



Advocate

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Pandemic Recovery: The Workplace's Role in Supporting Employee Mental Health

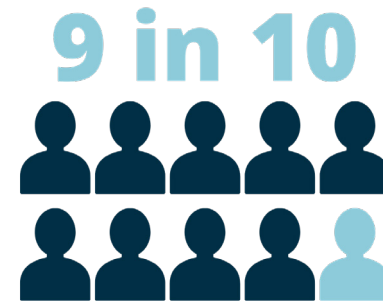
by Cassie Kelly, *Marketing & Communications Manager*

As employers and their staff begin to process the past year, many are realizing there is no going “back to normal.” Some see this transition out of the pandemic as an opportunity to build a better work environment suitable for the range of needs among employees.

“We’re in a different place now than we were a year ago,” Maggie Hallett, MHAOhio’s Director of Workplace Health, says. “We’re moving out of a collective trauma experience, and when that happens we shift from existing in survival mode and just ‘getting through it’ to actually feeling a lot of the feelings we’d maybe been suppressing. Every employee will experience it differently – some people can’t wait to return to in-person while others appreciate their new ways of working.” Regardless, Hallett says, “It’s important for employers to understand and anticipate another period of adjustment for employees.”

The pandemic has also prompted individuals to rethink and reimagine their professional lives. Some left their careers, some didn’t have a choice, and others have resolved to create more of a work-life balance than they had in pre-pandemic times. This puts workplaces in a unique position to adapt their policies to reflect what staff members need and create a work environment in which employees can feel productive, motivated, and safe.

MHAOhio’s Occumetrics program, which evaluates workplace health by conducting research-based assessments of employee wellbeing, provides extensive insight into the workplace’s role in supporting mental health. Through the Occumetrics assessment process, leadership receives a tailored set of recommendations that are designed to improve retention, morale, and engagement. Since its inception in 2016, Occumetrics has completed 70 assessments, representing more than 15,000 employees. Through reassessments, data have shown that the majority of organizations see a decrease in turnover and an increase in their Workplace Wellbeing scores.



Employees report that their workplace stress affects their mental health.

- Mental Health America National
Mind the Workplace (2021)

“Through this process, we get a complete picture of the employee experience,” Hallett says. “We provide the leadership team with the precise information they need to improve the work environment for their staff.”

Although every workplace is different, there are a few things all organizational leaders can do to help employees through this transitional period of the pandemic. The first is listening to employees and ensuring that staff are involved in changes that will impact them directly.

Second, employers should recognize that staff may be feeling disconnected after working from home for so long. Providing supervisors with trainings and support is one way to invest time and resources into team building.

Last, employers must understand how employees prefer to be communicated with and share the why behind decisions. Prioritizing clear communication ensures that employees stay committed to the mission because they feel heard throughout the process and understand the changes being made.

See Workplace Health on Page 3

In this Issue

To Your Mental Health	Page 2
Community Matters	Page 3
MHAOhio News	Page 4
Thank You	Page 6

To Your Mental Health



MHAOhio's Legacy

by Kenton Beachy, *Executive Director*

I stood in MHAOhio's reception area (well, it wasn't MHAOhio then – it was still Mental Health America of Franklin County), feeling a bit awkward but still welcome, waiting to be introduced for my job interview with the Board of Trustees. That

was in 2015, and later one of the Trustees who'd joined me in waiting remarked that I seemed quiet. Now today in reflecting on MHAOhio's legacy past and future, I'm impressed with the extent to which our staff and Board have determined and will determine that legacy. Soft-spoken or outspoken, our people have made all the difference.

In our 65 years of offering support to those experiencing mental illness, our leadership and programs have evolved greatly with a growing footprint and impact on our community. In 1956, the fledgling Franklin County Mental Health Association took its first step with Dr. Norman Guitry as the first Director – he also served as the first President of the Franklin County Mental Health Board, now called the ADAMH Board of Franklin County. Dr. Guitry instituted a series of monthly forums in the community on mental health topics, which ran until 1981. He published the first directory of mental health and recovery services in 1958, which continues to this day.

Dr. Guitry also put into motion an ongoing legacy of legislative advocacy for mental health progress. Our agency supported what was called Community Mental Health Services legislation in the 1960s and advocated for human rights in state hospitals in the 1970s. Over the years our agency has supported significant mental health legislation such as the Family Disability Trust Bill and anti-discrimination legislation requiring insurance to provide comparable coverage for mental illness and physical illness. Dr. Guitry's accomplishments and influence are the reason that each year we continue to bestow the Norman Guitry Award to a community individual who shows exceptional leadership in promoting mental illness awareness and prevention.

