



MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Updates and information from the Atlantic County Office

May is Borderline Personality Disorder Month and Mental Health Awareness

Fallen through the cracks

A mother's story illustrates how changes to the system and the law could help people like her son

BY Beth Wade
Public Relations Specialist

One capsule.

Or a monthly injection. Any regular treatment, really. That’s primarily what’s wedged between Rob and the long, loving relationship he had with his mother. It also prevents him from holding a job and using his business degree.

But he stopped taking his medication in 2018, and since then, his wellness has been on a steady decline.

"About six months ago, he stopped answering my calls. He cut me out of his journey," says his mother, Judy.

Her son lives with schizoaffective disorder, OCD, and an eating disorder. His thoughts and beliefs hold him hostage from having any relationships with friends and family. In his mind, he’s not ill, he’s a victim of a large conspiracy – his mother and family are part of it, so he’s cut them off.

Currently she is left with one-way communication, texts and phone calls that go unanswered. From time to time, she reaches out and sends him fond memories -- of weekend movie marathons with pizza and of adopting the beloved family cat. Lately, she says she finds

herself reminiscing more often about her only child prior to the onset of his mental illness. She describes him as a son who was once vibrant, smiley, friendly and funny, with a passion for music, family, surfing, sunsets and sports, and who cared deeply about other people.

Today, Rob is among the nearly 4 percent of the population who live with schizoaffective disorder, which is characterized by psychosis as well as mood symptoms. He holds wild beliefs – that he is a famous rapper, and a world-renowned musician murdered his grandfather (in reality he passed away peacefully in his sleep). He’s prone to anger and paranoia which have cost him numerous housing arrangements.

Another cost, the emotional cost to him and his mother, is equally incalculable.

"The illness stole most of his 20s and now he’s losing his 30s," she says.

Judy explained that her son has anosognosia, a symptom which affects the frontal lobe of his brain and prevents him from having insight to his illness (also may occur with stroke, Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s).

The first break happened in Rob’s senior year of college during the last semester. Following a call from a family member who saw some concerning posts on social media, Judy became alarmed and immediately drove 10 hours to the university. She was there before the Dean of Students had a chance to call her cell phone to say there was an issue. Finding Rob in the throes of a mental health crisis was heartbreaking, especially since he’d just returned from a dream trip to (cont. on page 2)

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Throughout the year, we will share stories of families and consumers in order to shine a light on their journeys towards recovery. We will rejoice in the celebration of their successes. We'll also reveal the challenges that exist for those families trying to access care for a loved one who does not recognize they have a mental health or substance use disorder, and how the current mental health system of care responds in these situations. We hope this series increases awareness, fosters compassion and improves outcomes.



Europe to visit a family member. The vacation was an early graduation present from his mother that he'd taken at Christmastime. Looking back, she says early signs of just before his first psychiatric break were beginning to appear, and a stark contrast from what he said not long after returning. He was frantic about a particular tragic event and connected certain numbers to that news story to his home address.

"You just don't think it's [mental illness] going to happen to your family," she said. "And you cannot imagine or understand what it is like to watch the illness take over your loved one in an instant. It was so surreal when it first happened."

As Rob's eating disorder worsened and created further health risks, Judy searched far and wide for a hospital that was willing to treat his eating disorder, psychosis, and OCD. That task was time intensive, but after numerous rejections, she ultimately found one in Boston. Rob trusted his doctors and therapists there, which was a turning point in his journey with the illnesses.

Following that hospitalization, Rob continued with medication and therapy, finished his last semester of college, and earned his business and marketing degree. He held jobs and "flourished," she said, for about three to four years.

When he stopped treatment, he spiraled downward including one attempted suicide. Since his first break at age 22, he's been hospitalized about a dozen times over the past decade. Currently, her son cannot tolerate physical touch. His OCD and eating disorder aggravate his psychosis, according to his mother. At times he's thrown away all of his belongings, including living room furniture, because of his delusion about contamination. Extreme paranoia and conspiracy theories generally prevent him from leaving his living space.

"My son won't let me even hug him," she said. "It's heartbreaking." "That makes me very sad."

Following a long circuitous series of moves to apartments, rundown motel rooms, his childhood home, one out-of-state living arrangement with family, and a couple of group homes, Rob now rents a room.

Judy says she has concerns that he will travel and disappear. Once Rob took a train to NYC in the middle of a snowstorm, with no money or place to live. He was motivated by the delusional career he has as a rapper.

With his history of risk of harm to himself, she wonders how the system could permit the situation to deteriorate to this point.

