

MHA The Mental Health Association of Westchester

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Celebrating 25 Years of CASA at MHA

Since its launch in 1990, 237 CASA advocates have given more than 43,699 hours to more than 700 foster children in Westchester. On Tuesday, April 14, we will celebrate CASA's 25th Anniversary at MHA. The special event at TD Bank in White Plains will honor founder, Lois Cowan and feature special guest, Honorable Kathie E. Davidson, Supervising Judge of the 9th Judicial District.

We asked MHA's CASA advocates to share what inspires them about their advocate experience:

"In life, we are always searching for meaning, and nothing can be more meaningful than the work we do at CASA. I'm honored to be a part of such an amazing program."



Anthony Zurica,
with CASA 1 year



Ann Kantor,
with CASA 5 years

"The first time I met the child whom I continue to see, he said, 'I knew you'd come, I knew you'd find me, I knew I wasn't forgotten.'"

What is CASA?

CASA is short for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children. CASA programs recruit, train and support volunteers to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in courtrooms and communities. Trained volunteer advocates—empowered directly by the courts—offer judges the critical information they need to ensure that each child's rights and needs are being attended to while in foster care.

Volunteers stay with children until they are placed in loving permanent homes. For many abused children, a CASA volunteer is the only constant adult presence in their lives.

"Being one of the few, sometimes the only, constants in the lives of my CASA children is what means the most to me. Seeing them achieve permanency will be the ultimate reward for them as well as for me."



Christy Lang,
with CASA 5 years



Mary Nicolich,
with CASA 8 years

"Knowing the boys has expanded me as a person and opened up my heart and eyes to the world."

Mission Statement

The Mental Health Association of Westchester County, Inc.'s mission is to promote mental health in Westchester County, New York, through advocacy, community education and direct services.

Contents

CEO message.....	2
Healthcare Hero.....	2
New Home.....	3
MHA on the move.....	3
Hearing Voices Network.....	4
Celebrating CASA Cont.	4
Be Inspired.....	5
Legacy Circle.....	5
IRA Conference.....	5
Suicide Prevention.....	6

news

2015 S P R I N G

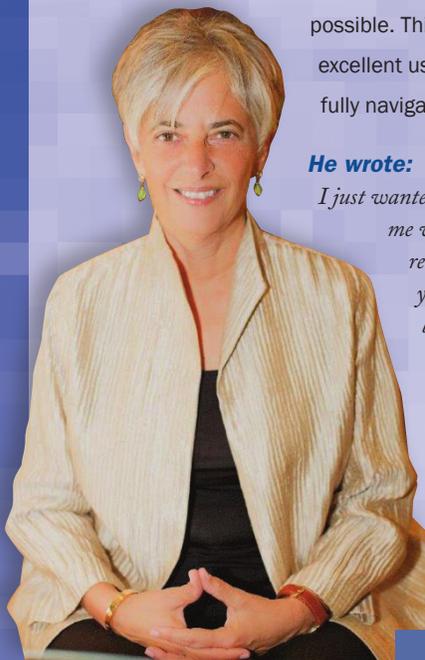
A message from our CEO

Dear Friends, Some of my favorite moments as CEO are hearing stories that are powerful examples of the often game-changing work being done at MHA every day. As a supporter of MHA, I thought you might find them meaningful as well. Here are a few recent ones that were particularly moving to me.

The first comes from our OnTrackNY @ MHA program, which seeks to bring young people who have recently experienced their first episode of psychosis back into their lives as quickly as possible. This note is from a teen who made excellent use of OnTrack and is now successfully navigating his freshman year of college.

He wrote:

I just wanted to thank you for being there for me when I was at my lowest. I couldn't relate to anyone else except for you, and you helped me get out of that hole and become who I am today. Right now I am trying to accept the fact that I can't be perfect. I think I have to accept that I'm human and that I have some quirks, which are normal. However, my psychosis is pretty much gone and so is my depression.



Dr. Amy Kohn, CEO

These next two come from family members whose loved ones attend our Sterling Community Center for support.

One mother wrote:

We are truly blessed to have you and the whole staff so connected to our son and so supportive of his well-being. We truly don't know how you do it.

