From the Desk of the Executive Director

This past May, the MHA celebrated its 50th Anniversary. The evening was filled with reflection and gratitude, and was attended by many friends and family.

We have come a long way in fifty years. In 1964, the MHA started because members of the community wanted to help individuals who were being released from nearby mental institutions. After so many years in an institution, those released needed help finding housing, getting medical care and acquiring basic living skills. Today, we continue providing these types of services and much more. Last year alone, we helped more than 80 thousand individuals and families. That’s pretty impressive for an agency that only has four full time, eight part time and five per diem staff members.

Our list of services has grown as needs have been identified. Currently we offer Information and Referral, including our 24 hour HELP line and Help Book; Presentations to schools, businesses and the community; In and out of court Advocacy; Hospitalization Advocacy; Peer Support Groups; In-Home-Respite Care; and Compeer for Children & Adults. Our phones and doors are always busy, and our staff is ready to address whatever problem comes their way. The call or walk-in could be someone looking for a job, or needing help understanding and filling out SSI or SSD forms. Maybe someone is being evicted and needs assistance understanding the paperwork they were given. Maybe they’re out of meds and don’t know how to get any when their next doctor appointment isn’t for another two weeks. Maybe they just need to talk to someone about things that have been building up inside of them, which may be causing problems or confusion. Maybe they’re over their heads in debt and don’t know what to do. They could be feeling worthless and unimportant, ready to quit, or even worse.

Whatever it is, staff at the MHA keep an open mind and put themselves in others’ shoes, dealing with issues kindly and without judging. We believe that every person deserves the right to be treated with respect and fairness.

And while the MHA has worked hard to meet the needs of the community, we could not have done it alone. We are indebted to all the individuals and agencies that have collaborated with us over the years, and we are relying on them as we move toward the future. Here’s to another 50 productive years!

Cheryl Blacklock

"Before I Die..." Project
Contribute to our community board, either in our office on 36 Pine Street or online. Read more about this on our blog, The Belfry, found at http://mhaniagara.wordpress.com

Become a Member
Help us stay strong during our next 50 years serving Niagara County! Call us for a membership form at 433-3780 or submit online at www.mhanc.com.
Compeer Niagara was started in 1985 as a program of the local Mental Health Association, its sponsor agency. It started with 14 volunteers and 17 clients, and provided supportive friendship to adults who may not have had anyone else. Over the past 29 years, these “matches” have proved to be the basis of what the Compeer Niagara adult program does best.

The Compeer Niagara for Kids program was started in 1994, also providing friendship and mentoring between volunteers and youth ages 5-18 years old. It is hoped that families are strengthened by taking part in supportive, educational and recreational activities, and a primary goal of the program is that kids can remain in the home.

Activities for both the adult and youth Compeer programs have been well received over these years. Bus trips to local places (Buffalo Zoo, Kazoo factory) as well longer day trips (George Eastman House, Jell-O Museum, Lucy/Desi Museum) are remembered fondly, as are annual picnics, craft events and movies. As a result of these social activities and matches, we have seen many friendships form among adult consumers and also among families in the kids program. These relationships are vital, enhancing individual strengths and providing ample opportunities to learn from peers.

There is another aspect of the Compeer Niagara program: the In-Home Respite program, started in 1998. In-Home Respite offers planned short-term relief for families and enhances the caregiver’s ability to care for a child with a mental health disability. It is direct care for the child by staff who are specifically trained to support the child’s needs. As a result, the relief provided to the caregiver reduces the family’s stress level and increases the family’s ability to provide for a challenging child.

The Compeer model is based on the simple premise that “friendship is powerful medicine”. A supportive, caring friend can make all the difference to someone who has no one else. I’ve been with the Compeer Niagara program for 21 years and am so proud of what we’ve been able to provide to Niagara County residents. I’ve seen for myself the difference we’ve made and I admit working with this program has made a difference in my own life.

Compeer’s silver anniversary—our 25th year celebration—was held in 2010 aboard the Grand Lady motor yacht out of Grand Island. Since then we have kept sailing, continuing to offer our services to Niagara County into our 30th year. Stay in touch to see how we celebrate that milestone!
PROGRAM UPDATE: Compeer for Kids

Past Events:

January: Due to the weather we did not have any activities.

February: Ponderosa and The Four Seasons in NF; Bowling and pizza party at Rapids Bowling Center in NF; Mardi Gras party for the kids.

March: St. Patrick’s day party; Roller skating and pizza at the Rainbow Roller Rink in North Tonawanda

April: Spring party for the kids (planting sunflowers); Canal walk for the whole family (each child received their own camera to capture their day)

May: Niagara Falls Aquarium and lunch.

Future plans:

- Junk Invention night for the kids
- Darien Lake for the families
- Family picnic at Krull park in Olcott
- Power Vista Wildlife Festival

We are glad we made it through this cold winter with only one cancellation! Also, we have been fortunate enough to make a new match for one of our Compeer kids. We continue to look for volunteers for our ever growing Compeer program—it only takes four hours a month to change a family’s life. Please consider helping a child in your neighborhood.

PROGRAM UPDATE: Compeer for Adults

Despite the lengthy winter we endured here, the Compeer Niagara Adult program enjoyed several fabulous activities.

We toured the Erie Canal Discovery Center in February. Several participants commented on how much they enjoyed the presentation of “Coopering on the Canal”. It was truly fascinating to learn the role that Lockport played in the history of the Erie Canal.

In March we went to the Historic Palace Theater for “Shrek” the musical. Throughout the show, I noticed everyone smiling and heard rounds of laughter.

