What’s New at MHA?

We would like to introduce you to a few of MHA’s new hires! Ryan and Clarence are part of our new DOC program initiative and Anthony has joined the Mental Health Court team. Welcome to MHA; we are happy to have you working with us!

Ryan Leonardo

is a Delaware Tech alumnus, having earned his AAS degree in human services. He has obtained certification as a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist and has worked in various roles as a peer, including with the homeless population, in a mental health crisis unit, and warm line. He is the father of two daughters and has one grandson. He enjoys sports, music, and traveling with his wife Karen. Originally from Philadelphia, Ryan now enjoys living at the beach in Sussex county, Delaware.

Anthony Butz

Anthony is a Mental Health Court Peer Mentor. He writes “I struggled with mental health and substance abuse the majority of my life. Stuck in this cycle of pain and misery thinking that I would never find a way out. Today I use my experiences to help others walk through similar situations, help break the stigma associated with mental health and substance abuse, and give them hope that they can do it, show them they are not alone, and that recovery is possible.”
CLARENCE JAMES CUMMINGS, CPRS

Clarence Cummings is a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, and holds numerous behavioral health certifications including those from Juniata College, the Association of Addiction Professionals, Wellness Recovery Action Plan, the Mental Health Technology Transfer Center, the Homeless and Housing Resource Center, and others. His experience and training have prepared him to look at the whole person: physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing, while identifying their strengths, needs and abilities. Clarence writes, “I attended California State University Chico, studying Political Science and Business Administration. After two successful years, I attended Condie College of Business and Technology, receiving my Associate Degree in Electronic Technology. I worked for five years in the semiconductor industry as an Engineering Technician developing CMOS integrated circuits. Life had a different route of experiences laid out for me. Through many winding and unsteady roads I came to understand it is not what I want, it is what is in front of me that I need to pay attention to.

As a person with lived experiences, SUD and mental health, I am a survivor. My life experiences have prepared me with the opportunity to help others who have experienced similar life events by caring and sharing my story. I am a firm believer that “Each One Teach One.” Listening and learning is the key to establishing rapport. Maya Angelo, American Poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist once said, ‘I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.’”

Director’s Note

As we start another new year, we are excited to begin rolling out our new DOC Peer Education program, which has begun training the first cohort of individuals at Howard Young Correctional. We have hired several new staff who will support education and awareness and we continue to increase our reach and touch new audiences with lifesaving information about mental health and suicide prevention. We are thankful for the support of readers like you who offer their time, financial resources, and encouragement to support mental well-being in Delaware.
This support continues to be critical, especially because many individuals are still struggling with the ongoing effects of the pandemic. To no one’s surprise, research shows that the pandemic is associated with increased rates of distress, anxiety, depression and insomnia world-wide. Many individuals continue to struggle with fears of contagion and the resulting social isolation, loneliness and sleep disturbance that go along with it.

Many are still affected by economic difficulties arising from the pandemic. Rates of addiction and substance use rose during the pandemic, as did rates of mobile phone addiction, especially among young people, and we continue to grapple with the results. Calls for help with concerns about suicide have increased.

There are important measures that we can take as a society to mitigate the harmful mental health effects of the pandemic. It is important that we provide supports for those living alone, and provide active outreach to those who are at increased risk of harm, such as older adults, healthcare workers, or those with previous suicide attempts. Financial support and telemedicine should remain available as options for those who need them. We also need to ensure that screening and evaluation is easily accessible to all. Visit MHA’s website to take a free, quick mental health screening and find out how to get services if needed.

For each of us as individuals, it is imperative to maintain connection and relationships, even if we can’t physically be in the same room with others as much as we have in the past. If you live alone it is especially important that you connect with someone on a daily basis. MHA has virtual and in-person support groups for those diagnosed with a mental health disorders, and a group specifically for individuals still struggling with long term effects of COVID-19, whether through ongoing symptoms of illness, grief, financial difficulties, social isolation, or other stressors related to the pandemic.

Remember that if you are going through a hard time, don’t be afraid to seek services, stay in treatment, or increase services if that is needed. All of us need some extra support sometimes, and it is wise and brave to reach out for support when it is your turn to be in need.

For more information about the long-term effects of COVID and coping strategies, please reach out to us at info@mhaiinde.org or call us at 800-654-6833 to schedule a presentation, sign up for a group, or just get additional information about resources in Delaware.

Always remember, while COVID-10 has impacted our mental health, there are effective steps we can take to help others and ourselves, and we need to keep taking these steps even as life returns to normal. Mental health disorders are treatable. People who have a mental health disorder can and do recover. Suicide is preventable. While we can’t control someone else’s actions, we can help a person (or ourselves!) find reasons to live and keep safe.