Our agency first established Suicide Prevention Services in 1967 – later transferred to Columbus Area Community Mental Health Center (at that time), moved to even other homes in the community over time, and then returned full circle to MHAOhio in 2018 with the re-envisioned Franklin County Suicide Prevention Coalition. Families in Touch, support for friends and family members of adults living with mental illness, got its start in 1980 and remarkably continues as a joint effort with OhioHealth, Twin Valley Behavioral Healthcare, and Concord

Counseling to this day. ParentTalk, an educational series for first-time parents, launched in 1986 and flourished for more than two decades, being marketed to other MHA affiliates across the country and helping many thousands of families, including through a Spanish edition.

Laura Moskow Sigal took over the helm as Executive Director in 1990 and by 1993 had gained contract provider status with the ADAMH Board of Franklin County, now the most prominent funder of our agency's services. In 1995, following the dissolution of the statewide Mental Health Association of Ohio, our agency became instrumental in the design and implementation of a statewide Public Policy Council comprised of Ohio's nine affiliates. Then in 1996 Laura spearheaded the creation of the Coalition for Healthy Communities, now an influential consortium of about two dozen statewide behavioral health organizations and associations (and she continued to co-chair the CHC until her retirement in 2015). In 2005 the agency hosted over 600 people at RAAP: Raising the African American Potential Summit, a forum addressing the unique issues facing young African American men, which resulted in collaboration with a dynamic community leadership group of Black individuals. Under Laura's leadership, our agency also launched its keystone programs – Ombudsman in 2001 (now called Get Connected) and Pro Bono Counseling in 2011 and welcomed POEM into the family of services in 2012. In 2009 Laura developed the Ohio Legislative Mental Health Caucus, which is still active today through MHAOhio with bi-partisan legislative co-chairs in both chambers hosting meetings to inform legislators on important mental health issues. All the while, our support groups continued to expand their meeting offerings for individuals living with various mental illnesses.

Needless to say, my board interview went well, and in my own soft-spoken way I've been enjoying the privilege of leading the organization since 2015. We've continued to add programming, more than doubling staff and budget to date, with expansions in Mental Health First Aid, peer recovery support, suicide prevention, family member peer support, workplace health, and equity in maternal mental health services for Black and African American moms. In 2020 we capped a negotiated affiliate agreement with Ohio's two other MHA affiliates by becoming Mental Health America of Ohio, responsible for advancing a statewide mental health public policy agenda, leading Ohio affiliate collaboration, and expanding our programming to unreached parts of the state.

Rest assured, our mission stays the same even though our organization continues to grow through the same legacy you've been reading about. Our goals are improved access, more support, and better-informed policies. As we continue our legacy as MHAOhio, we increase our ability to better guide all people on the path to wellness. And together, with you, we can continue to do even more!

Community Matters

Board Trustee Spotlight

Emily Gerber spent the first part of her career in IT sales and consulting. She's spent the last 15 years working with, for, and alongside some exceptional people in the nonprofit world. These organizations' efforts have included early childhood education and kindergarten readiness for children with special needs, improving the health of babies and mothers, feeding school-aged children, improving mental and physical health, and supporting English as a second language for immigrant families.



Emily joined the MHAOhio Board of Trustees in 2020 because she believes access to mental health services is vital and fundamental to our wellbeing as a society. She wants to see a cultural change in how mental health is portrayed and viewed. Emily is the board chair for our annual fundraiser Give Mom the Mic, taking place November 12. In addition to serving MHAOhio, Emily is also working with her husband, Randy, at his company Gerber LLC, which is a professional service firm exclusively advising first-generation entrepreneurs to help them reach their life, business, and wealth goals.

Workplace Health cont'd

Columbus nonprofit Concord Counseling, for example, completed MHAOhio's Occumetrics assessment to identify, understand, and address employee concerns through the pandemic and beyond. Their leadership team has since found many ways to continue to create a supportive work environment for years to come.

For the long-term approach, Occumetrics offered Concord a roadmap. Mike Preston, Concord's Director of Operations, explained how they have updated and streamlined their paperwork, revised the productivity structure, and been investing in training for their supervisors. They've prioritized even greater transparency with the staff about when and how they're going to address other key areas from their Occumetrics assessment. Overall, the feedback from staff throughout the process was very positive.

"Our clearness in communication was actually getting through to staff," Mike says. "There's trust in leadership and the executive team. It's worked out really well."

The time needed for healing and recovery from the pandemic cannot be underestimated. Patience, grace, and compassion for employees will be critical after such massive change and loss. Involving staff in decisions that affect them and communicating the rationales for change are likely key to getting through the experience and feeling more cohesive on the other side.

