Mental Health America of Central Carolinas (MHA) is beginning the 2019-2020 fiscal year with renewed energy and a new strategic plan. Last year, MHA staff and Board underwent a year-long strategic planning process and emerged with 3 broad goals:

**Goal 1: Branding/Community Engagement**—MHA will increase its visibility in the region through marketing, branding, and increased community engagement, with the goal of raising mental health awareness.

**Goal 2: Sustainability**—MHA will achieve and maintain financial stability in order to sustain quality programming to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

**Goal 3: MHA’s Programs and Services Will Align With Community Needs**—MHA will align its programs and services where community needs exist and achieve its mission through collaboration with key partners in the communities we serve.

Despite having endured severe budget cutbacks in this fiscal year, MHA is developing strategies that will strengthen its mission and, most importantly, its service to the community around mental health.

“Those of us connected with MHA know the great work the agency does each and every day, but we continue to struggle with our branding and awareness,” said Board President Ashley Smith.

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Meet MHA’s Board President Ashley Smith

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As for my involvement with MHA, I started attending Coffee & Conversations about four years ago in an effort to connect with local clinicians, advocates and professionals in the mental health field. After learning more about MHA, I knew I had to be a part of the mission. I joined the Board three years ago and am now excited to be serving as the Board President for 2019-2020.

As MHA’s new Board President, what do you see as the opportunities and challenges facing the organization? Our community?

I believe stigma is still a big part of the equation when it comes to individuals receiving the care and support they need. While strides have been made to eliminate stigma, there is still much work to be done. Also, the lack of awareness of services available and the decrease in funding present challenges, both to MHA and our community. With regards to opportunities, I’m really excited about the partnership opportunities MHA is pursuing community-wide which can increase mental health wellness, awareness and recovery in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.

What excites you the most about the work MHA is doing?

When I look at each of MHA’s programs specifically, I’m most excited about the Mental Health First Aid trainings we have provided for first responders and I hope we can continue to reach more individuals with this valuable training, as well as with QPR Suicide Prevention Training.

Is there any last message you would like to convey to our readers?

I’m excited to expand the reach of MHA in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus counties and to connect more people with mental health resources and trainings. The ability to bring community members and partners together is where I believe the strength of MHA lies. While the challenges around mental health are significant, we stand ready to meet those challenges.

Join us every third Tuesday at The Evening Muse for R U OK CLT, an event benefitting MHA. Tickets and information at www.eveningmuse.com

In a world of curated images, likes and followers, true connection has been lost, it’s what isn’t shown, the subtext between the moments shared, that is most important. Connect with us for a night dedicated to rediscovering the art of true human connection through music, comedy and conversation. Let's start to remove stigma surrounding mental health by simply asking...
MHA’s Art In Mind: Promoting Wellness Through Art

Join us at the Harvey B. Gantt Center for MHA’s 3rd annual Art In Mind (AIM) silent art auction on Thursday, October 10 from 7-8:30 p.m. This mission-focused event will inspire through visual art, music and spoken word, all in support of MHA’s programs and services. MHA’s PhotoVoice canvases by area youth, as well as artworks in various medium generously donated by notable artists, will be available in our silent auction. MHA’s Art In Mind tickets benefit MHA and include a creative evening of desserts, champagne, arts, entertainment, and parking. Early bird pricing is $50/ticket through September 25; $75 September 26 through October 10 at www.mhacentralcarolinas.org.

MHA Introduces Three Broad Goals

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Over the course of the next several months, MHA will work to better engage with the community where it can have the most impact, by aligning with work being done in area neighborhoods, such as the U City Family Zone, the Grier Heights Crossroads Initiative, and the Community Resource Center at Freedom Drive.

“The question we must ask ourselves is how can we work smarter and more effectively to assist those in our community who need help. . .”

2019-2020 Board President Ashley Smith

“The question we must ask ourselves is how can we work smarter and more effectively to assist those in our community who need help navigating the complex mental health system, raise awareness through Mental Health First Aid and other evidence-based trainings, and provide parents and individuals with the tools needed to have a successful, rewarding life, while living with a mental health diagnosis,” said Smith.

MHA’s Executive Director Kathy Rogers says she is excited about MHA’s direction. “Despite starting the new fiscal year with a reduction in resources, we have a renewed sense of purpose, dedicated and skilled staff, and a Board of Directors ready to steer us into the future,” said Rogers.

It’s Never Too Early to Leave a Mark on Your Community

MHA thanks long-time volunteer and donor Iris Esquerra for naming MHA as a beneficiary of her 401K plan. Iris said of the decision, “I feel like MHA can and should never be done away with because it is too important of a resource. You may not realize the importance of MHA until help is sought, when one doesn’t know where to turn."

Planned gifts are an excellent way to show your appreciation toward an organization. Here are a few ways you can leave a lasting legacy through MHA:

♦ Bequest: List MHA as a beneficiary in your will.
♦ Life Insurance: List MHA as a beneficiary in your life insurance or 401K policy.
♦ Endowment: Provide an investment that will sustain MHA into the future with a gift to MHA’s Endowment Fund through Foundation For The Carolinas.
Program Spotlight on Compeer:

Making Friends, Changing Lives

Reggie and Kelly describe themselves as yin and yang because Reggie is "child-like and inquisitive," while Kelly is more shy and reserved. But those are some of the qualities that have made these friends complement each other so well. The two were matched in November 2018 through MHA’s evidence-based Compeer program, a volunteer friendship match proven to reduce isolation and loneliness, and even hospitalizations for adults living with chronic mental health concerns. The two talk regularly and get together a few times each month—usually to eat—with a favorite spot being Benny’s Pizza or at Compeer social events.

After being a victim of street violence as a teenager, Reggie experienced a traumatic brain injury and some paralysis. Despite these challenges, Reggie focuses on staying positive. Kelly says, "Reggie surprises me—he’s motivating and the party doesn’t stop when you’re with him. I enjoy his company and his attitude."

Reggie says of Kelly, "I’ve benefitted greatly (from the friendship.) Compeer is a great foundation for the mental health arena. He doesn’t stigmatize or look down on me. He treats me like one of his own." Kelly is quick to reply, "You are!" Reggie adds, "Kelly is much more disciplined than I am. He keeps me grounded…he’s a good dude. When Kelly limits himself, I encourage him. If you think big, big things will happen."

Formerly a volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters for ten years, Kelly says of Compeer, "As a volunteer, you don’t realize how much you’re going to benefit." Kelly is earning his Masters in Social Work at UNC-Charlotte and working in a Psychosocial Rehabilitation center.

Serious for a moment over a good-naturedly competitive chess match, Reggie (left) admits, "I’m a work in progress." To which Kelly (right) replies, "We ALL are!"