With Warm Wishes for 2023,

Emily
New Program

MHA Peer Education is partnering with the Department of Corrections

MHA in Delaware’s Peer Training and Outreach Services team is beyond excited to partner with the Department of Substance Abuse and Mental Health and the Department of Corrections (DOC) to offer peer education to those who are currently incarcerated in the Delaware prison system. A team of MHA peer educators will provide training to both DOC staff and inmates. Inmates will be given the opportunity to complete Certified Peer Recovery Specialist training, sit for the Delaware exam for the national credential CPRS (Certified Peer Recovery Specialist), and work as peers within the correctional system. They’ll then have the option to seek employment as Certified Peer Recovery Specialists upon release. The initiative began in November of 2022 at Howard R. Young.

MHA is looking for peers working in the community who were justice involved and are willing to mentor to peers who are currently incarcerated.

If interested, please view the information below or contact us at: akorieh@mhainde.org

Are you interested in mentoring? Do you have lived experience with mental illness and/or substance abuse? Are you currently in recovery?

If you answered yes to any of the questions above, you may be interested in taking a quick survey. This survey is for the DOC Peer Mentorship program, specifically for previously justice involved individuals interested in mentoring currently incarcerated individuals studying to become peer support specialists.

Survey Link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JLSHJ7W

*To take this survey you must be formerly justice involved and lived experience with mental illness/addiction/ or co-occurring conditions, AND recovery*
Meet Our Public Allies!

Public Allies of Delaware is “a social justice organization that is committed to changing the face of leadership by recruiting and training of talented emerging leaders, all of whom have a passion for social impact.”

Through a partnership with AmeriCorps and over a 10 month period, Allies are placed in one of the nonprofit organizations in Delaware and help them address “critical community needs.”

Here at MHA we are happy to host two Public Allies, Monea Bailey and Akunna Korieh. Monea is working with our Peer Education team and Akunna is with our new DOC program. Keep reading more for information on our amazing allies!

What lead you to Public Allies?

What led me to Public Allies was my desire to network with like-minded people, and expand my knowledge and experience with non-profit organizations. Public Allies has allowed me to get out of my comfort zone in more ways than one. Since starting with this non-profit, I have made great connections with people and been a part of some events that further the Delaware community.

What has been your experience so far with MHA?

Time with my partner organization with the Mental health association has been great. The team there works well together and makes an effort to create a diverse and welcoming work environment. What I’ve enjoyed most so far is having the opportunity to incorporate my photography, design and videography skills. Another thing that I can appreciate about MHA is that they teach and encourage the importance of self-care and mental health.

What is your favorite way to practice self-care?

Two of my favorite self-care activities include massages and no-screen activities. This includes painting, writing poetry and stretching. This experience with public allies and MHA has been a pleasure thus far, and I can’t wait to see what the next few months hold.

What lead you to Public Allies?

What brought me to Public Allies was how deeply I aligned with their core values and mission. I’ve always been deeply passionate about social justice and equity; and participating in the Public Allies program has given me the opportunity to help pursue my passion interests fully.

What has been your experience so far with MHA?

What I’ve enjoyed the most so far at MHA is the community. Everybody I’ve encountered has been so incredibly kind since day one. I’m always reminded of endless support that is offered to me. I love MHA and everyone here.

What is your favorite way to practice self-care?

My favorite self-care activity is making a hot cup of tea and watching a movie.
From the Blog: Promoting Mind-Body Wellness

January is a month of the year that is usually known to be a “reset” for most people. After rushing around for the holidays, no matter what you celebrate, it can tend to be a bit overwhelming. This is why the beginning of the year is the ideal time to recharge, reset, and to become in tune of what we need, both emotionally and physically.

International Mind-Body Wellness Day, celebrated on January 3rd, was created for this purpose. Not only to learn more about the mind-body connection, but according to National Today, an “opportunity to celebrate how a healthy mind and emotions can lead to a healthy body.” The mind-body connection plays an important role in our overall well-being and mind-body wellness is a concept that has been around for thousands of years. It can include mindfulness, meditation, changes in diet, and/or spirituality – anything that personally helps you achieve balance and promotes connection amongst mind, body, and soul.

How can this be done? While the idea of it may seem fairly overwhelming at first, the practice of it can be quite simple. First, it should be something that you enjoy. As individuals we are inheritably unique with varying interests, so what we consider to be mindful or relaxing may not be for somebody else. For example, meditation is never something that I, personally, got into or found beneficial for myself. However, this doesn’t mean that other people don’t find this enjoyable or useful for themselves. Practicing mindfulness can be done in many different ways. Outside of meditation, there is yoga, journaling, and even mindful eating.

A good night’s sleep, while important all of the time, is especially important when you’re trying to achieve balance with mind and body. Restful sleep can help reduce stress, improve mental clarity, and prevent extreme daytime exhaustion the next day. To get a good night’s sleep, try to avoid drinking too many fluids, especially caffeinated beverages and stay away from technology or watching TV right before you go to bed.

Some other ways to create balance include eating (mostly) healthy, staying hydrated, and getting some form of exercise daily (that you enjoy). It’s also important to listen to both your body and mind and to find what works best for you. And while everyone may have different practices on how to achieve it, creating a mind-body connection is important and can contribute to our overall health and well-being.