If you're interested in learning more about Occumetrics, visit www.mhaohio.org/workplace-wellbeing-program

A large advertisement for the Youth Mental Health Conference. On the left, a young man with short blonde hair is shown in profile, wearing white earbuds and looking thoughtfully to the side. The background is a blurred indoor setting. On the right, there is a dark blue diagonal banner with white and yellow text. The MHA logo is at the top, followed by the text 'Mental Health America of Ohio'. Below that, 'YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH CONFERENCE' is written in large, bold, yellow and white letters. At the bottom of the banner, it says 'UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF RACIAL TRAUMA ON YOUTH AND EMERGING ADULTS'. At the very bottom of the advertisement, an orange bar contains the text 'SEPTEMBER 29, 2021 | WWW.MHAOHIO.ORG' in white.

MHAOhio News

MHAOhio Welcomes New Staff



Cass Stewart, MSM, POEM Program Coordinator

POEM sustained Cass after her son's pre-term birth at 33 weeks, and she eventually became a POEM Mom Mentor Volunteer to give back. Today, Cass is honored to work with the team that helped save her life. She brings years of experience in nonprofit work and mental health advocacy, holds a BA in Psychology and Child Development, and has an MS degree in Management. Music, singing, dance, and art are close to her heart, and she is a professional, published songwriter. Her motto is "get to the good" to encourage others to find the good in life and go for it.



Grace Zafasi, MSW, Franklin County Suicide Prevention Coalition Coordinator and Support Groups Manager

Grace leads the recruitment, onboarding, and engagement of our volunteers across the Coalition's committees and action teams. She also manages our support groups. Grace received her MSW from the University of Arkansas and continued at the UofA in her previous career in higher education with advising and residence life. As new residents to Columbus, Grace and her wife are excited to support all the local sports and restaurants and experience the midwest culture with their dog, Ella.

Healthy Connections Launches a New Support Group Format

by Maureen Traverse, *Education Manager*

John Fornshell set a health goal to get more steps in each day. He wears a step-tracking wristband to track his progress and walks outdoors and even around his house on rainy days. "My sister is joining me, and we'll talk while we're walking," John says. "It's helpful to have someone else to do that with, as long as we're understanding and patient with each other. We hold each other accountable and support each other mentally."

As a facilitator for the Healthy Connections program, John knows that support from others can help people achieve their health goals. That's the idea behind the new program format that continues serving people living with mental illness – formerly a classroom training and now a twice-monthly peer-led support group. Participants still learn strategies for setting and achieving exercise goals, preparing healthy meals, understanding the importance of consistent sleep schedules, and managing chronic conditions, but now they have more opportunity to share their challenges and successes on their journey to wellness and receive support from others who have set similar goals.

"Healthy Connections is a fun learning environment," says Annie Gonzalez, John's co-facilitator. "We're here to learn how to manage our physical health and mental health, but we look for ways to make it enjoyable rather than a task."



Both John and Annie completed Healthy Connections as participants before they became facilitators, and both felt the impact on their own health. "When I'm managing either my mental health or physical health, the other improves as well," John explains in connecting their relationship.

Annie's most important take away was that exercise is not just about losing weight but about her heart and lungs and positively impacting her mental health as well. She's lost and kept off twenty pounds but says it's a struggle every day. That's where the group support comes in.

"My favorite part about Healthy Connections is that it holds me accountable," she says. "I have other people to support me while I work on my health goals."

Healthy Connections is currently meeting virtually every 2nd and 4th Tuesday, 6:30-8:00 PM. Check out www.mhaohio.org/get-help/healthy-connections

Statewide Mental Health First Aid Training Success

by Cassie Kelly, Marketing & Communications Manager

Let's make Mental Health First Aid as common as CPR.

In March 2020, MHAOhio partnered in a statewide collaborative hosted by Mental Health America of Northern Kentucky and Southwest Ohio to implement a Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training program funded by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. The goal of the program was to train individuals how to recognize and respond when someone is in crisis and may need support for mental illness or a substance use disorder.

This first-of-its-kind pilot program surpassed all benchmarks. In a 13-month period from May 2020 to June 2021, the project team held more than 380 trainings resulting in 6,232 trained individuals across the state, including parents, educators, social workers, coaches, counselors, faith-based groups, nursing and medical students, community groups, assisted living staff, and first responders. MHAOhio staff member Tori Ivan conducted 211 of these trainings certifying 3,538 Ohioans as Adult Mental Health First Aiders.

