One of the recent ways that MHACC has been a leader of mental health advocacy was by hosting an annual Policy Breakfast on March 19, 2012. State and local policymakers learned about priority mental health topics through “speed networking” with local topics experts and consumers of those services. The experts shared facts about local issues and the consumers of the related services where able to give real examples of how they are personally affected.

Representative Tricia Cotham (Dem - Mecklenburg), the Vice Chair of the Mental Health subcommittee said of the breakfast, “It makes me more prepared and helps draft legislation. I learned a tremendous amount.”

Attendee Catherine Collier shared, “Advocacy 101 helped me realize that we, as consumers, can’t assume our political leaders know what we need. We can make a difference in policy and funding for programs that help our cause.”

Take Advocacy 101

Objectives for the Workshop:
- Define advocacy and learn about the agencies that do it
- Understand why/how participating in advocacy is important
- Learn who represents you and how to contact them
- Prepare your advocacy message to share with policymakers

A new way that the MHA is furthering advocacy within our community is by offering free Advocacy 101 workshops for consumers of mental health services and their caregivers. The training is entitled “Creating a Ripple of Hope: Telling Your Story & Inspiring Positive Change.”

Since January, the MHA has trained nearly 80 individuals, with plans to train hundreds statewide this year in partnership with the North Carolina MHA Collaborative, which MHACC helped found in 2010. 100% of consumers who have participated indicated they gained knowledge about legislative advocacy. The training is designed to encourage mental health consumers and family members to share their stories of recovery with state legislators, county commissioners and other politicians who can improve the mental health system. See workshop objectives (right.)

To sign up for the next Advocacy 101 training, contact Kathryn at 704.365.3454 or email kfalboxwoodson@mhacentralcarolinas.org. You too can be a Ripple of Hope!
The MHA hosted a 2-part series on the mental health needs of refugees and asylees, specifically for mental health providers in February and March 2012. The events featured local and national speakers on refugee resettlement, interpretation and trauma-informed care. DVDs of the trainings are for sale through June 5, 2012. E-mail Kathryn Falbo-Woodson at kfalbo-woodson@mhacentralcarolinas.org for details. Did you know...?

- A refugee is someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” (UNHCR)

- In NC, Mecklenburg & Guilford Counties resettle the highest numbers of refugees.

- Refugees experience higher rates of stress & trauma than general population, especially in the context of loss of community, & higher rates of mental health sequelae (complications).

- Language remains a major barrier to holistic treatment for refugees.

MHA certified QPR trainers (Question, Persuade & Refer) provided suicide prevention techniques to more than 300 high school freshman this school year at Charlotte Catholic High School. Guidance Counselor Maryangela Morgan added, “QPR instructors’ advice and role playing provided the students with valuable lifelong tools. We have received positive feedback and it has brought some legitimate concerns to our attention.” To schedule your free best practice suicide prevention training, contact Sal Caraco at 704.365.3454 or e-mail scaraco@mhacentralcarolinas.org.

The MHA will also take part in:
Senior Grapevine Free Resource Fair
Tuesday, May 15, 2012 from 10:30am-2:30pm
To register, please call 704-391-3860
Friendship Missionary Baptist Church at 3400 Beatties Ford Road - Charlotte, NC
A community-wide resource fair focusing on senior health and well being (for seniors 56+ and their caregivers.)

The MHA strives to raise awareness about mental health issues among community members of all ages. Each spring, the MHA focuses on educating older adults by participating in the Cabarrus Senior Health and Wellness Day, attended by over 1,000 local seniors on March 14, 2012.

Older Adult Attitudes Toward Depression: (According to a Mental Health America survey on attitudes and beliefs about clinical depression.) Did you know...?

- Only 38% of adults aged 65 and over believe that depression is a “health” problem.

- If suffering from depression, older adults are more likely than any other group to “handle it themselves.”

- About 58% of people aged 65 and older believe that it is “normal” for people to get depressed as they grow older.

Statistically:

- More than two million of the 34 million Americans age 65 and older suffer from some form of depression.

- Suicide among white males aged 85 and older is nearly six times the average suicide rate the U.S.

