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A message from Jim Lafferty
Executive Director, Mental Health Association in Delaware

Hello to all of you who are receiving our newsletter for the first time. My name is Jim Lafferty and I’m the Executive Director of the Mental Health Association in Delaware (MHA), which was founded in 1932. We are a not-for-profit organization that has a mission of promoting improved mental well being for all individuals and families in Delaware through education, support and advocacy. We are an affiliate of the national organization, Mental Health America, a United Way Member Agency and the Delaware Partner of the National Institute of Health.

Although we’ve been publishing a newsletter for years, this is the inaugural issue of our newly expanded and redesigned newsletter. It has been expanded in two ways. First, now we are able to send you and 119,000 others our newsletter; second, it has been completely redesigned so that we can include much more educational content.

Mental health and physical health are inseparable and in this issue and in future issues you will learn more about the importance of mental health and things that you can do to improve your own mental health. And yes, you will learn more about us: the Mental Health Association in Delaware. We hope to keep you informed about National Institute of Mental Health research aimed at discovering new and better treatments for mental health conditions, the opportunity to ask questions about mental health treatment, help you learn more about where to get treatment, understand how we can help you with our free community services, understand the services offered by the state of Delaware and how to use our information and referral services.

We welcome your input for future issues. Let us know what you would like to see in the newsletter. You can write our editor, Barbara Hill, blhill@dca.net or call her at (302) 654-6833 or (800) 287-6423 if you live in Kent or Sussex County. We would love to hear from you.

Hope you enjoy a beautiful fall and early winter. You’ll hear from us again in our winter issue and in the meantime we hope to hear from you.

A message from Anita L. Amurao, M.D.
Board President, Mental Health Association in Delaware

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Mental Health Association in Delaware, I welcome you to our first expanded newsletter issue. We are quite excited to reach so many more of you and we hope that you will learn more about who we are, our mission, and our goals for the coming years.

This year, we are proud to celebrate our 75th anniversary! We have interesting upcoming events during the next month or two, and hopefully you can participate in them. In the forthcoming issues, we will tell you more about the work that we do, and how we touch the lives of families, children and adults who are suffering from mental health problems. We will also provide you with information and opportunities to participate in our support groups, training and conferences, which we plan in collaboration with other agencies and mental health advocates in the community. Most importantly, we will provide you with educational information on mental health and wellness as well as resources where you can get help. Our advocacy efforts are ongoing, and we hope to find new partners to continue our work in promoting quality services, and supporting needed legislation such as parity of access to mental health services. We are very interested in your feedback and suggestions and we will do our best to accommodate your questions and concerns.

Sincerely,
Anita L. Amurao, M.D.

2007-2008 MHA Board of Directors

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Patti Tillotson Q&A
By Pam George

At age 17, many teens start planning for a future that includes college and a career. Stephanie Tillotson was not one of them. The day after her 17th birthday, the McKean High School student died by suicide, leaving her family and friends devastated.

Feeling the need to do something, her mother, Patti Tillotson, and Stephanie’s friends held a two-mile walk called Steps for Steph, which raised funds for suicide prevention in Stephanie’s name. The walk also planted the seeds for an organization, also named Steps for Steph, which was founded in fall 2003 to advocate for student mental health.

With the encouragement of family and friends, Tillotson helped form a suicide prevention coalition of about 20 public and private agencies.

The coalition, which had not previously existed in Delaware, was desperately needed. The suicide rate among preteen and teenage girls has risen to its highest level in 15 years, according to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Tillotson is currently executive director of Steps for Steph, and for the past two years, she’s been a member of the Mental Health Association in Delaware’s board of directors.

Q: How did you get involved with MHA?
A: MHA is part of our suicide coalition. That is how I met Jim Lafferty [the executive director]. He asked me to be a part of the board, and I agreed. It’s broadened my thinking about the overwhelming issues in mental health, but I certainly bring a cry for better care and improved continuity of treatment — particularly for teens.

