

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

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June 2012 Newsletter

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Thinking Outside the Mental Illness Box	1-2
Mental Health Month Reprise	3-5
Towers East Outreach	5
Don't Duck Mental Health	5
Dear Jason Flatt	6
2011 with MHAGC	7
MHAGC Programs at a Glance	7
Thanks to Our Donors	8

Thinking Outside the Mental Illness Box

by Vanessa Vestergaard

It is the beginning of summer. Top down, windows open and the breeze coming in. The senses of summer: the smell of freshly mowed lawns, a few cool summer evenings to sleep just right and the taste of all the fresh produce from the local farm stands, what could be better? Perhaps, this summer is yours to enjoy and experience. So let the over worked mind become lost in the haze of humidity. Where is worry in all of this and where is the looming feeling of guilt? Sometimes, we hold on to our diagnosis everyday and it overshadows the beauty of the earth and our surroundings. Let it go for a while like a summer balloon lifting into the air. Enjoying life is just as important as paying attention to one's health. I'm not advocating

"Promoting positive mental health for all persons in our community through advocacy, education and service."



skipping medications or missing doctor's appointments, but I am saying don't allow that to be all in your life and your life to be centered around your mental illness. If we don't include periods of relaxation, humor and carefree daydreaming hours then we may go down a slippery slope of stress and negativity. We may miss the opportunity to take advantage of our inner child and explore the world with youthful abandon. Too much time thinking of ourselves and our particular illness not only is unfair to those around us but confines us to the symptoms and the label given to us maybe a year ago or twenty years ago. Take this summer and define parts of you other than your medical term. Be free and discover your interests and talents.

I recently visited Brian Marks at the Mental Health Center and saw the beautiful artwork displayed by people with mental illness. I saw landscapes and animals detailed with such care through different art mediums. Many artists have been diagnosed with an illness and I believe art saved them from the hardship of living day to day and arduously managing their symptoms. Creativity is a means of expression for the self and what the self wants to communicate to the

world. Oftentimes an artistic creation from a consumer is his or her interesting view of the world around them. Art can be an escape. A museum may do the trick, if you lack an artistic bone in your body. Art appreciation may not only raise the spirits but also inspire you to think differently about a subject, which may lead you to a brand new interest.

Thinking outside the mental illness box this summer should be a priority and part of your recovery. Learning, playing, or simply enjoying the summer breezes with a minted ice tea may be the necessary prescription when the illness brings the sudden storms. Your body and spirit will feel so healed after a day of fun. Don't forget to laugh and feel the weight of mental illness just lift in etheric happiness.

MENTAL HEALTH MONTH:
MAY 2012

CAFE AND THEN SOME FUNDRAISER

On May 9th, MHAGC celebrated Mental Health Month with a FUNdraiser show hosted by Café and Then Some. The show was called *Politics for Dummies*. Featuring Jim Wilkins, Susan Smith, Maureen Abdalla, Traysie Amick and Bill Smith, the show put a comic spin on the Presidential elections.

Funds raised by the show benefited all of MHAGC's programs. MHAGC would like to send a warm thank you to Café and Then Some for their continuing support of our agency!

ANNUAL MEETING

On May 17, Mental Health America of Greenville County held their annual meeting at Trinity Lutheran Church. Our keynote speaker was John Magill, the State Director of SC Department of Mental Health. John Magill has been working in different capacities for the SC Department of Mental Health since the late 1960s and became State Director on September 1st, 2006. Although he leads an organization of 17 community mental health centers and 46 clinics for every county in South Carolina, one of Mr. Magill's largest developments is that of telepsychiatry – the delivery of psychiatric treatment using video conferencing equipment- to rural and urban areas.

