

Promoting Mental Wellness Since 1933

*“There is simply no pill that can
replace human connection.
There is no pharmacy that can fill
the need for compassionate
interaction with others.
There is no panacea.
The answer to human suffering is both
within us and between us.”*

Dr. Joanne Cacciatore



Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog Post from the Director

Connection: The Answer to Human Suffering

On Tuesday, May 21, Mental Health America of Central Carolinas (MHA) held its 5th Annual *Wake Up for Wellness* Breakfast. We were honored to have former Carolina Panthers Steve Smith share his story and the Butler High School DREAM Team share how they are breaking stigma around mental health. Below are excerpts from my remarks at the event, which had more than 400 in attendance, as well as photos from the morning.

As I was thinking about my remarks over the past several weeks, I kept coming back to one word: **Connection.**

Dr. Joanne Cacciatore, a researcher specializing in trauma and bereavement, said, "There is no pill that can replace human connection. There is no pharmacy that can fill the need for compassionate interaction with others. There is no panacea. The answer to human suffering is both within us and between us."

I want to spend a few minutes of my time with you this morning sharing a few stories (names have been changed):

Henry recently called MHA frustrated that no one was able to help him with his daughter who had recently experienced a mental health crisis. Henry's daughter had spent nine hours in the emergency room before being admitted to partial hospitalization for borderline personality disorder. Desperate, he called MHA and said in an emotional voice, "I need help." Our Youth Engagement Specialist Kevin Markle said, "Come on in and let's meet." During that two-hour meeting, he was given resources, information and next steps in planning for his daughter's discharge. Later, Henry asked, "What is your rate? How does this work with my insurance?" When Kevin told him, "This is what we do and there is no charge," he was holding back his tears.

Connection. . .



Living with a chronic mental illness, Sally felt lonely and isolated and came to MHA seeking support. Compeer Coordinator Angela Garlins helped connect her with a volunteer companion through the Compeer Program and Sally now has someone to do things with and says she has made a good friend. Sally shared the following, “She is sweet, she is kind, and she celebrated my birthday with me. I love having a friend and having someone to focus on the goals that I’ve set for myself. I have someone to go out in the community with. I just love her.”

Connection. . .



When MHA Family Partner Barbara Baker first met Georgia at a Youth Recovery Court Support Group, she was standoffish and angry. She felt she had done everything she could do for her son and asked,

“Why do I have to participate in this, why are you talking to me? You should be talking to my son.” Georgia came to realize she was not in this fight alone. With Barbara’s help, she saw that parents didn’t come to parenting with a book or a manual. She needed more resources and skills. After weeks of attending and recently graduating from support group and Youth Recovery Court, Georgia now feels empowered to reach out to help other parents who are going through a similar experience.

Connection. . .



Sixteen-year-old Madison came to ACTIVE Youth Support Group with her mom after making threats to end her life. At that first meeting, Kevin Markle noticed a quiet young woman listening, but not talking. However, after several meetings, she began to open up and even shared some of her poetry with the rest of the group. They loved it and asked for more, making Madison feel supported by her peers. As she left ACTIVE Youth that night, Kevin noticed the smile on her face.

Connection. . .





In a world full of people living in loneliness and isolation, I believe the strength of MHA and the way we will move the needle on complex mental health issues will be the ability to make those meaningful human connections throughout the community.

In the coming months, we will continue to strengthen our connections, as we work to be the leader in promoting mental health awareness, wellness and recovery. Having recently completed a new strategic plan, our organization will be working on a rebranding effort in the next fiscal year to raise awareness and better serve the community. We will increase our engagement, strategically focusing on neighborhoods to bring mental health resources, like Mental Health First Aid training and [ParentVOICE](#) support, to areas identified in the Leading on Opportunity report. We will be working with Foundation for the Carolinas on a Student Mental Health Initiative, and we are currently partnering with nine other organizations in our community to become more trauma informed.

I'm excited about the future of MHA and the difference we can make to help those who are often the most vulnerable—the 1 in 5 who experience a mental health concern each year. We are being BOLD and we need you to be BOLD, partnering with us in our work and sharing your time, talent and treasure. After all, you never know what can grow, because as Dr. Cacciatore said, the answer to human suffering is both within us and between us. [Make a Difference with a Donation.](#)

We know that one of the best ways to eliminate stigma is by sharing our story, which MHA does through its amazing volunteer storytellers. And now here to share his story is our keynote speaker for today. Steve Smith is a 16-year NFL veteran who played 13 seasons for the Carolina Panthers. Steve has recently become a voice for those battling depression and other mental health issues and it is with great pleasure that I welcome him to the podium to share his message of hope and recovery. [WSOC Coverage of Steve's story.](#)



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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas promotes mental wellness through advocacy, prevention and education in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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