

# MHA The Mental Health Association of Westchester

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## Mission Statement

The mission of The Mental Health Association of Westchester (MHA) is to promote mental health through advocacy, community education and direct services.

## Providing Care in Vulnerable Times

*MHA introduces new programs and services to provide flexible support for individuals*

Community is key to the success of The Mental Health Association of Westchester, to the work we do each day and to the recovery of our clients.

We believe—and have seen firsthand—that people recover best from behavioral health challenges if they remain in their communities and in their lives, surrounded by natural supports. While this means providing services that enable clinicians to meet clients in their homes, libraries, coffee shops and other convenient spaces, it also means keeping people *in* their community by keeping them *out* of the hospital. When hospitalization does occur, flexible care delivery and increased support is vital to an individual's well-being during the vulnerable time following discharge.

To proactively reach clients during this transitional period, MHA has introduced **HealthlinkNY**, a new electronic alert system from the New York State Department of Health. A sophisticated and secure electronic alert system, HealthlinkNY sends daily notifications to MHA when a client who has previously provided consent utilizes a hospital or emergency room. Alerts from HealthlinkNY are disseminated to appropriate staff, such as clinicians, care managers, peer specialists and housing and employment services.

Nearly real-time in its notifications, HealthlinkNY enables our staff to connect with clients in a timely manner to collaborate on next steps and identify the type of assistance that will be most helpful upon discharge. *Has housing been secured? Are they able to buy food easily? Do they need a prescription filled or a medical appointment scheduled?*

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# news

Winter  
2018

# A Letter from the CEO



## Providing Care in Vulnerable Times

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**Dear friends,**

*The life-changing work that happens across our community every day is driven by our dedicated staff, who spend more than 260,000 hours each year helping children, teens and adults. Our mobile team logs enough miles to cover more than 18 trips around the Earth each year—nearly half a million miles!—as they deliver services throughout Westchester.*

**As our staff work hard to support more than 13,500 individuals throughout the year, MHA is there to support them. We are committed to caring for our employees, both professionally and personally.**

*We equip staff with tools and skillsets to provide the very best care—care that is person-centered, trauma-informed and culturally aware and sensitive.*

*We recognize that our community is diverse and that our clients have many different backgrounds and life experiences. To help staff deepen their understanding of how cultural identity can impact emotional, physical and behavioral well-being, we offer culture competence workshops throughout the year. This vital training—just one in an array of professional learning opportunities—helps our staff understand the ways in which their own cultural identity can shape client interactions, as well.*

*Caring for those in crisis is difficult, and the emotional toll of this work can be significant. We work with a growing number of individuals with increasingly complex health and behavioral health needs. Therefore, we have implemented enhanced staff support to minimize secondary traumatic stress.*

*Our “Circle of Support” offers care from fellow staff during times of increased need, such as following the death of a client. Our Enhanced Peer Support Team, an internal group of trained volunteers, also provides additional peer support and trauma informed care. Each individual is unique, and we understand that staff reactions and needs may vary. Support may be offered over coffee or lunch, a walk outside or even keeping someone company in our quiet Wellness Room*

*We are proud of our staff, whose work is fueled by a deep belief in recovery. We care for each other as family, and we consider you part of our family, too. If you have identified a way in which we can better support you, please reach out to us at [help@mhawestchester.org](mailto:help@mhawestchester.org).*

*Your belief in our mission provides the foundation for our work, and we are grateful for your ongoing commitment to MHA. Thank you for all that you do to support mental health!*

Kindly,

Charlotte Östman, LCSW-R



With HealthlinkNY, we can help clients avoid unnecessary re-hospitalizations or emergency room visits for medical reasons, as well. Staff now have a broader picture of a client's whole health, can identify patterns of primary health challenges and, as a result, dig deeper than what is seen merely on the surface. For example, if a client visits the hospital repeatedly for complications from diabetes, our staff can work with the client in understanding and treating underlying causes. *Are they currently homeless, and therefore don't have a safe space to keep their medication? Are they faced with the difficult decision whether to spend money on food or their prescription? Do they have adequate access to healthy food? Do they understand how to use their medication?*

By answering these questions, we can identify challenges that contribute to medical and behavioral health issues. Hospitalizations and emergency room visits can be disruptive, costly and even traumatic to the individual. Addressing the underlying cause for these visits helps us reduce the likelihood of future hospitalizations, therefore improving the trajectory of an individual's recovery journey.