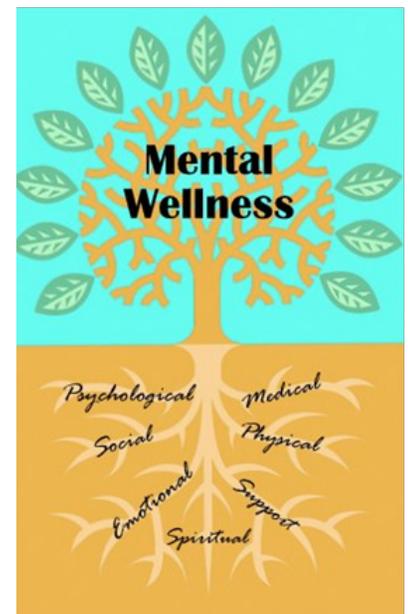


State Director of SC Department of Mental Health, John Magill

Mr. Magill delivered an informative speech on the history of mental healthcare in South Carolina and where we stand today. John Magill's address was filled with many interesting facts that appeared to be unknown to much of the audience. For example, did you know that South Carolina was the second state to have a state hospital for mental illness? Or that there were 525,000 inpatients in South Carolina's mental health facilities just in the last year alone? Mr. Magill's speech clearly explained the need to keep the mental health services we

currently have in South Carolina, in addition to the necessity to continuously advocate for mental health. In addition to Mr. Magill's compelling speech on mental health care in South Carolina, the Voices of Hope Choir performed a couple of songs, and as always, moved everyone in the room. Their lifted spirits and passion in singing caused many tears to be shed and a standing ovation after their performance. Kathy Eckart, director of Crisis Intervention Services at MHAGC, delivered the Bell Story, a prominent symbol of MHA, and a well-known story in MHA's history. Awards were also handed out to faculty, staff, volunteers, and members of the community who made a difference to MHA over the past year. Overall, the annual meeting was an uplifting event full of education, song, and a relaxed atmosphere shared by friends of MHAGC and the Greenville Community.

CALL FOR
COMPASSION
2012



Mental Health America of Greenville County's annual Call for Compassion conference was held on May 30th at St. Michael Lutheran Church. The theme of "Nurturing Healthy Relationships through Life's Passages" was presented by our multiple speakers, covering issues that individuals face from early childhood through late adulthood. Kathy Eckart, the Director of Crisis Intervention

Services at MHAGC started the day off with an interactive presentation on active listening and building connections when discussing difficult subjects. The active listening segment was followed by Natalee Braun, Ph.D.'s presentation on bullying. Dr. Braun and her guest speaker Ivy Hill, who is a survivor of bullying that consumed many years of her childhood, discussed the facts and myths about bullying, its effects, and what we as individuals can do to help prevent bullying. Ivy's heartfelt stories and painful first-hand experience gave the audience a raw insight to what it is like to be a victim of bullying. Natalee and Ivy's segment was received with great interest and compassion from the audience; making it one of the most enjoyed segments of the day.

A panel of faith leaders discussed the topic of intimate struggles in adolescence, touching on issues of sexuality, sexual orientation, teen pregnancy, and other struggles adolescents face during this period in their lives. Rev. Angela Ford Nelson (Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, Bishopville, SC), Rev. Dr. Vaughn Crowe Tipton (Furman University), Rev. Dr. Michelle McClendon (Greenville First Baptist), and Pastor Robert Miles (St. Michael Lutheran) delivered a panel discussion facilitated by Dr. Natalee Braun. As one attendee said "The panel discussion was very informative. All were dynamic speakers and gave us a lot to think about. They are very knowledgeable and non-judgmental." The panel did an excellent job of discussing such a taboo subject from a faith based perspective while still educating our audience and bringing in their own personal experiences facing these situations as faith based leaders.

Neil Sondov and Haley Speer from Compass of Carolina presented a very enlightening piece on divorce; teaching the audience the key elements of a co-parenting relationship as well as how to support and talk to children whose parents are going through a divorce. Their presentation not only engaged the audience, but many personal stories were shared; suggesting that this is a topic everyone can relate to one way or another and more importantly, something we can all gain knowledge about.

We ended the conference's "journey through life" with Dawn Harbin from Greenville Mental Health Center talking about depression in the elderly. Dawn's presentation was very interactive, with the audience consistently asking questions, sharing their personal experiences, and talking about services they know of that are useful to the elderly and their families.