"I am tired of hearing [someone in] the system say, 'He's an adult. He has a right not to take his medication,'" she laments. "The laws stipulate that a person can be hospitalized when they are a harm to themselves or others."

That definition, she adds, includes not being able to make safe decisions in caring for oneself due to the illness. But, in her experience, more often than not that criterion is not enforced.

— “
I am tired of hearing the system say, 'He's an adult. He has a right not to take his medication.'
” —

Judy's son has been in an Involuntary Outpatient Commitment Program but when he refused to go, there were no teeth to force him to participate, no repercussions or follow-up.

Other times, the system can be frustrating to navigate when presented with inexperienced staff who lack a basic understanding of mental illness. Judy's son was once dropped from a program because he didn't answer a phone call about potential housing. That was inconceivable to the social worker, she remembers. She reminded the worker, to no avail, about the challenges faced by individuals living with mental illness who can have difficulty communicating and keeping appointments. to no avail.

Judy remains dedicated to her advocacy for her son. She speaks to psychiatrists, primary care doctors, doctors and the police who interact, evaluate, or treat her son in an effort to help them understand his illness, lack of insight, and non-compliance with medication. She says she is comforted and buoyed by newer initiatives, such as Crisis Intervention Team Training (CIT) training that is offered to law enforcement.

Along with NAMI meetings and IFSS staff support (Cathi Chiola), Judy continually reads and researches about the illness, medications, and available programs. Recently, articles on New York State legislation piqued her interest. Kendra's Law provides for court-ordered assisted outpatient treatment in cases of individuals who display an unawareness or delusional misapprehension of surroundings or of physical condition or health (specifically, a threat to themselves by virtue of their inability to care for their basic needs, food, shelter, health care). *continued on page 3*

Families interested in becoming involved with advocacy can contact Gail Christian at gchristian@mhanj.org or 609-517-8614



“At the moment, Rob fits this definition,” she says in frustration. “He falls through the cracks in the system here, and because he isn’t violent or threatening, he cannot be forced to be hospitalized or to take medicine.”

If a similar law were enacted in New Jersey, she believes her son might have a better quality of life – one that included family, friends, a job, and his interests. Right now, he’s isolated and alone, except for Facebook and TV.

As a math-minded person, Judy struggles with the reality that there is no concrete solution. She is not alone, as her frustration is shared among many other families in the groups that she attends. She also has been connected to staff at Acenda and sees a therapist to help her navigate and understand the system and her son’s illnesses.

She noted improvements and headway in the system -- numerous opportunities and programs to aid and support those living with mental illness such as the local Special Needs Registry and “ride along” “arrive together” protocols, which provide for a mental health screener to accompany police on calls related to mental health issues.

Though her son’s lack of insight prevents him from using support, Judy practices regular self-care and takes advantage of local programs and meetings. She’s grateful for the understanding and camaraderie that softens the struggles and hard reality she and her son face.

“I’m grieving,” she explained. “The illness took my sweet boy from me. It’s like a death, a constant death. I might get discouraged from time to time, but I never stop praying, and I never give up hope.”

Note: The names in this story have been changed to protect their privacy.

In New Jersey, a concerted effort by family members was made to change the law. In 2009, family members advocated for Involuntary Outpatient Care (IOC). They expected a court order would guarantee help for their ill loved ones by forcing them to take medicine and accept treatment. Some individuals who are ordered to participate in an IOC comply, but others do not. Currently, individuals who do not comply are not issued summons or picked up by law enforcement.



Cathi Chiola is a longtime, dedicated member of the IFSS team which works with families -- supporting them as they support their loved one with mental health challenges.

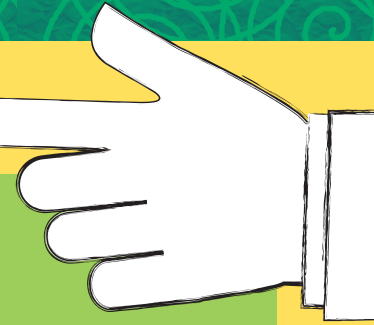
Supporting a family member with a mental health/substance use disorder can be overwhelming. Balancing your own needs while being there for a loved one is a challenge. Take time for yourself and ensure that your own needs are being met— remember that you can support your family member more effectively when you take care of yourself.

- Make time for activities that help you cope with stress.
- Make time to see other family members and friends.
- Ask friends and family for help.
- Be aware of your boundaries and set limits to make sure they are respected.
- Look after your own physical and mental health, and seek support if necessary



Look Around

CONNECTING TO THE COMMUNITY & NATURE...WHY IT MATTERS



From the local library, to coffee shops, barber shops, places of worship, local markets, and public parks, there are many ways -- and good reasons -- to become more deeply immersed your community.

