

Helping Us Live Mentally Healthier Lives Since 1933

“Butterflies can’t see their wings. They can’t see how truly beautiful they are, but everyone else can. People are like that as well.”

Anonymous



Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog Post from the Director

We See You: Our Aspiration for 2020

“We See You...”

Three lovely words full of empathy and understanding. At Mental Health America of Central Carolinas, our aspiration for 2020 is to create a community where we truly **SEE** those around us...we see the good, the bad, the joy, the pain...we truly see the humanity of those we serve and interact with.

As I was writing this blog, the following quote resonated with me: *“Butterflies can’t see their wings. They can’t see how truly beautiful they are, but everyone else can. People are like that as well.”* So often someone who is living with a mental health diagnosis has lost their ability to see how beautiful they are and, as a society, we have for many years labeled people by their diagnosis so they begin to identify as bipolar, schizophrenic, etc. People who have a mental health diagnosis are often more vulnerable to stigma and discrimination, which further erodes their self-worth.

Mental Health Advocate Achea Redd writes in her article *How Labels Impacted My Mental Health*, that labels dictated how she should act, what she should wear, and how she should spend her time. “Labels come with expectations, most of which are not healthy. I became so caught up in the roles and titles that meeting expectations became more important than the experience of being in those roles.”

She writes about the pressures she felt being the wife of an NBA player, but it was after her first major panic attack that she began to understand more. “Trauma from my past and present, combined with the heavy weight I bore from the labels I carried, were like gasoline, and all it took was a spark to set my life ablaze. That was my day of reckoning, where I finally met my issues face to face.” Redd says that labels divide us and encourage a constant comparing of ourselves with everyone else. She now realizes, “My beauty is not predicated on the length of my hair or what the scale says...I am enough, I

am worthy.”

It is this type of self-acceptance that we aspire to promote at MHA and throughout Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties. We all have value, we are all worthy. While labels can be useful, for those living with a mental illness, the labels we use can also be degrading and hurtful.



MHA Storytellers (from left) Iris Esguerra, Danielle Rogers, Jim Dukes, Rachel Rosenfeld and Missy Willis.

In the article, *Why I Believe We Should Look Beyond Mental Illness 'Labels'*, Elena De Luigi writes, “In the last six months, I have accumulated some different labels: borderline personality disorder (BPD), social anxiety disorder (SAD) and depression...three mental illnesses trapped inside my body, making me feel this inexplicable feeling inside.”

She goes on to say, “I hate when people use my labels to define who I am. That is something I will not tolerate. I am not a label or a bunch of labels. I am a person. A person of value. A person who needs some help. A person who desires to be happy and loved.”

Isn't that what we all want? To be happy and loved? MHA is fortunate to have volunteer storytellers who have found the courage to tell their stories and experiences about living with a mental health diagnosis...being a survivor of a suicide attempt...or sharing the grief and loss of losing someone to suicide. What is inspiring about MHA storytellers is their openness and their willingness to be vulnerable and brave at the same time. Their underlying message: **SEE ME**, the human not the label.

As we move forward in 2020, MHA remains committed to educating the community about issues related to mental health so that we truly **SEE** the one in five in our community who are living with a mental health diagnosis. That we truly see them as a human first, who, as the butterfly, doesn't see how beautiful they truly are and how much they have to offer. **To hear from an MHA Storyteller and learn more ways to get engaged with MHA's mission, [Register for Coffee & Conversation or Mental Health Trainings.](#)**

You are not your
illness. You have
an individual story
to tell. You have a
name, a history, a
personality.
Staying yourself is
part of the battle

JULIAN SEIFTER

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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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