Our **Intensive Outpatient Program** is another innovative offering through which we have recently begun to help people following hospitalization. Introduced this summer, the Intensive Outpatient Program provides services of varying intensity, specifically tailored to what a client needs that day or that week. The frequency, length and type of support are all dictated by a client's unique and fluctuating desire and need for care. Clinicians and peer professionals collaborate to provide multiple points of contact during times of increased need. Through its location at our peer-run Sterling Community Center, the program also provides easy access to services such as employment and peer support, which can further support recovery.

“By making real connections when people need it most, we can support an individual's journey in a meaningful way and improve the trajectory of their recovery,” said MHA Chief Operating Officer, Stacey Roberts, LCSW. “Our agency has a rich history of developing models of care that support clients when and where they can benefit most. We are proud to continue to expand our programs and services to reflect our deeply held belief in recovery.” ■



# Modern Warrior LIVE Shines a Spotlight on Hope and Healing

*Reflections from MHA's Fall Benefit:  
An Evening of Conversation and Music*



On Wednesday, October 24th, The Mental Health Association of Westchester welcomed Modern Warrior LIVE to the stage at The Chappaqua Performing Arts Center. Through an autobiographical theatrical performance, Modern Warrior LIVE combined powerful music and gripping conversation, leading attendees to a deeper understanding of a soldier's life, as well as the challenges of transitioning back into civilian life.

"This special evening was a powerful reminder that we must promise to do more for our country's veterans: listen more, understand more, support more," said MHA CEO Charlotte Östman, LCSW-R. "I am pleased to share that our benefit marked our own pledge to do just that. As we embark on developing specialized support for the extended military community, we come full circle from 1946, when we were founded to help service members returning from World War II."

A universal message of hope, recovery and the healing power of storytelling infused the evening, which began with a stirring rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner" sang by Amy Chicavich, Technical Sergeant Air National Guard Band of the Northeast and sister-in-law of our Vice-President of Children's Services, Deirdre Sferrazza, LMSW. It was apropos to take the time to honor and to recognize all of the heroes who have served our country in our nation's armed forces.

We then honored Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Geraci, LMHC, PhD with MHA's inaugural Community Hero Award. Since returning from service, Dr. Geraci has dedicated himself to mental health support for the veteran community, and we proudly recognized his achievements and commitments.

Afterwards, the stage lights shined on show co-creator and Staff Sergeant Jaymes Poling as he passionately described his journey from war to civilian life. His message exemplified the pathway from adversity to resilience and post traumatic stress to post traumatic growth. The music—led by co-creator and renowned jazz trumpeter Dominick Farinacci—included a mix of jazz, blues, gospel and hymns. The performance ended with a compelling Q&A with the show co-creators and Dr. Geraci, during which the audience discussed how we as a community can best support our veterans.



We are grateful for the support of our sponsors and partners who helped to make the evening a success: Meryl A. Allison and Elisa E. Burns, MD, CBS/Xerox, Clarfeld Financial Advisors, Jen and Steve Kasoff, Michael and Kate Lombardi, PKF O'Connor Davies, LLP, Donna M. Renella, Gallagher, Sharon Krieger, MD and Brian Hannon, Ulf and Charlotte Östman, Gerald Stern and Carla Pasquali, TD Bank, Nora and Jonathan Contract, Allen and Jeanette Fairhurst, Life Time Athletic Chappaqua, Peter and Michele Sloane, Team Daniel Running for Recovery from Mental Illness, Yvonne Tropp and Alan Epstein. ■

*Left: Cast and Crew Modern Warrior LIVE*



*Top: Gabe Botero, White Plains Vet Center Director, Lt. Col. Joseph Geraci, LMHC, PhD*

*2nd row left: Show Co-Creator Jaymes Poling*

*2nd row right: Sarah LeBuhn, Niki Grados and Jen Williams*

*3rd row: MHA CEO Charlotte Östman with MHA Board Members Meryl Allison, Dr. Ann Mandel Laitman, Donna Renella, Gerald Stern, Nicholas Pirrotta, Mike Lombardi, Sean Mayer, Jeannette Fairhurst.*

*Bottom photo: Cast member with Show Co-Creator Dominick Farinacci*

**Visit us at [www.mhawestchester.org](http://www.mhawestchester.org)**

## New Training Empowers Young Adults to Harness Essential Soft Skills for the Workplace

In today's ever-changing and increasingly competitive job market, it is challenging for young adults to know where to begin to secure employment. MHA's new Youth Work Readiness Program is a valuable service that, over the past several months, has been providing young adults with a wide range of interpersonal and soft skills to help ensure long-term success in the workplace.

