



**MHA**  
 MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY  
 HOPE, ADVOCACY, RECOVERY

# Newsletter

Fall 2018

## New Faces at the Mental Health Association in Chautauqua County

*Increased need and additional programming bring new staff to the MHA.*

Formed in 1999, the Mental Health Association in Chautauqua County (MHA) became a peer-run organization in 2005 with a single full-time staff person. Six years later it had three full-time staff.

With the acceptance of the need for more recovery services, in 2015 the MHA became a United Way community partner organization.

The MHA now has 15 full- and three part-time employees. That's what it takes to serve 683 individuals or families in just the preceding six months. That's why there are so many new faces: peer specialists who assist with finding employment, safe housing, and access to reliable transportation.

What's it like to become part of an organization experiencing both growth and demand for services? We found out by asking some of the newcomers.

Sean Jones, who was teaching a cooking class at MHA before he joined the staff, said, "Working at the MHA is an amazing experience on a daily basis. Being able to meet people on their personal path in life, invited to walk with them and being a support on their journey is an absolute honor. I personally consider working here a privilege.

Sheridan Smith had produced his hour-long video *Recover Jamestown* and been co-leading *Refuge Recovery* classes at both St. Luke's Episcopal Church and the MHA before becoming a staff member. Sheridan feels that, "When I can use my recovery skills, what I've learned from my struggle back to health, it helps me find the meaning in my years of pain. At MHA, I find meaning in my recovery every day, through the people I meet, learn from, and joke with. Here, I learn how to recover with people, and it's something I'm proud to be a part of."

From the brochure describing the many services of the Mental Health Association in Chautauqua County:

***We're here because we've been there!***



*Several additions have been made to the MHA staff in recent months. Pictured from left are Sheridan Smith, Justin Jimenez, Darien Holt, Sean Jones, and Joseph Vaughn. Not available when the photograph was taken were Jessica Falco, Amy Lynch, and Alex Roblyer.*

Jessica Falco observed, "Working at MHA is incredibly rewarding. I am able to give to others what I have learned throughout my journey in recovery. I truly believe this is the work I am meant to do. I wake up each day grateful and excited to try to pull someone out of the nightmare and Hell I've been through. If my pain and suffering can save a life, it has been well worth it."

"Working for the MHA is an honor," said Justin Jimenez. "MHA has built my confidence into a leadership role, making every mistake into a learning experience. Being able to build our participants' confidence in finding employment and encourage self-expression through art and poetry is a very gratifying experience. At the MHA, we are a family. We acknowledge that everyone has a story."

"MHA was an essential resource for my own personal recovery," said Alex Roblyer. "It's a privilege to now be a part of the staff. The main message I aim to communicate to participants is that recovery is possible. I believe everyone is capable of changing their lives and I try to motivate, encourage, and support participants any way I can."



## Groups! Groups! Groups!

Multiple pathways support individuals in recovery. That is why more than 30 groups meet weekly at the MHA.

Regardless of what you are struggling with, there is a group where you will find sympathy, empathy, and support. A very few – like the Parents of Angels group for those who have experienced the traumatic death of a child – require a brief admission conversation before joining. At the cooking and knitting classes not only will you improve your life skills, but studies have linked knitting to reducing depression, anxiety and chronic pain.

The MHA's **Knitting for Wellbeing group** meets Wednesdays at 10 a.m. under the direction of Janet Forbes and Jeanette Moore. All are welcome — no experience is necessary. Pictured working on their knitting projects are group members, from left, Gloria Pacheco, Dan Carson, and Krystina Papaserge.



## What's Been Happening at the MHA



The MHA was one of seven Western New York organizations that received a **2018 Spotlight on Population Health (SOPHi) Award**. The recognition was presented by the Population Health Collaborative that brings together community leaders and local organizations for a multi-sector approach to community health, safety and wellness. Peer Specialist Sheridan Smith (pictured, left) and Executive Director Steven Cobb traveled to Buffalo to receive the award.

Under the direction of the **Chapel Team, chapel services** are now held at the MHA 2-3 p.m. on Tuesdays. Two pastors from the ecumenical team are at each gathering, described as “a Christian worship focused on recovery. Wherever you are spiritually, you're welcome.” Chapel Team members, pictured from left, are the Revs. Bob Hagel, First Presbyterian Church; Carolyn Stow, Kidder Memorial United Methodist Church; Tara Eastman, Tree of Life Lutheran Church; and Mark Hurst, Lander United Methodist Church. Not pictured is Rev. Luke Fodor, St. Luke's Episcopal Church.