Our son's anxiety and stress can produce such scary results. When I drove him home yesterday, he was semi out of sorts, but finally went to sleep late. He had a good night and this morning seemed ok. I have no answers, but feel so thankful that his episodes are finally a thing of the past. I try to just be grateful that he seems more himself lately. You all are more than amazing and everything you do is so appreciated.

A brother told us:

The Sterling Community Center is an integral part of his life and brings him comfort, friendship and a sense of purpose. My brother has experienced enormous kindness and compassion at the center. Please convey my heartfelt and profound thanks.

I am proud of our staff who continually reach to connect with each individual and promote recovery both now and for the long term.

Thank you for believing in our mission and partnering with us. Hope to see you at our feel-good event, MHA on the move 5K Run/Walk & 1-Mile Kids' Race, on Sunday, May 3rd!

Karlyn Jackson Hailed as Healthcare Hero



Karlyn Jackson, MHA's housing program director, has been named a Healthcare Hero by Westchester Magazine, an honor bestowed upon individuals "who are shining examples of community service, patient concern, compassion and leadership in the local healthcare field". Karlyn will be recognized in the May 2015 issue of Westchester Magazine and at the awards luncheon on May 14.

Karlyn started her career at The Mental Health Association of Westchester 15 years ago as a rehabilitation counselor moving quickly into the position of housing case manager and now, Program Director. Dr. Amy Kohn, MHA's CEO describes Karlyn this way: "She knows no bounds in her determination to make sure people's needs are taken care of. She is fearless. She'll go anywhere and talk to anyone. Karlyn connects to the humanity in each person and her clients heal because of the way she cares for them."

Exuberant, warm and positive, Karlyn is a do-er, a fix-er, a problem solver nonpareil. Karlyn reaches people others would prefer to ignore and she does it with grace, humility and a smile.

For Karlyn, helping people with serious mental health conditions secure safe and affordable housing is more mission than paycheck. Karlyn moves mountains by helping landlords understand and break through the stigma associated with people with mental health conditions.

Participants often state that when Karlyn calls, they feel like a friend is on the other end. That's Karlyn's "special sauce", a way she has for making people feel connected and valued. Residents of the Supported Housing Program attribute Karlyn's efforts to making them feel cared for and respected. This begins the process of feeling whole, no longer identified by a label, such as "mentally ill", "homeless", a "drug addict" or a "patient". Instead they see themselves as a neighbor, a friend and a community member. This transition has been crucial to the tenants' recovery as well as decreasing overall stigma in their communities.

Join us in applauding Karlyn on receiving this well-deserved honor. ■

New Home Ignites Recovery for Five MHA Clients:

Gifts from several generous donors combine to make the purchase possible

House-hunting is a lengthy process—no surprise there. But for MHA, with many more requirements than most for housing program clients, the search was positively Goldilocks-ian! We needed a house that was accessible to public transportation, capable of accommodating several households, in good condition and more.

Some time ago, we thought we had found a suitable house, but the engineer's report said otherwise. This time, the stars aligned. On a lovely street in White Plains, a house was found that had been built by a father/brother team and beautifully maintained over many years. This time, the engineer's report declared it to be solid, constructed to last from top to bottom—perfect for us.

Since purchasing the house in December, renovations have been in full swing, adapting the space to accommodate five people in three apartments. Walls have been freshened up with paint and kitchens and bathroom updates.

With the move-in date imminent, the five individuals who will be moving in are elated. MHA's housing staff will make sure that everyone has furniture and kitchen equipment and, most importantly, the emotional support they need to ensure life in this new home is sweet and safe. Mission nearly accomplished! ■



MHA on the move: Have you registered to run or walk? Sunday, May 3, 2015, 8am to noon



Lou Young



Lorin Richardson

Sign up at www.mharunwalk.org!

Join us to run, walk or cheer in support of mental health!

Now in its 11th year, MHA on the move 5K Run/Walk & 1-Mile Kids' Race gives us all the unique opportunity to come together as a community and take a stand for mental health.

Whether you run or walk, your participation helps raise funds that go directly to work in our community.

This year, we will be joined for the first time by special guest Lorin Richardson of FIOS 1 and by good friend of MHA, WCBS' Lou Young, making his eighth appearance at the event.