Developed by Danielle Ramachandran, a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor in our Employment Services Department, the program offers young adults, ranging from 15–21 years of age who have a documented mental health diagnosis, strategies and helpful tools to prepare them for their first employment experiences. The program, which is free of charge and does not require any work experience, also emphasizes identifying support services to bolster participants' efforts toward vocational success.

As Ramachandran puts it, "My goal is to help youth recognize their strengths, so that they transition into the job market with necessary tools and the confidence to use them. Many young adults, when faced with the process of looking for employment, do not know how to go about it. Some have unreasonable expectations of where they should be in their life at their age. The whole experience can be anxiety provoking. The program helps with boosting self-esteem and strategies to overcome obstacles that everyone faces when searching for a job."

Ramachandran leads the groups twice a week at the Sterling Community Center, sharing tips and leading exercises about job search techniques, resume writing, and interview skills, including how to present oneself positively during an interview and follow-up with prospective employers. MHA Employment Specialists also offer individual placement services, which cover obtaining employment and job coaching.

For more information, please contact Danielle Ramachandran at [ramachand@mhawestchester.org](mailto:ramachand@mhawestchester.org) or 914-512-4123. ■



## Dwayne Mayes Receives Leadership Award

We salute Dwayne Mayes, MHA's Director of the Recovery Network and Peer Training, for receiving the Brendan Nugent Leadership Award at the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services Annual Conference this fall! This special recognition is presented to an inspiring peer leader for their exemplary efforts in promoting and advocating for the empowerment of people with mental health issues. Dwayne's dedication and compassion have changed the lives of those we serve and have inspired each of us at MHA, and we are so proud that his leadership was recognized at a state level. Congratulations Dwayne! ■

*Executive Director of NYAPRS Harvey Rosenthal, MHA's Dwayne Mayes, and Chief Program Officer of Mental Health Association of Nassau County Jeff McQueen.*

## Remembering Lois Cowan, 1924-2018

This summer, our community lost a true advocate, a remarkable leader and a respected mentor.

Lois Cowan's commitment to mental health advocacy and the well-being of all community members defined her life, as she devoted 45 years to volunteering with MHA. As a devoted Board Member, Lois served as Vice President and President throughout the years, acting as pioneer for behavioral health advocacy and care.

Lois was known for bringing people together for positive purpose, and as she once said about herself, "I don't get interests, I get passions—and they stay with me." She was instrumental in the creation of MHA's Abused Spouse Assistance Services and chaired our Education and Family Abuse Services Advisory Committees. Intensely focused on the issue of



abuse, she gathered shelter directors, guidance clinics, judges, probation officers, police, ministers and the League of Women voters to change community attitudes.

One of her strongest passions was for young people in need. Recognizing the need for support for children and teens in the foster care system, she was instrumental in bringing the national Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program to Westchester.

Lois' determination and deep desire to make a difference has helped thousands of families across Westchester and inspired all of us at MHA.

As we remember Lois, let us all reflect upon her words:

"I think education must be involved if there is to be change, prevention and growth." ■

# Self-Care in Challenging Times

For those whose lives have been touched by trauma of any kind, difficult feelings such as grief, sadness, anxiety and possibly fear may re-surface upon hearing news of tragic or violent events. Please prioritize taking care of yourself, in whatever safe way works for you. Some things that have worked for our staff and client include:

- Connecting with loved ones
- Disconnecting from the media
- Spending time helping others
- Maintaining your day-to-day routines
- Taking care of your physical health through exercise, good nutrition and adequate rest
- Avoiding excessive use of alcohol and other substances
- Exploring the arts—music, drawing, painting, theater, live performances and more can provide therapeutic and healing benefits

You may also consider connecting or re-connecting with formal supports such as mental health services, clergy support and peer support. **MHA can help. To learn how we can support you or help connect you to other supports, please call our Information and Referral Line at 914-345-0700, ext. 7303 or email [help@mhawestchester.org](mailto:help@mhawestchester.org).**

To speak with someone immediately, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or reach the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741. ■

# Clinic Expansion Offers More Services to Yonkers Community

Following nearly a year of planning and renovating, we were delighted to open the doors to our new Yonkers clinic late this summer. The expanded space reflects our trauma-informed, recovery-oriented and person-centered values and is home to clinic services and OnTrackNY@MHA, our innovative treatment program for young adults experiencing their first episode of psychosis.