Q: Will Steps for Steph concentrate on suicide prevention?
A: I’d like Steps for Steph to concentrate on two things: Suicide prevention and promoting teenage mental health. They go hand-in-hand.

Q: Is it hard for parents to hear about teen suicide?
A: I can tell you that they absolutely don’t want to think about suicide. I never thought about it once until it happened to us.

Q: Did Stephanie have mental health issues?
A: Stephanie was in counseling, and taking antidepressants. It was all a very confusing time. She would get angry with us and we wouldn’t know whether it was because she was [just] a teenager or something else.

Q: What are some of the signs parents should look for?
A: There’s anger, mood swings, family history. (See sidebar below.) Parents need to be aware of them.

Q: What is the suicide prevention coalition’s main mission right now?
A: To get the suicide “lifeline” number out there, (800)273-TALK. It’s a national number, but when someone calls, they get a trained person in the state of Delaware to talk with.

Q: You have had depression since you were a teenager. Part of the disease is a feeling of inertia, the inability to act. How can you combat that feeling?
A: I have what’s called my own personal flag pattern. I pay attention to it. If I’m at 100 percent “Life is great,” I start on a slow decline. When I reach 50 percent, I have that precipitous drop to zero. I don’t know the phone exists to pick it up and call for help. Understand how your depression works.

Q: It also helps to have a support system.
A: Yes. My husband is the one to catch my depression and help me do something about it. I talked to my daughters — I have another daughter, Michelle — when they were around 10 and told them that our family has this history of depression.

“If you ever get to the point where you feel sad continuously for no reason, come see me.” That’s what Stephanie did the first time around.

There needs to be a coordinated team approach to mental health [like that among medical professionals who treat cancer patients]. Stephanie had a suicide attempt and went to a treatment center. When she came out, we had no instructions. So for a long time, we were walking on eggshells: “What is it we’re supposed to do to help her?” There was no hand-off.

Q: What’s been the most rewarding part about your involvement with MHA?
A: Saving lives. Absolutely. After the coalition formed, the Delaware River & Bay Authority put the suicide prevention lifeline number across the digital billboard at the bridge. One woman got in her car and drove over the bridge because she remembered seeing the number, so she could help her son.

Q: How can people help Steps for Steph?
A: Because of the stigma, it’s difficult to raise funds for suicide prevention so I’ve made it easy to contribute. In May, I set up a Web site, StepsforSteph.com. People can link through my Web site and shop at Amazon.com, Macy’s, Best Buy and we get a donation. It’s an easy way to give. The more people buy, the more we can help.

Suicide Warning Signs

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself.
- Looking for ways to hurt oneself by seeking access to firearms, available pills or other means.
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person.
- Feeling hopeless.
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge.
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities — seemingly without thinking.
- Feeling trapped — like there’s no way out.
- Increasing alcohol or drug use.
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society.
- Feeling anxious, agitated or unable to sleep or sleeping all the time.
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life


If you or someone you know is in crisis, call the Lifeline (800) 273-TALK. The Mental Health Association in Delaware: (302) 654-6833 from New Castle County; (800) 287-6423 from Kent and Sussex counties.
Mental Health Association in Delaware

Much has changed since MHA’s founding in 1932 as the Delaware Mental Hygiene Association. “We’re beginning to chip away at that little block of granite I call stigma,” says Jim Lafferty, Executive Director of MHA. “Awareness has increased dramatically: Mental illness is a treatable disease.” In Delaware, that growing awareness is no doubt due in part MHA’s efforts.

Along with education and awareness, advocacy is a major MHA initiative. “Support groups are a vital part of the organization’s mission, and MHA strives to fill unmet needs. Hundreds of Delawareans attend the more than 20 support groups offered by the agency. There are groups in each county for people with depression and/or anxiety, MHA also offers a support group for people whose loved ones have been murdered and groups for parents of children with mental illness. There is a group for a people whose loved ones have been murdered and groups for parents of children with mental illness. See the schedule on page 8 for a full support schedule.