Our Co-Chairs are Nyna and Peter Giles, of Pound Ridge who will share their personal reasons for taking part at the event. Junior Co-Chairs are Gabriella Cuzzola and Will Cownie, of White Plains.

A family-friendly morning of healthy exercise, food, entertainment and raffle, the event is fun for all ages. For runners and walkers, it's a beautiful, scenic day in the park. For children, it's their own rousing warm-up and 1-Mile Kids' Race (for ages 10 and under) with ribbons for each runner.



Co-Chairs Nyna & Peter Giles



Co-Chairs Gabriella Cuzzola & Will Cownie

- 5K timed by Taconic Road Runners Club.
- Medals awarded to top male/female in each age category, as well as overall top male/female runners.
- Strollers and pets welcome.
- Free t-shirt for all registrants.

Check in begins at 8 am and continues through 9:45 am. The kids' race starts at 9 am and the 5K Run/Walk at 9:45 am.

Form a team, bring your family and friends. Most importantly, come, have fun and feel good for a great cause! ■



You'll Want To Know:

The New Hearing Voices Network of the Lower Hudson Valley

The recently formed Hearing Voices Network of the Lower Hudson Valley Region (HVN-LHV) is a grassroots initiative working to introduce to our community an innovative, self-led support for individuals who hear voices and have other unusual sensory perceptions, such as seeing visions.

Hearing Voices, a movement that began in England some twenty years ago, challenges the stigma around such experiences by offering a supportive environment free from judgment or the assumption of illness. Hearing Voices groups offer people who have had such experiences the opportunity to understand, learn, and grow from them together. The effectiveness of the Hearing Voices approach is well documented in the research

literature, and growing numbers of peers and mental health providers on three continents are incorporating Hearing Voices principles into their work.

With the first training completed in March, Hearing Voices groups will be forming soon.

HVN-LHV has grown from a collaboration among CHOICE of NY, Human Development Services of Westchester (HDSW), New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Inc. (NYAPRS), The Mental Health Association of Westchester (MHA), The Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health (DCMH), and Westchester Independent Living Center (WILC). ■

Celebrating CASA, cont'd



Mary Schwartz,
with CASA 3 years

"To be able to contribute to the well-being of children in foster care is an immense privilege. Through CASA we are able to bear witness to the strength, resilience and yes, the pain of the children we work with. They touch our very souls."

"People often ask if I get depressed by what I see. Not at all. I am thriving in this work. Recently, I was so touched while visiting a foster child in her school in New Jersey. When I got up to leave, she gave me a great big hug and held on tight. It made me aware of how important we become in a foster child's life."



Yvonne Tropp,
with CASA 15 years

"In my many years as a CASA Advocate I have seen how CASA can really make a difference in lives of the children we represent."



Warren Gregory,
with CASA 15 years

"As my own kids are growing up and need me less, CASA has given me new reason to feel good about the work I do and the impact I can have on one child's life."



Mary Lou D'Silva,
with CASA 2 years

"CASA work has proven to be the voice for the children."



Lisa Reilly,
with CASA 1 year

Be Inspired: Lois Cowan's MHA Legacy

When Lois Cowan joined the board of MHA in 1972, she had just moved to Westchester following a career teaching psychology at Florida State University and Hunter College. Though her family was still young, the work MHA was then doing in the schools and in the county resonated deeply for her; she felt it was the bridge she was looking for between education and community mental health.

Indeed, Lois was soon sent out to speak in classrooms, tasked with raising awareness about domestic and dating violence and training others to do so as well.

Through her relationship with two family court judges, Lois became aware of the acute need for children's advocacy during court proceedings. Lois proposed the establishment of a Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program to the supervising court judge. In CASA, new at the time, Lois saw the program's great potential to protect children. Persuaded, the judge agreed, but only if the program was supervised by MHA. Lois convinced MHA's Executive Director to greenlight the program, which was to be financially self-sustaining, and CASA at MHA was born.

Lois worked tirelessly to help CASA succeed, training both judges and CASA advocates. Before long, more and more judges saw the value of having a CASA who could follow a child's case until it was settled.

Said Lois, "CASAs are a huge service to the court system; helping to ensure that court decisions truly are in the best interests of the child."