The expansion comes on the heels of an increased demand for behavioral health services in the Yonkers community, which resulted in our waitlist growing to more than 100 people. Now, with an additional 1,000 square feet of space and more than double the number of offices, we are able to better meet the needs of the community through the support of additional clinicians, as well as a nurse practitioner, care manager and employment specialist.

Previously located in two smaller spaces at the same address, our new and improved Yonkers clinic is situated in the heart of the Getty Square



**Yonkers Deputy Mayor Jim Kavanaugh, MHA CEO Charlotte Östman, MHA Board VP Gerald Stern**

neighborhood. Clients benefit from this convenient location, which offers all modes of transportation and close proximity to many other social services agencies.

The renovation and expansion offered us the opportunity to design a trauma-informed space that reflects a message of resilience and respect.

With a calming color palette, dimmable lighting, wood floors and state-of-the-art soundproofing and technology, the space offers a safe and comfortable environment where clients can flourish in their recovery journey.

To formally celebrate the opening of the new space, we hosted an open house this fall and were joined by Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Yonkers Deputy Mayor Jim Cavanaugh and Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health Commissioner Michael Orth. We are proud to remain a stalwart resource for behavioral health in the Yonkers community—and throughout the Lower Hudson Valley. ■

# New Members Join MHA's Board of Directors



**David Flemister**

We are pleased to announce the recent appointment of two new members to our Board of Directors: David Flemister and Jason Rimland.

A New York City native, Flemister has held many roles in marketing, including his current work as Account Managing Director at Young and Rubicam. "Raising awareness for mental health is essential to ensure that we can identify challenges and direct people toward resources available to help," he said. A graduate of Connecticut College, Flemister lives in New Rochelle with his family, where he is also an assistant coach for the Iona College rugby team.



**Jason Rimland**

Rimland is Senior Counsel at Wuersch & Gering, a boutique law firm in Manhattan, where he specializes in mergers and acquisitions, venture capital and debt and equity financing. "There is no family or community that has not been affected by mental health issues," said Rimland. "I have seen firsthand how effective treatment can make a profound and positive impact on one's life." Rimland, who received his BS from Cornell University and his JD from Fordham University, lives in Irvington where he enjoys hiking and spending time with his family. ■

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Charlotte Östman, LCSW-R

*MHA is a member of Coordinated Behavioral Health Services (CBHS), a partnership of progressive, non-profit, community behavioral health and disability service providers serving seven counties in the Hudson River Region. The mission of CBHS is to support its members' efforts to provide effective behavioral health services to the Medicaid, Medicare and uninsured population.*



# Spread the Cheer: Support MHA this Holiday Season!

## Operation Holiday Joy

Each year, MHA makes the holidays brighter for families in Westchester through our annual gift drive, Operation Holiday Joy. Join us this year and help make the holidays magical for someone in need! To be part of our very special group of gift-givers, please call us at 914-265-7512 or email [development@mhawestchester.org](mailto:development@mhawestchester.org).



## Share your support on

# #GIVING TUESDAY™

Join a global day of giving and kick off the charitable season on Tuesday, November 27th with #GivingTuesday, which focuses on the true meaning of this time of year: kindness, generosity and giving back. There are many ways for you to give—visit [mhawestchester.org/get-involved](http://mhawestchester.org/get-involved) to see how you can make a difference!

## Shop with AmazonSmile

Shopping online can make gift-buying a little easier—so why not make it count? If you shop on Amazon, be sure to sign up for AmazonSmile, which donates a percentage of your eligible purchases to the charitable organization of your choice. To get started, visit [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com), select The Mental Health Association of Westchester and get ready to shop! Be sure to always fill your cart at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) to ensure that the donation will be made!



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