- Symptoms of clinical depression can be triggered by other chronic illnesses common in later life, such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s or heart disease, cancer and arthritis.

Source: Mental Health America
Congratulations to our Family Partner Graduates! Eight family members have successfully completed the inaugural Family Partner Training with ParentVOICE and graduated on March 2, 2012. These 8 Family Partners have each completed over 120 hours of training and have passed a competency exam. The MHA’s ParentVOICE is the first family support program in NC to develop a training program for family members to prepare them to serve as family partners; all 8 have participated as volunteers and have not received a stipend or compensation for their time.

Family Partners (FPs) use their lived experience and specialized training to assist and empower families raising children and youth who experience emotional, developmental, behavioral, substance use, and/or mental health concerns. Family Partners help families navigate the education, mental health and juvenile justice systems to improve family outcomes and strive to eliminate stigma and discrimination.

The 22nd Annual Conference of the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health was held on November 18 – 20, 2011 in Washington, D.C. The theme for the conference was “Trauma Informed Care: Children, Youth and Families Shaping Best Practice.” ParentVOICE (PV) program staff attended the conference and took 2 parents and 2 youth. It was a weekend of firsts: for the families, it was their first trip to our Nation’s Capitol, their first time traveling on the Metro, their first time attending a national conference, and for the youth, their first time flying.

Kevin Markle, ParentVOICE Youth Engagement Specialist, shared, “During the Celebration of Youth-Cultural Extravaganza, our youth from Charlotte took part in a performance piece in front of the entire conference. It was truly amazing to see some of the youth that I have gotten to know, do something so extraordinary. I will never forget seeing Elijah walk back after his performance with a smile from ear to ear. Experiences like this are what change people’s lives.”

Wandalyn, one of the parents who went to D.C. shared, “One of the workshops I attended was Addressing Trauma Impacts on Children, Families, Protective Caregivers and Children Welfare workers. In this workshop I learned some positive strategies to prevent, treat and heal trauma in children. Trauma for a lot of children is a recurring feeling of shame, guilt, rage, and disconnection. The children do not trust adults. They are neglected by their birth mom due to a number of things. Some of the reasons are drugs, illness, mom being abused and men. These things can take away from what a child needs. The child comes second to some or all of these things. Sometimes because of this the child is removed from the family. Who is suffering, THE CHILD.” Additionally, Wandalyn said “I learned through this conference and ParentVOICE that you have to have patience and a support team. Having someone to talk to and having some release time is very important for the child and the caregiver. I learned that there are people everywhere experiencing trauma. Many, children. I thought I was alone. I feel now, I am not alone.”

PV Family Support Specialist Barbara Baker added, “It was awesome to see how much they enjoyed being with other families; it just felt like a family reunion. Seeing them embrace the information and empowerment was wonderful to be part of.”
In honor of National Volunteer Appreciation week, the MHA hosted “Chocolate Therapy” on April 17th, a dessert event to recognize all of our talented volunteers and our generous donors of $250 and up. Recognition included our annual H. Keith Brunnemer, Jr. award, to William Evans and Rizza Hermosisima of Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc. for outstanding contributions to Education in 2011. Rizza and Bill partnered with us to help provide speakers and a curriculum for workshops and a statewide conference in 2011, while also helping us secure financial support from Janssen Foundation.

Our Compeer program award winner was Ashley Lawton. Ashley has been a dedicated Compeer volunteer since 2007 and has been a great ally, advocate, and role model for her friend. Additionally, Ashley promotes volunteer involvement and fights the stigma surrounding mental illness by serving as an MHA Ambassador, speaking publically about her experience.

Our ParentVOICE (PV) program volunteer award was presented to Yvonne Neal. A volunteer since 2007, Yvonne is always willing to provide a helping hand to staff and families in the program, volunteering not only for PV but also for MeckCARES and Friendship Trays.

If we don’t have your e-mail address, you are missing our eNewsletters and video e-mails. Go to www.mhacentralcarolinas.org and Join Our Mailing List. Like us on Facebook & follow us on Twitter, MHAofCC.