



## MHAOhio and Southeast Healthcare Launch Peer Recovery Supporter Field Placement Program



Last year, Governor DeWine announced an investment of \$85 million in building Ohio's behavioral healthcare workforce. A 2021 study found that demand for behavioral health services in Ohio increased by 353% while the workforce saw only a 179% increase between 2013-2019.

MHAOhio has addressed the growing need by continuing to build programming that connects people to care and fills gaps in the system. Maggie Hallett, Senior Director of Workplace Health and Education at MHAOhio, oversees the Occumetrics program, which helps employers assess the health of their workforce: "Through the 100+ workplace health assessments we've conducted with behavioral healthcare providers in Ohio, we've developed a deep understanding of the challenges of turnover and staffing shortages." She has observed that while many factors impact employee retention, productivity, and engagement, employees report high satisfaction when they feel connected to their work, and Peer Recovery Supporters (PRS) often feel deeply invested due to the lived experience they share with clients.

Given the myriad roles that PRS can play, this workforce is an essential part of care delivery. Since 2017, MHAOhio has helped build and sustain the PRS workforce in Central Ohio by hosting certification trainings and providing guidance and support for PRS before, during, and after certification. We've also partnered with employers through our Peer Employer Learning Collaborative to provide networking opportunities like our annual PRS Community Event and Job Fair.

Last year, a member of the Collaborative, Southeast Healthcare, approached us about working together to help PRS find employment that is the right fit.

At our first meeting, it became clear that our agencies deeply valued peer support and had the same goal—to ensure more people with lived experience of a mental health and/or substance use disorder would enter and stay

in the peer support field. As Sandy Stephenson, Chief Healthcare Officer at Southeast Healthcare explains, "Southeast... values Peers and their unique and valuable contributions as members of the behavioral health workforce. We hired our first two Peers in the mid-1980s and immediately recognized the value they brought to people we served as well as to our staff teams."

Delivering peer support services in a crisis unit is different than at a drop-in center or out in the community, and newly-trained PRS, some of whom are re-entering the workforce after an absence, may not yet know where they'll be able to make the most of their skills. Southeast hoped to offer PRS an opportunity to observe peer support in action before applying for a position, and MHAOhio wanted to provide graduates of the 40-hour certification training more chances to connect with employers who are hiring PRS.

"Once the conversation started, the idea took off," recalls Jesse Roberts, Vocational Program Manager and My RecoveryWorks Manager at Southeast, who has worked alongside MHAOhio staff to develop an internship program. Together, MHAOhio and Southeast built a pilot program through which certified PRS meet with Southeast Vocational Services to identify teams they would like to observe and arrange an internship schedule. PRS can observe the work of up to three teams for two weeks at a time and are eligible to receive additional vocational support from Southeast.

Christopher Cooper, who completed a PRS certification training hosted by MHAOhio last year, was the first to begin an internship at Southeast, "It's a great opportunity for me. I know what peer support is, but I didn't know what a Peer Supporter did on a day-to-day basis. Doing the internship gives you insight into what might be triggering for you. You're in an environment that's safe, but you can observe and interact," Christopher says.

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## Welcoming New Staff



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**Bridget Downey**  
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**Tanisha James**  
Dayton POEM Program Coordinator

## Staff Promotions - Congratulations!



**DeAnna Hall**  
Get Connected Program Manager

DeAnna Hall has been promoted to Get Connected Program Manager. She will be working to expand the program, increase volunteer and participant numbers, and spread awareness of the Family Advocate Program.

Raquel Williams has been promoted to POEM Education Manager. In her new role, she will coordinate and implement the most current perinatal mental health education to providers and participants and engage with POEM and Rise's policy and advocacy efforts.



**Raquel Williams**  
POEM Education Manager



## BOARD SPOTLIGHT

**Nikkia Knudsen**  
**MHA, JD**

We are pleased to welcome Nikkia Knudsen to the MHAOhio Board of Trustees! She joined our Board in November of 2022.

Nikkia is passionate about MHAOhio's mission and wanted to join the board to contribute to the organization in a tangible way. After losing a friend to suicide a few years ago, she realized the importance of mental health, overall mental well-being, and having access to resources in our community.

Nikkia earned her Bachelor's of Science and her Master of Health Administration from The Ohio State University and spent the early part of her career working as an analyst and program manager at National Church Residences. She earned her Juris Doctor from Syracuse University College of Law and passed the Bar exam in October of 2021. She is now an Associate in Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Pease LLP's healthcare group.

In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, curling up with a cup of hot tea and a good book, enjoying a meal with family or friends, and spending time outdoors.

Welcome to the board, Nikkia! We are excited to work with you!

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## MHAOhio and Southeast Healthcare Launch Peer Recovery Supporter Field Placement Program

Christopher observed Southeast's Phoenix Team, which provides support to individuals transitioning from homelessness into stable housing. One day, the Case Manager he was observing took a box of food to a client who had recently moved into his first stable home in some time, and was clearly experiencing anxiety as a result. "I was able to engage with him," Christopher recalls, "and able to determine what he really wanted, and helped him see he could make his own decisions. I could have talked to him for two hours, and it made it clear to me I'd made the right choice in becoming a Peer Supporter."