After 40 years of service to MHA, Lois stepped off the board a few years ago, but retains her strong connection. At the April 14th's event celebrating the program's 25 years, Lois will be honored for her vision and leadership as the founder of CASA at MHA.

Continuing as she started all those years ago with her mission of giving back, Lois has made a bequest to MHA, insuring that MHA is able to carry on its work in the community for years to come. For this special gift, Lois will be named a Founding Member of MHA's Sterling Legacy Circle.

Dedicated, passionate, a true pathfinder, Lois inspires still.

The Sterling Legacy Circle of MHA Westchester

was created to ensure that MHA's essential programs and services endure. A legacy gift is made through a bequest in your will. There are no dues or fees. There is no minimum financial commitment. There is, Legacy Circle members say, great satisfaction in knowing that your bequest will help MHA remain the innovative resource it has been since its inception and be able to continue its life-saving work far into the future.

Do give us a call. We can help guide you through the details. For more information, phone Constance Moustakas, Director of Development at 914-265-7511.

IRA Conference UPDATE

Tuesday, June 23rd at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Tarrytown

Diving into the most pressing issues of the day, this year's conference will explore implementing the developing practice of Trauma Informed and Integrated Healthcare.

Now in its 35th year, MHA's Ira S. Stevens Memorial Conference is Westchester County's most anticipated behavioral health care conference. We are pleased to welcome two acclaimed speakers—**Leah Harris** and **Cheryl Sharp**. Leah Harris is a survivor and crusader for social justice whose goal is to achieve a "cultural shift in how we understand and respond to emotional distress, toxic stress, addiction, violence, and suicide". Cheryl Sharp, MSW, ALWF, Senior Advisor for Trauma Informed services at The National Council holds the

unique perspective of a person who has recovered from significant mental health challenges, a trauma survivor, a family member of a loved one who died as a result of mental illness, and a provider of substance abuse and mental health services.

New this year, tracks specifically designed to meet the needs of CEOs, COOs and CIOs preparing for the transition to Medicaid Managed Care. We are also offering specific training for Care Managers whose role is critical to the success of the transformed public health system. ■

Thank you so much for your support of mental health in Westchester.



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Suicide Prevention:
Connection, Compassion & Coping

We invite you to join us for a conversation about suicide prevention and local resources available to families. Panelists will share their own experiences with loss to suicide, as well as the ways they've learned to get through each day.

Tuesday, April 28, 2015
7-9 p.m.
Chappaqua Library Theatre

Our community conversation takes place in the context of a nationwide epidemic of suicide. In 2013 alone, 41,149 people died by suicide in the U.S., leaving a network of close friends and family members to grieve. And with about 1 in 5 adults diagnosed with a mental health condition, there are no simple solutions.

The focus will be on assisting individuals at risk and their families; and exploring the resources that can help us understand, grieve, heal and not feel so alone. We hope to help promote a culture of acceptance and caring for people grieving in ways that are not always visible.

Moderator

Sean Mayer, Planning Editor,
The Journal News/lohud.com.

Sean was inspired to partner with the Mental Health Association of Westchester following the loss of his brother to suicide last year.

Panelists

Janine Crowley Haynes is a Chappaqua resident and author of *My Kind of Crazy: Living in a Bipolar World* and a survivor of a suicide attempt.

Richard Klein lost his son Jeff to suicide nearly 4 1/2 years ago. Since then, Rich, a Chappaqua resident, has been sharing his thoughts and feelings about his family's tragedy on a blog,

kleinsaucer.wordpress.com and through a Facebook page, Friends of Jeff Klein.

Rebecca Walkley MS, NCC, LMHC is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and Certified Group Psychotherapist. She facilitates support groups for individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide, as well as assisting individuals with issues of complicated grief and suicide loss, trauma.

Barbara Bernstein, PhD
of MHA Westchester

Presented by
The MHA Westchester
and the Journal News

Sponsored by
the Chappaqua Library

Event is free, signup online.

Save the Date!



5K Run/Walk and
1 Mile Kids' Race

Sunday, May 3, 2015
8 am to noon

FDR State Park,
Yorktown Heights, NY



Visit us at www.mhawestchester.org