

Mental Health Association Steps Up During COVID-19

New Challenges, New Opportunities

As Mental Health Association in Chautauqua County (MHA) Executive Director Steven Cobb observes, the opposite of addiction is not sobriety, it is connection.

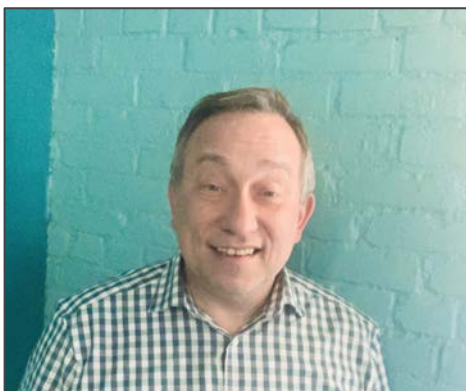
It is not easy to be connected during pandemic-imposed isolation and social distancing. But the MHA is meeting this challenge every day, finding new ways to reach out, to break barriers, to create and maintain connections.

With the spike in stress, anxiety, suicide, and overdose, the MHA focused on seven-days-a-week support and expanded projects with other organizations, working without pause to give support to people who need it immediately.

During initial COVID-19 restrictions, most services went online. With Chautauqua County Crisis Response Fund: Covid 19 support, MHA provided many participants with phones so they could participate in group meetings and clinical services.

In addition to specific-topic groups like SMART Recovery, Southern Tier Queer Peers, and Chautauqua County Alternatives to Suicide, peer support groups, including two in Spanish, met online three times every day. Cooking in Recovery went to YouTube (*see p. 3*). Phone and text help could be accessed 8 a.m. to midnight every day.

With the careful reopening of the facilities in Jamestown at the Gateway Center on June 22 and in Dunkirk at Grace Lutheran



In a [homepage video](#), MHA Executive Director Steven Cobb and staff thank funders that make their work possible.

Church on July 6, some groups will be live and some virtual. The current schedule can be found at MHACHautauqua.org/groups.

Now anyone with questions or in need of services for themselves or a family member can call or text (716) 661-9044 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday- Friday and 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays.



Stories about Chautauqua County Crisis Response Fund grants during COVID-19 featured this picture of MHA staffers Joseph Vaughn and Allison Murphy.

Early on, MHA assisted the Salvation Army with food deliveries to shut-ins, elderly, and disabled. Masks donated initially by MHA volunteers then through the United Way are a valuable tool when coaches need to meet directly with participants.

MHA partnered with UPMC Chautauqua after the NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports eased rules on using drugs in addiction treatment. Now persons coming to the emergency room are linked immediately with an MHA peer, who supports the patient to expedite the ER interaction. What once could have taken five to six hours without receiving medication is now resolved in about an hour and a half.

As Steven and staff express, we are only here because of the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation, the Chautauqua County Departments of Mental Hygiene and Health and Human Services, the Ralph C. Sheldon Foundation, UPMC Chautauqua, the United Way of Southern Chautauqua County, the Reginald A. and Elizabeth S. Lenna Foundation, the Hultquist Foundation, and because of and with community partners like Evergreen Health Services and The Chautauqua Center.

CSARP Connects Substance Use Disorder Resources in Chautauqua County

For a rural county, Chautauqua County has tremendous resources to combat and treat substance use disorder. The Chautauqua Substance Abuse Response Partnership (CSARP) brings together these providers through a \$1 million multi-year multi-year initiative supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration to address barriers to access in rural communities related to substance use disorder.

In addition to the Mental Health Association, CSARP is comprised of representatives from Brooks-TLC Hospital System, the Chautauqua County Departments of Mental Hygiene and Health and Human Services, Chautauqua County Health Network, Evergreen Health Services, Prevention Works (formerly CASAC), The Chautauqua Center, The Resource Center, United Way of Southern Chautauqua County, and UPMC Chautauqua.

To inform Chautauqua County residents of the resources available to them, CSARP has produced...



...a Website

Clicking a few links at CombatAddictionCHQ.com opens a wealth of information, including Common Myths About Addiction, Signs of a Problem, Harm Reduction, All About Overdose, Safe Disposal of Drugs, New York State's Good Samaritan Law, and more.

A **Chemical Dependency Services Locator** lets you search for the kind of service you are interested in (treatment, recovery, prevention, help for families, or harm reduction), inpatient or outpatient, and a geographic area. You can find services located in Chautauqua County, Cattaraugus County, Erie or Niagara County (NY), and Pennsylvania. You can also search for services for children/adolescents and medication assisted treatment (buprenorphine).

...a YouTube Channel

Steve Kilburn, Grant Director for Chautauqua County Department of Mental Hygiene, leads CSARP. In his "Let's Heal Together: Conversations to Combat Addiction" videos on CSARP's YouTube channel (via CombatAddictionCHQ.com), he interviews key CSARP figures as well as others like Jamestown Police Department Chief Harry Snellings.



In his interview with MHA Executive Director Steven Cobb, Kilburn says that while he has been familiar with the MHA for many years, CSARP has made him even "more impressed the more I get to know what [the MHA] does and the contribution it makes to our community."