The MHA is collaborating with the **Manufacturers Association of the Southern Tier (MAST)** on worker recruitment and retention. Using grant funding to develop a program to increase the pool of prospective employees and reduce turnover, peer specialists have been hired who help individuals get prepared for employment, then support them after they find work. MAST's Talent Pipeline and Apprenticeship Coordinator Tim Piazza (pictured, left, with peer specialist Sheridan Smith) has brought employers to the MHA to strengthen participants' resume and interview skills.



Under the direction of their fellow Community Based Practice classmates Jennifer Trusso and Lexi Lewis, all 22 **Jamestown Community College Occupational Therapy Assistant students** prepared and presented a **Wellness Fair** at the MHA on Halloween, October 31. The event aimed at promoting a healthier lifestyle and helping those in recovery to regain their independence and increase their performance of daily activities, including career/job skills, coping and social skills, grooming, money management, homemaking, play and leisure, and more.

## A Message from MHA's Executive Director by Steven Cobb



A Maple Grove graduate, I was an Eagle Scout and Boys Stater. With a BFA from NYU, I worked as an actor and set designer, taught at the French Culinary Institute, and managed restaurants. I wasn't supposed to be an addict.

But I found meth to be the best way to deal with my crippling anxiety and depression. Until the price became too much. Living on the streets of New York City had become too hard and treatment centers would not admit me, saying I had to hit bottom first.

Looking for a way out of homelessness, addiction, and depression, eight and a half years ago I returned home. My only possibility of support to heal was in the broken relationships that hung by a thread with my family. I made a connection with the MHA, where everything was different. There was a kindness and acceptance I'd never experienced in a recovery setting. I felt safe and loved. I began to believe I could get better, to have hope. Recovery only happens in the presence of hope.

My story isn't unique at the MHA, where recovery stories grow every day. Partnerships with treatment and other community resources allow for the recovery of our neighbors with a mental health and/or substance use diagnosis. I am excited to lead the MHA's talented staff to strengthen and grow our services. The MHA will be here for you and all our neighbors as recovery grows in Chautauqua County. Peers, hope, and love — that's our part in the foundation of everyone's recovery. The MHA: #recoveryhappenshere!



## Saying Good-Bye, Moving On

Change is part of life — of organizations, as well as individuals. The MHA would not be where we are today without the more than a decade Kia Briggs dedicated to the recovery of the people we serve. Now in a new role at a correctional facility, she continues to use her training and experience to restore others — and her shorter commute allows her more time with her son. Thanks to the personal commitment and vision she devoted to the MHA, Kia leaves us prepared to move ahead as we serve the needs of both our participants and our staff.

Pictured (from left) are MHA's new Board President Ian Eastman, former executive director Kia Briggs, Advisory Board Chair Dr. Lillian V. Ney, and new Executive Director Steven Cobb.



## Recovery Jams

Recovery Jams are an opportunity for MHA participants to share their recovery experiences and what has helped them along the way. For some it could be writing poetry, like the poem here. Others have composed songs or made music. Still others have created paintings.

A Recovery Jam was held in June in conjunction with a Big BBQ on Give Big CHQ Day sponsored by the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation. The picnic meal was prepared by Sean Jones and served outdoors beside the river.

The September Jam included a meal and followed a Recovery Walk in recognition of Recovery Month and award presentations to Krista Camarata, Director of Community Impact at the United Way of Southern Chautauqua County, for her work with Chautauqua Bright Spots that supports and promotes all the positive things happening in Chautauqua County; Lauri Keller for the third successful memorial walk to benefit A Fresh Start; and Sheridan Smith for his work with the youth development program Awareness Theatre.

*I'm cold and sweating from a sickness deep within,  
It's going to be hard but have to say goodbye to Heroin.*

*I've spent too long trying to numb my pain,  
No matter how long I do it, there's nothing I can gain.*

*I've lost so many friends, life's becoming tough,  
When will I realize that Enough is enough*

*How am I supposed to feel after losing another friend.  
If I continue using, my life will surely end.*

*I must look in myself for complete forgiveness.  
I have to leave this in the past, but never forget this.*

*I never once thought in my life I'd become conflicted.  
I started to use more, then became addicted.*

*Why was this the life that I chose,  
Once again waking up with a bloody nose.*

*My connection to heroin must be my biggest sin.  
If I stop fighting back my Disease is going to win.*

*If I give it a shot and start fighting back,  
I know I can win and finally put my use in the past.*

## Worth Reading/Worth Watching



**Road to Recovery Radio and Television Files.** SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, has produced a series of recovery-related television and radio programs. You can view trailers and the full television episodes and listen to the radio episodes at [recoverymonth.gov/road-to-recovery/2018-episodes](http://recoverymonth.gov/road-to-recovery/2018-episodes).