For PRS who complete certification training but are not yet ready to pursue employment, an internship offers a way to gain practical experience while they wait. Melissa Blankenship graduated from PRS certification training in November, but is also in her second year of college to become a social worker or counselor and is in physical therapy following a minor surgery. While she isn't ready to apply for peer support jobs, she is looking forward to an internship in March. "The past few years have been a lot of training and working on my own recovery," Melissa says. "So I'm very excited to get out in the world and do something like shadowing—to be able to help others with what I've learned."

While the pilot program is just launching, Jesse Roberts already notes two major successes: "We've seen acceptance from your training graduates—they are excited to experience an internship. We've also seen how comfortable PRS are in being honest about their experiences here—what they saw and how they felt. We're learning from them."

Southeast and MHAOhio want to see the pilot program expand to provide internship opportunities with other providers in Columbus and beyond. As Jesse explains, "I hope together we create a model that can be moved to other agencies, but also other counties. We know there's a shortage of PRS in many places in the state. Ultimately, we want to see increased knowledge of the value of peer support."

Maggie Hallett agrees, "It's very exciting for us to help develop new employees to hopefully help expand the behavioral health workforce through the PRS training and field placement program."

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**MAUREEN TRAVERSE**, Education Manager

# TO YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

KEVIN MCDANIEL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



In October of 2022, I had the honor of being selected as MHAOhio's Executive Director.

In just a few short months, I have recognized three pillars of our agency's foundation that make

it possible to serve the mental health needs of our community every day: our staff, our mission, and our reach.

Our first pillar, our knowledgeable, caring staff, is our number one asset. They're not just great at what they do, they are also sincere about creating a helpful environment, both internally and externally, so they can live out their best selves every day and provide a pathway to help others do the same.

Our second pillar is our long-standing 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.

That involves encouraging community members to prioritize the care of their minds and hearts along with the care of their bodies and spirit.

Our goal is for an appointment with a therapist for a mental health challenge to be as natural and comfortable as an appointment with a physician for a physical symptom. Or as routine as attending a church, mosque, or synagogue for spiritual health and support.

Our third pillar is the expansion of our services into other parts of Ohio. MHAOhio's statewide reach extends beyond Franklin County, as we've recognized the access-to-care barriers of our state's urban and rural communities.

Those experiencing a mental health issue aren't always sure what they need or where to seek help. There are transportation issues, capacity challenges, and insurance coverage limitations.

Our statewide reach allows MHAOhio to be the on-ramp to the interstate of mental wellness in Ohio.

Folks need a path to the highway, and we become the ramp. That means every community partner, community agency, and everyone who is a trusted voice for the people we serve needs to be aware of who we are.

We are working to connect with community members, link them to trusted community partners, and encourage them to engage with their mental wellness.

We work every day to remain accessible so individuals in our state can maximize their lives.

We've done great work, but much is still to be done.

We are grateful for your talent, resources, and ongoing support of our programs. The need for skilled volunteers and fiscal support will continue this year as we work through our strategic plan.

I feel privileged to be chosen to lead an already healthy organization. It's my job to ensure we maintain that health and grow it outward.

## CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS



**WE NEED YOU!**

Our program is looking for more **POEM Rise Mentors & Bilingual Mentors!**

**POEM Rise Mentors** (for Black pregnant and parenting persons) & **Bilingual Mentors** (for Spanish speaking pregnant and parenting persons) are moms and birthers who've been there. They can talk through the challenges of motherhood and offer guidance, emotional support, and helpful information when needed. We offer free training and continual support from POEM staff as you serve.

**APPLY** <https://mhaohio.org/get-involved/volunteer/>



# Ohio Perinatal Mental Health Task Force



Perinatal\* mental health complications are the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth, affecting 800,000 moms and birthing persons each year in the United States. Between 2008- 2018, overdose and suicide combined were the leading cause of pregnancy-related mortality rates in Ohio. Improving the state of perinatal mental health care in Ohio will save lives.

Perinatal mental health issues have also moved to the forefront of maternal health advocacy as pandemic parenting highlighted the need for expanded community and social support and specialized care for moms and birthing persons.

Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms (POEM), a program of MHAOhio, has linked program participants to community and clinical care in Central Ohio for over twenty years. A new statewide POEM team is rallying care providers across Ohio for a chance to impact systems collaboratively as the Ohio Perinatal Mental Health Task Force (OPMHTF).

The OPMHTF is hosted by MHAOhio and funded by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. It is a collaborative of individuals and organizations committed to advancing policies and initiatives that the task force hopes will position Ohio as one of the leading states in the country in perinatal mental health access to care and treatment. The structure of the OPMHTF is action-focused, and is committed to building a membership culture that is inclusive of voices across the state and intentional in centering community efforts.