Two types of trainings were offered: one for working with adults, and one for working with youth. Utilizing a five-step action plan, participants learned to assess for risk of suicide or harm, listen nonjudgmentally, give reassurance and information, encourage appropriate professional help, and encourage self-help and other support strategies. Participants also received detailed information regarding local providers, community services, and national resources available for support and recovery.

With 19 trainings dedicated to Head Start staff from across the state, The Ohio Head Start Association had some of the highest attendance rates.

“Our staff are on the front lines,” says Becky Stewart, Specialized Services Manager for Ironton-Lawrence County Head Start. “A lot of them need to go in the homes or interact with parents at drop-off. They see parents face-to-face, and now they feel better equipped to handle situations when someone is in a crisis. It is wonderful.”

Organizations like Head Start are deeply embedded in their communities, which makes the strategies they learn in MHFA all the more important. For many, the training gives them real pathways to helping not just those in their community, but their family and loved ones as well.

“I’m the mother of a child who was addicted to heroin, and that was a really rough time in my life,” says Debbie Good, Head Start Education Coordinator for the Ashtabula County Community Action Agency. “I wish I’d had the training when I was going through all of that – it would



have made my daughter’s recovery so much easier. But now I know I can help others.”

Following certification, all newly trained First Aiders are provided with a list of mental health resources, including the Ohio Mental Health Network for School Success’ School and Community Continuum of Services, a directory that provides details on agencies and programs listed by county. This continuum provides First Aiders with the tools they need to actively connect people experiencing mental health challenges with community resources, which can help prevent worsening symptoms and improve outcomes – all the while shining a spotlight on Ohio’s mental health supports.

“MHFA is a powerful tool in battling stigma surrounding mental health challenges,” Ivan says. “The training encourages you to lead with empathy, listen to the experiences of others, and be the helper. Now more than ever, we need more helpers and less judgment, and I could not be prouder to be a part of this project that has positively impacted our entire state.”

Additional program partners for this initiative included Miami University’s Center for School Based Mental Health Programs and Discovery Center for Evaluation, Research and Professional Learning, and the Ohio Mental Health Network for School Success. Although the pilot period has ended, the project collaborative including MHAOhio has recently secured funding partners to continue this critical work.

Learn about upcoming MHFA training opportunities at www.mhaohio.org/get-help/MHFA

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Honoring Walter Augenstein's Legacy

by Michael Anderson, *Director of Development & Marketing*

Legacy. A word that is often used to describe what is left behind when an individual moves forward in their professional or personal life; and even upon their death.

Walter Augenstein was a man who hoped his life's work would allow a legacy to be left to organizations that were important in his own life, and MHAOhio was recently fortunate enough to receive a bequest from Walter's estate. Walter passed away in 2020 – at the beginning of the pandemic – and his memory will remain with us well into the future as we meet the ever-growing needs of individuals in our community who seek our services.



Jan Augenstein, Walter's sister, recently shared with me that although science, math, and engineering were a lot of his life's work (he received his undergraduate degree in math from Case Western Reserve University, where he also received his Master's in engineering), Walter didn't shy away from the more personally introspective aspects of life.

"My brother had personal experience with mental health issues over his lifetime and developed an appreciation for the services ... and benefits provided by various mental health agencies," Jan says. Walter also gave back to his community as a member of Overbrook Presbyterian Church and various Masonic lodges. The desire to have his bequest serve others is another testament to his selfless nature.

The legacies we leave behind are an important aspect of our lives and allow us to live on beyond our years. Walter's generous legacy gift to MHAOhio highlights both the way he lived his life and the importance of supporting and growing the many services of nonprofits in our community.

If you are interested in learning more about the impact you can have with your legacy, please contact Michael Anderson at manderson@mhaohio.org. Our relationship with The Columbus Foundation allows us to have access to important information, options, and resources that can help guide you in your own philanthropic planning.

Read MHAOhio's 2020 Annual Impact Report

2020, a year like no other, will be remembered as one of the most challenging in our collective history. With your extraordinary support, MHAOhio was able to continue our vital work in the community – and for that, we thank you! To learn about MHAOhio's work in 2020, please read our Annual Impact Report by visiting

www.MHAOhio.org





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For the past ten years, the annual ***Give Mom the Mic*** event has attracted a sold-out crowd of Central Ohioans who care deeply about healthy moms and families. The hilarious and heartwarming event supports the programs and services of MHAOhio.

This year's event will be held on **November 12, 2021** at The Exchange at Bridge Park in Dublin, Ohio. We hope you'll join us, and together we will give voice to families affected by mental illness and increase the availability of treatment and support.

MHAOhio.org/GMTM