Staff Blogger: Mollie Clupper

Mollie Clupper works for MHA as a Communications and Support Specialist. Using her own experiences, she wants to help bring awareness and end the stigma surrounding mental health. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking, drinking coffee, and spending time with loved ones.
Peer Specialist Career Information Session

Do you have personal experience with mental health and/or substance abuse and consider yourself in recovery? Are you looking for a way to use your lived experience to give back to others, and turn it into a career? The profession of Peer Support might be for you! Please join us at a Peer Support information session, where Peer Educators at the Mental Health Association in Delaware will take you through the roles and responsibilities peers face, requirements needed for employment, training opportunities, our yearly Peer Internship program and other relevant opportunities. See you there!

Date: Wednesday, February 22, 2023
Time: 10 am-12 pm
Location: Community Services Building, room 105
Registration Link: Mental Health Association in DE — Peer Specialist Career Information Session (corsizio.com)

*light refreshments will be served

Grounding Techniques CEU

Come learn what grounding is and why it’s helpful to your mental health. There are many forms of grounding that people can use to decrease stress, anxiety depression, etc. Learn as a peer support specialist how to incorporate the skills to help your peers. This is a fully independent CEU based on our online learning platform.

Participants will 2.0 CEUs after completion.

Registration Link: Mental Health Association in DE — Grounding Techniques (corsizio.com)
Empowering Community Wellness Symposium

Thursday, May 4, 2023  
9am - 12pm  
Riverfront Events - 760 Justison Street, Wilmington, DE  

Theme: A Deeper Understanding of Self-Care  

Registration information to follow.  
For more information, email Jason Coleman (jcoleman@mhainde.org).
Communities and individuals struggling with mental health illnesses are among the largest group of tobacco users. Commonly, this population uses smoking and vaping as a way to cope with everyday barriers, which may prolong their mental conditions and lead to physical ailments (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Studies show that those diagnosed with schizophrenia and anxiety related disorders had higher prevalent rates of tobacco use.

Tobacco and nicotine are increasingly more addictive as e-cigarettes and vape products become more popular among younger populations. This could lead to early stages of addiction and early onset of a plethora of health concerns (Templeton, 2019). In addition to the negative effects that smoking can have on an individual’s mental well-being, smoking is dangerous to overall health and places individuals at increased risk for heart disease, cancer, and many other life-threatening illnesses.

**Know the Facts**

**There is a strong link between smoking and mental health.** Smoking increases the risk of depression, along with its many other negative effects including heart disease, cancer and other life threatening illnesses.

Recent studies indicate that smoking is also linked to other mental health problems including anxiety, especially among women and young people. According to the CDC, more than 1 in 3 (36%) adults with mental illness smoke cigarettes, compared with about 1 in 5 (21%) adults with no mental illness. About 3 of every 10 cigarettes smoked by adults are smoked by adults with mental illness.

Sometimes people with mental illness turn to smoking to help them feel better. Studies indicate that smoking can provide temporary relief from feelings of depression or anxiety by raising the level of serotonin in the brain. Many people turn to cigarettes when they are anxious, and the physiological effects of the nicotine can create a calming sensation. The key thing to remember, however, is that nicotine only produces a temporary relief from negative feelings, and it also compromises overall physical health. Symptoms will return, and sometimes become even more severe. Numerous studies have found a link between depression and smoking. Many researchers view depression as leading to an increase in smoking, but some studies find the reverse— that smoking increases the risk of depression. Studies indicate that nondepressed teens who smoke are more likely to develop depression than those who do not smoke. Symptoms of depression may include loss of self esteem, fatigue, lack of concentration, weight loss or weight gain, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, sleeping problems and suicidal thoughts. Over time, tolerance to nicotine develops and it takes more nicotine to achieve the same effects. Once this cycle has been established, heavy smokers who try to quit are all the more likely to experience depression and this increases the chances that they will relapse to smoking. This is a challenging cycle to break, but there is help available. Research shows that adults with mental illness who smoke want to and are able to quit.

**Take Action for Better Mental Health**

The Mental Health Association in Delaware is pleased to provide educational materials like this brochure to:

- Deter people from starting to smoke
- Encourage and support people who want to quit
- Offer educational presentations for adults and youth that include information on nicotine and mental health, and encourage smoke-free workplaces
- Maintain support groups for people with depression, anxiety, or for people who have experienced the suicide or sudden and violent death of a loved one
Call 654-6833 in New Castle County or 1-800-287-6423 in Kent and Sussex Counties for more information. You can also email MHA at information@mhainde.org or check us out online at www.mhainde.org.

Interested in Quitting?

Delaware QuitLine
1-866-409-1858
Offers stop smoking resources and counseling on the phone or in person, as well as online support.

American Lung Association HelpLine
1-800 LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872)
www.lung.org
Offers a telephone counseling program, online chat, materials and resources to help you quit.

Teen Cessation (under 18 years)
Not on Tobacco (NOT) 1-800-LUNG USA
www.lung.org

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