After describing MHA services, Steven shares the importance of connection for him personally in his own recovery. He adds, "I would encourage anyone, not just someone who's in recovery, to learn and stretch and figure out how you stay connected to people when we're being asked to physically stay apart."



...and a Facebook Page

Find information and learn more at facebook.com/CombatAddictionCHQ

2019 Overview

...A Year of Incredible Service

Sometimes numbers tell the story, and there were a *lot* of meaningful numbers for the MHA in 2019.

Like the number of people who signed in at the door of the Mental Health Association: 11,959. And the 13,630 peer support group sign-ins that did not include five weekly groups where anonymity is protected.

Of the 622 participants working with coaches, 260 were females, 356 males, 5 transgender, with 82% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 5% African American, 2% Native American, and 1% Asian.

Of 6,231 coaching sessions, 192 were at the Chautauqua County Jail, 198 coaching sessions at Chautauqua County Family Court, and 148 at the Oxford Houses.

MHA's OPEN Program helps participants in recovery return to work. Limited to 14701 until it expanded to all Chautauqua County in December, of the 138 people in the program, 79 were employed full-time, 62 for 90 days or more, and 26 had enrolled in education or training programs.

OD (Overdose Detection) Mapping, a Jamestown program started in 2019 that went countywide in December, responded with a peer to all 72 reported overdoses.

In the fall MHA opened an office in Dunkirk, N.Y., to provide recovery services three days a week in northern Chautauqua County. The center had 780 sign-ins by 34 individuals,



So much has changed since the MHA's holiday staff party last year, but staff are still working every day to bring recovery to Chautauqua County.

64% Caucasian, 31% Hispanic, and 5% African American. Four of the 12 weekly peer support groups were Spanish language.

These services were provided by one part- and 16 full-time employees and 18 community volunteers. The MHA provided internship placements for 14 people from Jamestown Community College's OTA and Human Services programs, Fredonia State University, Jamestown High School, and the University of Southern Florida.

Cooking in Recovery -- on YouTube!

You don't have to be a beginning cook or even in recovery to learn culinary skills and how to create yummy dishes on Chef Sean Jones's *Cooking in Recovery* episodes on the MHA's YouTube channel.

Initially offering his classes as a volunteer, Sean is now a full-time peer specialist. When MHA's facilities closed due to the pandemic, his classes moved to [youtube.com/c/MHACHautauquaOrg](https://www.youtube.com/c/MHACHautauquaOrg).

In Episode 1 you can learn how to more safely and efficiently dice vegetables for a nutritious and delicious soup. In Episode 7, Sean makes lasagna at home with his family. With each episode you can work along with him in your own kitchen.

After showing how to make a quick and tasty salad in Episode 3, Sean shares the story of his personal path to recovery following



more than two decades of alcoholism and addiction. The Cooking in Recovery Class is supported by Farm Fresh Foods in partnership with St. Luke's Episcopal Church.

Worth Reading, Worth Viewing

In *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*, David Kessler shares how to ease the pain of loss and to move forward in a way that honors our loved ones. As a child, he witnessed a mass shooting at the same time his mother was dying. For most of his life, he taught physicians, nurses, counselors, police, and first responders about end of life, trauma, and grief, and led talks and retreats for those in grief. Then, after his 21-year-old son’s death from an accidental drug overdose, Kessler found a way through this loss that would honor his son: meaning. The book is available through the James Prendergast Library. Search for **“David Kessler Grief” on YouTube** to find many interviews.



Because approximately 5.7 million -- that’s 1 in 8 -- kids in the U.S. are live in homes where one or more parents are dealing with substance use disorders (not including those no longer with their parents), *Sesame Street* has introduced Karli, a character whose mother is in treatment for addiction, and Salia, a real girl whose grandparents took care of her while her parents were in treatment. Sesame Workshop makes their videos available for free in English and Spanish with additional tools at SesameStreetInCommunities.org/Topics/Parental-Addiction.

WBFO, Buffalo’s National Public Radio member station, repeats as WUBJ in Jamestown at 88.1 FM. WBFO’s **Mental Health Initiative** is a project to normalize the conversation about mental illness by bringing this issue from the shadows into everyday light. Topics at WNED.org/community/mental-health-initiative include Music is My Salvation, Buddhist Chanting, Learning to Cope, Addiction and Suicide, PTSD, numerous PBS Newshour stories, videos, and very much more.



Chautauqua County readers of *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope*, by Pulitzer Prize-winning authors Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, may feel a kinship with the residents of rural Yamhill, Oregon. As the story unfolds of the children on Kristof’s old school bus who died in adulthood from drugs, alcohol, suicide or reckless accidents, we learn of the decades of government failure that resulted in this profound damage found across our country. The authors offer numerous solutions and conclude with “Ten Steps You Can Take in the Next Ten Minutes to Make a

Difference.” This *New York Times* bestseller is a difficult book to read, but it feels deeply necessary. Search for **“Nicholas Kristof Tightrope” on YouTube** to find many interviews.



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