Due to inclement weather in January we had two activities in April. At the beginning of the month we had a dinner and movie night and at the end of the month we toured the VanHorn Mansion. The Mansion, built in 1823, was the site of the Town of Newfane’s first town meeting. The building was donated to the Newfane Historical Society and they have worked tirelessly to maintain its splendor and value to present day. The tour guides were fabulous and the Compeer group was thoroughly impressed.

Support Groups

For times & locations, please visit our website at www.mhanc.com or call the MHA at 433-3780.
All the News That’s Unfit to Print
A Poem by Frederick Wayne Faust

Drawing from his own experience, Lockport resident Frederick Wayne Faust has written several poems and prose pieces to help fight the stigma of mental illness. He can be reached at 77 Main St. Apt.1208, Lockport, NY 14094.

Schizo Off His Medication Pushes Woman Into Train.
Violent Maniac Shoots Up Hamburger Stand.
Mental Patient Escapes and Stabs His Father.
Crazed Psycho Terrorizes the Land.

Why do the headlines only tell a small part
Of the history of all our kind?
Why do they give the public,
The notion that we are all so unkind?

Why don’t they ever mention
The great contributions many of us make?
The Lincolns, the Tolstoys, the Beethovens,
How much effort for journalists would that take?

We are no more violent statistically,
Than the general population.
Yet whenever one of us does something wrong,
We suffer as a group from his stigmatization.

But when one of us does something positive, or right,
Does it ever get into the papers?
Believe me; we’re working on making good news,
Because most of us are Good Press Makers!

Copyright 2003 by Frederick Wayne Faust

PROGRAM UPDATE:
In-Home Respite

In Home Respite gives families the opportunity to take a breath and regain the energy that is needed to continue providing care for a child with a mental health disability. Trained child care workers will care for all the children in a family so that the parent(s) can take care of scheduled medical appointments, go out for dinner, take in a movie or just spend time reading a book without interruption. Parents/guardians can leave their children in safe hands, or even stay in the home and “do their own thing”!

Respite workers arrive at the home ready to interact with the child, bringing with them games, snacks and movies. All of the workers receive specific training for the job, including first aid instruction.

We make every effort to fill requests, which must be made with reasonable advance notice.
PROGRAM UPDATE: Community Education

We continue to present the Hearing Distressing Voices Simulation Training with great success. This unique 3-hour training allows individuals to understand more clearly the challenges that people with psychiatric disabilities face. It is particularly helpful for those in health care and law enforcement. Participants in this training are asked to wear headphones that allow them to hear voices, and then asked to perform unrelated tasks. Other distractions are introduced as well, all in an attempt to simulate the distraction and confusion that a psychotic episode may cause. Participants are overwhelmingly struck by the difficulty of focusing and listening, and afterward approach their work with a different attitude. To learn more about this training, or schedule a session, please call the MHA at 433-3780. The cost is $20 per participant to cover materials.

PROGRAM UPDATE: Consumer Services

Coming Up:

CPACs annual picnic at Wide Waters will be on July 17th at Wide Waters Park starting at 11 AM! Last year was phenomenal, let’s hope the rain holds off for a second year in a row!

Off the Shelf

Each newsletter, a staff member reviews a book taken from the shelf of our resource library.

Book: Is It Worth Dying For? How to make stress work for you - not against you

By Dr. Robert S. Eliot and Dennis L. Breo

This book offers the insight that twenty years of research and experience can bring to bear on the issue of stress in our lives. You will learn techniques to help relieve stress in the workplace or your personal relationships, how to judge your reactions and manage them and how to reduce reliance on alcohol or drugs. There are self-tests included to help you understand how you are feeling about your life, and detailed explanations of the physical reactions the body can have to stress. Well worth the time spent on this book! ☑

Recent Speakers at CPAC

We’ve had some great speakers come to CPAC recently. Jim Graziano from the Niagara County Mental Health Department came in April to discuss the changing environment of Mental Health services. In April, Christen and Joy, from the Navigators Program at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, came to discuss their program in which they assist individuals, families, and small businesses in obtaining health insurance as well as breaking down the paperwork.

CALL US AT  716-433-3780
Call MHA at 433-3780 for more information!

Members of the MHA and participants in our programs are very creative people who enjoy sharing their artwork with each other and with the public. For many years we have held an annual art show to highlight the work produced by those who participate in Art for Relaxation, MHA Supports the Arts or anyone who wants to contribute something they have created. This show has been called “Twist: The Way I See This”.

In November of 2013, the MHA participated in the Niagara Art Trail weekend by turning our office space into an exhibition hall for work that was created by consumers. The opening of the show included a reception on Friday, November 22 and the works were on display until mid-December. A few still grace our walls and are enjoyed by staff and visitors.

We hope to continue our collaboration with Niagara Arts Trail Events, offering everyone in Niagara County the opportunity to appreciate the creativity and originality of all those connected with the Mental Health Association. The 2014 Art Trail Weekend will take place in November, beginning on Friday the 21st with an opening reception. Think about what original works of art you want to display and share!

Mission Statement
The Mental Health Association in Niagara County, Inc. will offer programs and services aimed at promoting mental health while advocating for individuals with mental illnesses and working toward dispelling commonly held misunderstandings regarding mental illnesses.

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The Mental Health Association in Niagara County, Inc. is funded by the New York State Office of Mental Health, the Niagara County Department of Mental Health, the United Way of Greater Niagara, the United Way of the Tonawandas, grants, memberships and voluntary contributions.