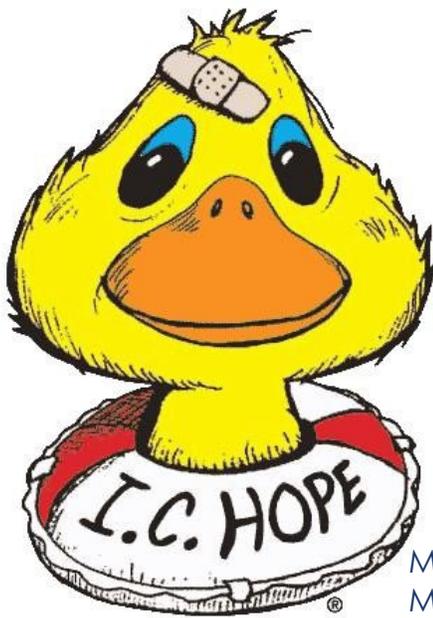
Overall it was a day full of imperative information and engaging conversation. Call for Compassion gives Faith Leaders and professionals a chance to come together to discuss topics that are important to not only their duties as professionals, but also to their personal lives. As one individual put it, "This was one of the best workshops that I have attended in a long time. All of the presenters were excellent." Another said, "I enjoyed the conference. This is the first I attended and I will plan to attend again."

We would like to give a special thank you to all the individuals and companies that made this event possible. Thank you to Trio for catering our delicious lunch, Entenmann's for their generous food donation, Thomas McAfee for donating water bottles, St. Michael Lutheran Church for housing this event, and all our vendors, staff, and volunteers.



VETERAN'S EVENT

On **May 31, 2012**, MHAGC partnered with the **Department of Veterans Affairs** and the **South Carolina Veterans Center** to provide an opportunity of awareness and recognition for Upstate South Carolina veterans. As these individuals are often unaware of the resources available to them and their families, this event both recognized these veterans and helped connect them with community resources, specifically mental health services. MHAGC hopes to host this event on a recurring basis; the first event was for members of the **151st Expeditionary Signal Battalion**.



DON'T DUCK MENTAL HEALTH!

MHAGC is happy to announce the reprisal of the Don't Duck Mental Health program. The program, which is geared towards elementary-school children, features the friendly and inquisitive puppet, I.C. Hope, in his quest towards mental wellness. Featuring a combination of storytelling, interactive talks and the popular "Down with the Duck" song and dance, Don't Duck Mental Health aims to teach kids about the benefits of taking care of your mind, as well as to reduce the stigma of mental illness.

Want to volunteer? Please call Stacey Cobb at 864-467-3351x211 or email volunteer@mhagc.org.

Want to schedule a program? Please call Kathy Eckart at 864-467-3347.

TOWERS EAST: MHAGC's New Place to Promote Mental Health

Mental Health America has begun a series of workshops at Towers East, our neighbor down the street. We are coming together for educational purposes to learn about ourselves and to be able to have good mental health in our day-to-day lives. So far we have only begun to establish our presence but with Angela Satterfield, the activities director who initiated our partnership, we are slowly becoming a fixture known in the recreation room. The people have been interested in our group discussions about stress and self-esteem. We also are planning a healthy body/ healthy mind series, in which each person will keep a daily journal. Inside, they will write the foods they eat and types of exercise they engage in, while notating their mood and weight. So far there has been lots of interest. Our last meeting, we shared fresh fruit, and talked about the types of food that gives us good energy and raises our mood.

We will meet the first and third Thursday every month at eleven. The staff at Mental Health America is enthusiastic and welcomes this new program to our agency. We are looking forward to it blossoming with volunteers who are interested in becoming part of these workshops. If you are interested in volunteering, please call Stacey Cobb at 864-467-3351x211.

Dear Jason Flatt,

You don't know me. I must admit that I was hesitant to write an article about you because I don't know you either. I looked you up on the internet and saw where your dad had said that you like football, you performed well in school and you were active in your youth group. I know that you are about six years older than me.

That's not what I want to know, though. I want to sit down and have an interview with you over a cup of coffee and ask about the little things. Who was your first crush? Who was your second grade teacher? Who is your least-favorite athlete? Silly? Yes. Irrelevant? Yes. But it's those little details that settle into place and become a person.