In *Dopesick: Dealers, Doctors, and the Drug Company that Addicted America* author Beth Macy takes us from distressed small communities to wealthy suburbs, from disparate cities to once-idyllic farm towns in a heartbreaking trajectory that illustrates how this national crisis has persisted for so long and become so firmly entrenched. She shows that the only thing that unites Americans across geographic and class lines is opioid drug abuse. And in a country unable to provide basic healthcare for all, she still finds reason to hope--and signs of the spirit and tenacity necessary in those facing addiction to build a better future for themselves and their families. Macy was interviewed in a recent *Time* magazine titled "We Need to Treat Addiction as the Medical Problem It Is" ([time.com/5388350/beth-macy-dopesick-opioid-epidemic](http://time.com/5388350/beth-macy-dopesick-opioid-epidemic)).

*Dopesick* is available through interlibrary loan at the Prendergast Library.



# S.A.F.E.

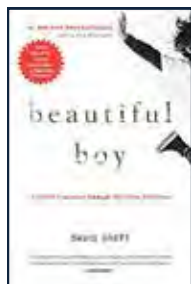
Stop the Addiction Fatality Epidemic

Retired Admiral James "Sandy" Winnefeld said in "**No Family Is Safe From This Epidemic**" in *The Atlantic*, "As an admiral I helped run the most powerful military on Earth, but I couldn't save my son from the scourge of opioid addiction"

([theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/11/an-epidemic-from-which-no-one-is-safe/546773](http://theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/11/an-epidemic-from-which-no-one-is-safe/546773)). Also interviewed on *CBS This Morning* ([cbsnews.com/news/opioid-epidemic-retired-admiral-sandy-winnefeld-sons-death](http://cbsnews.com/news/opioid-epidemic-retired-admiral-sandy-winnefeld-sons-death)), Winnefeld and his wife, Mary, created S.A.F.E./Stop the Addiction Fatality Epidemic ([safeproject.us](http://safeproject.us)) that is committed to contributing in a tangible way to overcoming the epidemic of opioid addiction in the United States.

Retired Admiral James "Sandy" Winnefeld said in "**No Family Is Safe From This Epidemic**" in *The Atlantic*, "As an admiral I helped run the most powerful military on Earth, but I couldn't save my son from the scourge of opioid addiction"

"**Humanity Is: Recovering.....Addiction is not a choice. Recovery is.**" Hannah Griffith posted images taken at the MHA along with messages from her subjects at [hgriffith.exposure.co/humanity-is-recovering](http://hgriffith.exposure.co/humanity-is-recovering). Check them out!



In *Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction*, David Sheff asks, What happened to my beautiful boy? To our family? What did I do wrong? Those are the wrenching questions that haunted David Sheff's journey through his son Nic's addiction to drugs and tentative steps toward recovery. Available at Jamestown's Prendergast Library.

In *Tweak: Growing Up on Methamphetamines*, Nic Sheff describes how he was drunk for the first time at age eleven, and in the years that followed, he would regularly smoke pot, do cocaine and ecstasy, and develop addictions to crystal meth and heroin. Still, he felt he would always be able to quit and put his life together, until a violent relapse convinced him otherwise. This is the compelling, heartbreaking, and true story of his relapse and road to recovery. Available at Jamestown's Prendergast Library.



Based on the best-selling pair of memoirs from father and son David and Nic Sheff, the recently released film *Beautiful Boy* chronicles the heartbreaking and inspiring experience of survival, relapse, and recovery in a family coping with substance use disorder over many years. It stars Steve Carell, Timothee Chalamet, Maura Tierney, and Amy Ryan. One trailer ends with the words: "While addiction is massively under-funded and under-regulated, there are those working tirelessly in all communities to combat this epidemic. The help is out there -- for those struggling with the disease, their loved ones, and for those who grieve. For more information and resources, please visit [BeautifulBoyInfo.com](http://BeautifulBoyInfo.com)."

### MHA Advisory Board Members

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