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Beyond Stress and Beyond Stress Teen

In both of these interactive presentations, participants will learn what happens in their work, school and personal lives when they, their family members or friends move beyond stress into depression or anxiety disorders. They will also learn how to eliminate their suffering by using prevention strategies to manage stress. The Beyond Stress program is intended for adults, while the Beyond Stress Teen program is geared towards troubles between the ages of twelve and eighteen.

Your Emotional Health and Your Baby

MHA offers this educational program to expectant mothers, their partners, and members of their support system. Participants will learn to distinguish signs of “the baby blues,” a normal phenomenon, from the symptoms of common but serious postpartum mental health conditions including postpartum depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and psychosis. In addition, the discussion covers the ways that these mental health conditions can affect both a new mother’s relationship with her partner and the health of their newborn. Treatment options and resources are also offered.

The Suicide Prevention Conference

Every eighteen months, MHA, in collaboration with the Delaware Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH), hosts the Suicide Prevention Conferences in order to educate the public about a range of topics related to suicide, including risk factors and warning signs, as well as effective and appropriate techniques for intervention. This conference is offered to all attendees at no cost. The next Suicide Prevention Conference is tentatively scheduled for Fall 2008.

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6th Annual People of Color Mental Health Conference

The Mental Health Association in Delaware is excited to be collaborating with the Attention Deficit Disorders Association to bring you the 6th Annual People of Color Mental Health Conference, entitled “Bending & Mending: Conversations for Better Mental Health through Mind, Body and Spirit.” This two-day conference will take place on Friday, November 2, and Saturday, November 3, and will include several workshops and exhibits, as well as dining and entertainment.

Friday, November 2, will be dedicated to issues related to Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder (AD/HD); professionals attending on Friday will have the opportunity to earn CEUs. The Keynote Presentation on Friday will be a panel discussion during which two families will share their experiences in learning to cope successfully with AD/HD and ultimately thrive. Saturday, November 3, will be focused on mental health issues as they pertain to people of color; CEUs will NOT be offered on Saturday. In addition to workshops for adult attendees, Saturday also includes several activities geared specifically towards younger participants. The Keynote Speaker on Saturday will be Keisha Zollar from the National Mental Health Awareness Campaign. Keisha will discuss the cultural stigma surrounding depression in African-Americans and share her personal experience as an African-American woman who overcame this stigma and found successful treatment for her depression.

Children and adolescents who are 17 or younger are welcome to attend one or both days free of charge. Great gifts will be raffled off to attendees 17 and under who attend on Saturday! Prizes include a portable DVD player, an MP3 player, and a Nintendo Wii.

Limited scholarships are available for registration. For more information on the 6th Annual People of Color Mental Health Conference and registration, please call the Mental Health Association in Delaware at (302) 654-6833, or toll free at (800) 287-6423. Information, including a downloadable registration brochure, is also available on our website at www.mhainde.org/news.htm

History of Annual People of Color Mental Health Conference

In 2002, the Mental Health Association in Delaware hosted its first People of Color Mental Health Conference in order to disseminate information about mental health to the African-American and Hispanic communities throughout the state. The underlying concept for the conference arose as a direct response to numerous requests from community members who wanted to learn how to identify the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, as well as how and where to seek treatment.

The community enthusiastically embraced the event, and it has since been held annually in the city of Wilmington. The conference, organized by a committee comprised of MHA staff and community members themselves, includes a nationally recognized keynote presenter, break-out workshops on a variety of topics, and a host of human service exhibits with giveaways. Due to its success in New Castle County, the conference is now being offered in Dover every spring through the partnership between Delaware State University’s Center for Mental Health Advancement and MHA.

The Annual People of Color Mental Health Conferences have given the opportunity for individuals of color to gain greater understanding of mental illness and combat the stigma that is so pervasive in the minds of many.