I don't know you because, as you well know, you completed suicide when you were 16 years old. I want to ask you why, Jason. Is that bad? Is it judgmental? I want to know why. More than my curiosity, though, I want to ask you because I want you to answer. Had you lived, who knows? We might have gone to the same college or worked at the same place; I don't know, the possibilities are endless. We may have been best friends, or have not gotten along. Much more likely, we may have never met at all. Still, it's the not knowing that's got me worked up today. Who *are* you, Jason Flatt? Who would you have been?

That's when it hit me. It's not about what we know; it's about what we will never know. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in teens. How many teens do we not get to know as adults because they were in too much pain to go on living? Those unknown, often overlooked teens should have been my peers. I wish I could have graduated with them. I wish I was standing behind them in the grocery store check-out line. Heck, I wish I was cursing at them for not using a

turn signal and coming to a dead stop in the middle of the highway. So long as they were here.

I miss them, Jason. Those unknown peers. Sometimes I think I see their shadows out of the corner of my eye. I don't know if you are aware or not, but your family started a foundation in your name. It's because of that foundation that the state of South Carolina has passed the Jason Flatt Act, which requires middle and high school teachers to complete two hours of suicide intervention training in order to renew their certification.

I'm writing this letter to you now in hopes that I will never have to write it to another teen. The next time I have to write an article about teen suicide, I hope the story will be less one-sided. I hope to sit across a lopsided table at some hole-in-the-wall coffee shop while some young adult tells me his or her story over two steaming mugs. I hope this person says, "I thought about suicide, but then my Algebra teacher got me help." And then maybe we could talk about first crushes, sports and teachers.

Jason, we all know your name. I wish we knew your voice. I'm sure you would have something important to tell us.

Please don't worry about a reply; if I don't hear back from you I'll certainly understand. I just hope you know that you are missed and that you and your family have made a difference.

Wishing you peace beyond measure,

Stacey Cobb

For more information on the Jason Flatt Foundation, please visit www.jasonfoundation.com.

2012 with MHAGC

September

10 World Suicide Prevention Day
10-16 National Suicide Prevention Week

October

4 National Depression Screening Day Screenings Available at MHAGC.org

November

4 National Survivors of Suicide Day Time and Location TBA

Mental Health America of Greenville County Programs: Nationally Certified Crisis Intervention Services

CRISISline | 864-271-8888 CRISISline is a free, confidential, 24/7 hotline offering a non-judgmental sounding board for people to talk about life's struggles as well as resources and crisis intervention. The line is for anyone, anytime, any reason.

TEENline | 864-467-TEEN (8336) | online crisis chat at www.TEENlineSC.org

TEENline was opened in 1995. Trained teens answer the phones Monday through Friday from 5pm to 9pm. After these hours, all calls are answered by CRISISline. An online Crisis Chat is also available.

Reassurance Line | 864-467-3350 This unique MHAGC program connects and supports clients of mental health centers through a peer to peer support line. The line promotes consumer independence, self-confidence and compliance with individual treatment plans.

Survivors of Suicide | 864-271-8888 | e-mail sos@mhagc.org

Survivors of Suicide (SOS) is a comprehensive support program for those who have lost a loved one to suicide. SOS provides an array of survivor services including an open monthly support group led by veteran survivors, support team visits, a resource library and an 8 week closed group for adults, youth and children.

Mental Health Matters! Education Programs (outreach@mhagc.org)

Outreach Programs and Initiatives

Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) is a one-hour nationally recognized suicide prevention training. It consists of 3 simple steps that anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide.

The I.C. HOPE® "Don't Duck Mental Health" campaign is a public awareness and education campaign committed to educating students about the importance of mental health.

Free and Confidential mental health screenings for a variety of mental illnesses are offered 365 days a year. Screenings are offered by appointment or on-line at www.mhagc.org.

Consumer Independent Living Support Services (864-467-3344)

Representative Payee Program provides financial management services for over 200 individuals with chronic and severe mental illnesses.

Affordable Subsidized Housing for individuals with chronic mental illness.

Operation Santa Claus is an annual holiday gift collection project for individuals with chronic mental illness.



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www.mhagc.org)

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