

A loved one has mental health symptoms that escalate until they reach a point of crisis. They may no longer be able to keep their job and consequently can't afford their rent or mortgage. Sometimes, they develop a substance use disorder to try to mitigate their symptoms. In a desperate attempt to help their loved one, the family tries to do it on their own but quickly realizes that the system of care is fraught with obstacles. Time, money, and emotional stress take a toll, and the family and their loved one ultimately lose hope.

Stories like these inspired MHAOhio's Family Advocate program as a way to help families navigate the many obstacles within the system and help their loved ones on their path to recovery.

"When I speak to families they are often skeptical," DeAnna Hall, program coordinator, explained. "They've been through this for years, and there hasn't been a resolution."

Often the loved one has no source of income, is uninsured or underinsured, or has no transportation and no access to the specialized care they need. DeAnna, along with our team of peer volunteers, understands these challenges and works through them with families.

"The reality is that this kind of situation traumatizes all members of the family," said Ed Desmond, MHAOhio peer volunteer and co-founder of the program. "When they learn how we can help – with information about accessing job placement, housing, insurance and benefits, medicine, and more – they are so emotionally relieved. It's a whole world that we have to offer that really picks up all the pieces and puts them back together again."

As a peer volunteer, Ed's focus is to make sure that families are empowered to manage their loved one's needs on their own. But, beyond that, he also helps them heal from the trauma that situations like this can induce. He helps them find care and support, often connecting them with MHAOhio's Families In Touch support group, which is a place just for caregivers to find support and education in how to best support their loved ones. "By healing the whole family," he explains, "we can ensure that this doesn't happen again."

The program is graciously funded by the ADAMH Board of Franklin County. MHAOhio hopes to expand this program in 2021 and is actively seeking more volunteers. If you are interested in becoming a Family Advocate volunteer, visit mhaohio.org/get-help/family-advocate.

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Collaboration Is Key: The 2020 Children's Mental Health Conference

by Cassie Kelly, *Marketing & Communications Manager*

Suicide is the third-leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds (Centers for Disease Control), and the factors that contribute to suicide are complex. Childhood and adolescence pose a range of social and emotional situations that impact mental health – and race, gender, and culture can all play an important role in how a young person navigates these situations.

This is why MHAOhio focused its 2020 Children's Mental Health Conference on Addressing Gaps in Suicide Care for Adolescents and Young Adults. In collaboration with the Franklin County Suicide Prevention Coalition (FCSPC), MHAOhio hosted a diverse group of leaders to present at the conference, including American Association of Suicidology President Dr. Jonathan Singer, who led the full-day conference. The conference featured Ohio Representative Erica Crawley who discussed bridging sectors to address gaps in mental health care for Black adolescents and young adults. A panel discussion presented different perspectives on how local organizations can partner to support loss survivors. Dr. Glenn Thomas, FCSPC Chair, closed the conference by advocating for suicide prevention best practices within the local healthcare system.

“The conference was truly a collaborative effort amongst various organizations to understand and address local gaps in suicide care for adolescents and young adults,” said Michelle Vargas, FCSPC Director. “I am most grateful to all our partners who contributed their time and expertise in ensuring its success.”



Dr. Jonathan Singer

In total, more than 500 individuals attended the virtual conference and gave overwhelmingly positive feedback. One attendee responded, “This conference provided culturally sensitive and nuanced techniques for improving my work as a prevention clinician. I learned tips to add to my toolbox when working with suicidal teens and their families.”

The FCSPC is hosted by MHAOhio and funded by the ADAMH Board of Franklin County. The FCSPC aims to increase communication, coordination, and collaboration efforts in Franklin County to prevent suicide and bring hope and support to those affected by suicide. To learn more about the FCSPC, visit franklincountyspc.org.

Launching the Maternal Mental Health Peer Support Certification Program

by Cassie Kelly, *Marketing & Communications Manager*

Here's what we know: at least 20 percent of new mothers experience postpartum depression. However, these numbers have drastically increased since the COVID-19 crisis began. We also know that Black and African American women are at a much higher risk of experiencing maternal mental health complications compared to white women – that's why support from other Black moms in the community is vital.