National Depression Screening Day

The Mental Health Association in Delaware is gearing up for the 17th Annual National Depression Screening Day on Thursday, October 11, 2007. National Depression Screening Day is designed to call attention to the illness of depression on a national level. It is also designed to educate the public about symptoms and effective treatments, to offer individuals the opportunity to be screened for depression, and to connect those in need to the mental health care system in Delaware. This year, National Depression Screening Day will feature new educational materials that will help empower members of the public to recognize and respond to the warning signs of suicide in a friend or a loved one. The STOP A SUICIDE TODAY! campaign highlights the importance of identifying and treating depression and other mental illnesses before a situation becomes urgent.

Thanks to the support of the many organizations and businesses that sponsored last year’s event, over 600 Delawareans participated in National Depression Screening Day at 27 sites statewide and the Mental Health Association received national recognition for promoting and coordinating National Depression Screening Day in Delaware.

This year, MHA has recruited more than 30 screening sites statewide for individuals to participate in a free depression screening. To locate a depression screening site near you, visit our website at www.mhainde.org/news.htm, or call (302) 654-6833 or (800) 287-6423 in Kent and Sussex counties.
Exercise and mental health
by Kate McGraw, Ph.D.

Now let’s be honest with one another. How many times this week did you exercise? Come on, not slowly getting up from the chair to get a snack and sit down again, but actually raising your heart rate to the point you started sweating for more than 30 minutes? Unfortunately, like many Americans, you probably can think of a time several weeks ago. And maybe you feel guilty about not exercising frequently because you know that exercise can help ward off many diseases, and can help you stay at a healthy weight. It may even reduce elevated levels of those strange sounding chemicals in your blood that your doctor scolded you about at your last appointment. But did you know there is increasing scientific evidence that exercise can help fight depression and anxiety?

A study in the January 2005 issue of *Journal of Preventive Medicine* reported that if you exercise 30 minutes six days a week you may experience improvement in your mental health if you are depressed. The study compared two groups of patients with depression and found that the group that exercised only 80 minutes a week didn’t seem to gain benefit for their depression. The other group who exercised three hours a week reported a significant decrease in their depressive symptoms. Theories of why this occurs are varied. Some theorists point to the production of endorphins which produce a pleasant feeling in your body after prolonged exercise. Others focus on the excretion via sweat during exercise of damaging hormones produced by your body during stress. There is further suggestion from this study that the impact of exercise on depression could compare favorably to other types of treatment for depression, including medication and psychotherapy.

This study is not the first to report the positive effects of exercise on mental health as there have been several excellent studies published supporting the theory. Many point to measurable impact on self-esteem, positive mood, and more restful sleep as additional benefits from regular exercise. These studies also report that exercise in combination with other types of treatment is the best prescription for depression and anxiety.

The next logical question seems to be, can exercise be used like vitamins as prevention for mental illness? If you exercise regularly, will you prevent depression and anxiety from taking hold? While that question is being explored by scientists, what do you think would happen to your view on life if you put this paper down, put your shoes on, and took a long walk? My guess is that you will feel better and sleep sounder tonight. Give it a try!
Volunteers make all the difference

For more than three decades, the Mental Health Association in Delaware has relied in great part on volunteers as the agency put our mission into action, developing and delivering education, support, and advocacy on behalf of all who are affected by mental health issues. Volunteers who work in the MHA office, plan or participate in conferences and workshops, or help spread the word about mental health initiatives know that every hour given makes a significant difference to the well-being of all who come to MHA for support. Help make life better for Delaware: volunteer to help MHA today. Even a little time goes a long way.

Mental Health Association in Delaware Support Groups Fall 2007

Please call to register. (302) 654-6833 in New Castle County, or in Kent or Sussex (800) 287-6423

To maintain the privacy of our members, MHA does not publish support group locations; locations are provided with registration. Support groups sponsored by MHA are not intended to replace professional mental health treatment.

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</tbody>
</table>