If you are a healthcare provider, social worker, psychologist, policy maker, community worker, birth worker, advocate, person with lived experience, or if you care deeply about issues affecting moms and birthing persons in Ohio, get involved!

Have questions or want to join the Ohio Perinatal Mental Health Task Force? Reach out to Becca Alexander, Senior Manager of POEM Statewide Operations, at [balexander@mhaohio.org](mailto:balexander@mhaohio.org).

\*Perinatal: the period from conception through the first year postpartum

**Becca Alexander**, Senior Manager of POEM Statewide Operations

## MHAOhio Honors Volunteers at Holiday Magic



MHAOhio was delighted to celebrate our volunteers, donors, and mental health advocates during our Holiday Magic event on November 30.

The first Holiday Magic event since the pandemic, we welcomed over 120 individuals who enjoyed a delicious spread of hors d'oeuvres and a meaningful awards ceremony recognizing the efforts of our volunteers and donors.

A special congratulations to Duane Casares, MSW, LISW-S, CEO of Directions for Youth & Families, winner of our Norman Guity award. This honor, named after MHAOhio's first executive director, recognizes an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the community in the area of mental health.

Thank you and congratulations to all of our award winners, pictured here.

We hope you will be able to join us for Holiday Magic 2023 later this year! Stay tuned for more details.

# THANK YOU

To our members and donors

June 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022

## Leadership Circle (\$1,000+)

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## Pi Sigma Epsilon Raises Funds for MHAOhio



Fundraising efforts for MHAOhio's life changing programs are most effective when a community rallies together. Organized by Pi Sigma Epsilon (PSE), Gamma Nu at The Ohio State University, CycleBar Upper Arlington generously hosted a fitness class to raise funds for our work! Established in 1980, PSE is a marketing, sales, and management co-ed professional business fraternity. Led by Ryan Schaffer, PSE endeavored to support a cause close to the students' hearts with this fundraising project. The transition to college life can come with many challenges for students, and mental health resources aren't always easily accessible when they need them most. We applaud Ryan and Pi Sigma Epsilon's efforts to make positive change in the mental healthcare system by raising funds!



# Family Advocate Program: Families Need Support, Too

When someone has a mental illness, it can affect everyone around them. Friends and family members might not understand what their loved one is going through, why they are acting a certain way, or what they can do to help or support them. This can leave family members feeling frustrated, burned out, isolated, and confused.

But families don't have to feel alone. MHAOhio's Family Advocate Program provides support and resources to those caring for someone with a mental illness, from someone who has walked in their shoes.

Recently, DeAnna Hall, former Get Connected Coordinator, was promoted to be the Get Connected Program Manager, enabling her to impact the Family Advocate Program differently. "This change allows me to spend more time on the Family Advocate Program, and bring in more participants and volunteers," she said.

The Get Connected Program links callers with an experienced mental health professional who can resolve issues, refer to the most helpful resource, navigate the mental health and substance abuse treatment system, and educate them about their rights. Oftentimes, a family member of a person with a mental illness is calling the Get Connected phone line. That caller is automatically enrolled in the Family Advocate Program.

"This way, the caller can be connected with a Family Advocate volunteer right away to make sure all of their needs are being met," DeAnna said.

Family Advocate volunteers are people who have lived experience supporting a family member with a mental illness. They also complete MHAOhio's Family Advocate training program. Volunteers have knowledge of the local mental health system and can lend support, a listening ear, and connection to resources.

## A Support Group for Families

A new Families in Touch support group, sponsored by the Family Advocate program, launched in late 2022. Family Advocate participants are referred to this support group, but it is open to the public and one of the many Families in Touch support groups options offered by MHAOhio.

The Families in Touch support group provides a safe space for families to talk with other families experiencing the same challenges. They explore feelings and frustrations, and share victories and setbacks.

Support group participants know that whatever hardship they might be facing, they have a foundation of people who have been-there-done-that rallying behind them.

The Families in Touch support group meets the third Wednesday of every month at the Karl Road Branch of the Columbus Metropolitan Library at 5590 Karl Road in Columbus. The group meets in Conference Rooms 1 and 2 on the upper level.

With so many families in our community caring for loved ones with mental illness, DeAnna's main goal in the coming year is to expand: To offer services to more participants, to recruit volunteers to help those participants, and to continue providing ongoing support through more Families in Touch support groups.

If you would like to become a Family Advocate volunteer or know someone who needs the service, visit our website at [www.mhaohio.org/get-help/family-advocate](http://www.mhaohio.org/get-help/family-advocate) or call (614) 242-4357 to Get Connected.

**Laurie Zinn**, Marketing and Communications Manager

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## SAVE THE DATE!

MHAOhio's ***Give Mom the Mic*** event has attracted a sold-out crowd of Central Ohioans who care deeply about mental health and access to services. The hilarious and heartwarming event supports the programs and services of MHAOhio.

This year's event will be held on **September 29, 2023** at The Grand Event Center in Grandview Heights, 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.

**DETAILS COMING SOON!**