MHAOhio's POEM program recognizes these needs and is beginning to offer more maternal mental health services for Black moms, including Rise, which offers support and mentorship exclusively by and for Black and African American moms in Central Ohio. In addition to Rise, POEM is also working with national partners, including 2020 Mom (which is leading the nationwide initiative), Recovery Innovations International, and Shades of Blue, to launch the Maternal Mental Health Peer Support Certification Training Program.

The 2021 pilot funded by Cigna via 2020 Mom will launch with two small cohorts in California and require 60 hours of intensive training to complete the certification. Kelli Blinn, Rise Coordinator and a certified peer supporter, will be the lead trainer for this year's certification participants. The goal of this project is to engage, train, and support Black moms who have recovered from a maternal mental health complication as peer supporters to combat isolation and depression in other Black moms.

“This is all about building an equitable program from the ground up,” said Tonya Fulwider, MHAOhio's Associate Director and co-founder of POEM. “There's such an important space for peer supporters to help moms, and we have found partners who also believe that.”

Peer support not only improves mental health outcomes and mitigates provider shortages but also provides mothers with support from a community they trust.

For more information about maternal mental health services, visit mhaohio.org/get-help/maternal-mental-health.

Thank You!

To Our Members and Donors (August 2, 2020 - February 28, 2021)

MHAOhio is grateful to the many donors and supporters throughout Ohio whose financial contributions help to make possible the wide variety of programs we offer.

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** Please see page 7 for the tribute acknowledging Mr. Dunn's passing and his significant support of our work*

***Donation made in kind*

In Memoriam: A Tribute to Longtime Friends of MHAOhio

by Michael Anderson, *Director of Development & Marketing*

It takes compassion, understanding, and vulnerability to advocate for mental health. Although it is more common these days to speak up about mental illness, stigma and fear have caused great silence around the subject for generations. Andrew (Andy) Dunn and Nathan (Nate) Goldberg exemplified individuals who saw the need for advocacy in this space and gave their time and resources to help those in need.

A lifelong resident of Columbus, Andy Dunn passed away on February 15, 2021. A compassionate and generous man, Andy cared deeply about mental health awareness and making our community a better place for those who call it home. As generous and long-time MHAOhio supporters, Andy and his wife Diane helped to ensure that the organization would sustain many years of important work and services for individuals in need. In his professional career, Andy helped lead his family's company, Plaskolite, as it grew well beyond the borders of Ohio. Andy devoted his life to bettering the lives of many and leaves behind a legacy that will serve the community well into the future.

Nate Goldberg, who passed away on January 22, 2021, was a devoted advocate for increasing access to mental health care. After the passing of his daughter, Melissa, in 2006, Nate and his wife, Elaine, founded the nonprofit Melissa's House, with the mission to restore hope to those with mental illness. Melissa's House focuses on updating and renewing existing group residences with aesthetic changes in order to positively impact the well-being of those who live and work there. In 2013 MHAOhio awarded Nate and Elaine the Norman Guitry Mental Health Award for their exceptional leadership and service in promoting awareness of mental illness.

It's impossible to measure the impact of a lifetime of dedication to mental health. MHAOhio is fortunate to have witnessed two of those lifetimes in these two individuals. If you'd like to learn more about how you can support MHAOhio as we work to continue the legacy for both Andy and Nate, please visit mhaohio.org/donate.

Tribute Gifts

In Honor of Kenton Beachy
Dr. Timothy Buckenmyer

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



We missed seeing you in 2020 and having the opportunity to bring awareness to MHAOhio's POEM program and the life-changing mental health services that we've continued to provide during the pandemic.

However, we're excited to announce that we're planning *Give Mom the Mic* to return in the fall.

Stay current with our plans by visiting one of our social media pages or by subscribing to our bi-monthly newsletter, *Wellness Wednesday*.