With the 2023 theme of Mental Health America "Look Within, Look Around" in mind, we highlight some local and regional opportunities, both free and low cost.

Atlantic is home to some beautiful open spaces, such as EHT Nature Preserve, Birch Grove in Northfield, Forsythe Nature Preserve, Galloway, and Estell Manor Park.

There are many fresh markets open in spring, summer and fall. And, as the temperatures continues to warm, there are u-pick farms for strawberries, blueberries and other seasonall specialities.

Connecting to the community by volunteering also can benefit wellness. The Food Bank, Red Cross, Funny Farm and Animal Rescue, animal shelters, and thrift shops are some popular places where people give their time.

Joining social media pages related to towns in Atlantic also provides information on free summer concerts, movies in the park, and other recreation and social events. Pickle ball is one sports that's growing in popularity! Some communities have an adult league for soccer, hockey, and softball.

On our monthly community bulletin board (see page __ in this newsletter), you'll find events, theater, classes, workshops, and local ideas.

A strong sense of community within neighborhoods protects mental health through shared support, resources, and joy. And, spending time in nature can benefit self-esteem, emotional regulation and social skills.

If you are a consumer at MHA Atlantic and need help with arranging public transporation, our POST Team may be able to help.
Call 609-652-3800 for more information.

ONLINE RESOURCES

www.atlanticlibrary.org
(click on At The Library, then Calendar)

www.pressofatlanticcity/events

www.stockton.edu/pac/
calendar of performances

artsgarageac.com
Workshops, classes, events

Ventnor Cultural Arts Center
classes in art and dancing
ventnorarts.org

DID YOU KNOW?

Spending time in nature is linked to many positive mental health outcomes, including improved focus, lower stress, better mood, reduced risk of developing mental health conditions, and a sense of connection to yourself, community, and purpose. Aim for 15 minutes of sunlight on your arms and legs a few times a week! Being around nature doesn't always mean hiking in a forest. Consider walking in a park, bringing a plant inside, sitting in your backyard, or spending time under a tree.



Our coverage of the 2023 MHA theme "Look Within, Look Around" continues on page 3...

...with tips for improving your personal space

Look Within

Creating a calm personal space

Tips on clutter, comfort and color



Create comfort with a blanket, a meaningful gift, candle, natural light, fresh air, houseplants, colors, photos. Swap out wall decorations between rooms or rearrange furniture -- that's no cost!

Color matters! The human brain associates warm colors (red, orange, yellow) with a range of feelings including passion, comfort, excitement and delight. Cool colors, like green, blue, purple, create a calming, relaxing atmosphere. Neutrals make for a cozy, comforting space.

Reduce clutter. Clutter can contribute to depression, trouble focusing, confusion and stress. Organize or donate! Start with even 15 minutes per day.

Mental Health Benefits of Houseplants

Nurturing/caring for plants can reduce stress and boost mood

Being surrounded by plants releases serotonin, the "happy hormone"

House plants provide indoor "green spaces"

Encourages self-expression

Soil contains microbes "outdoorphins" that act like a natural antidepressant

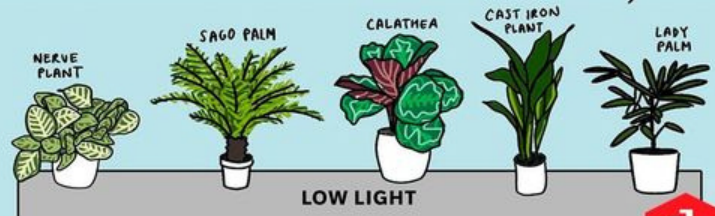
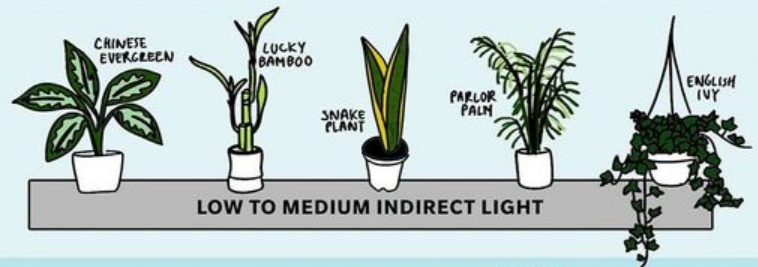
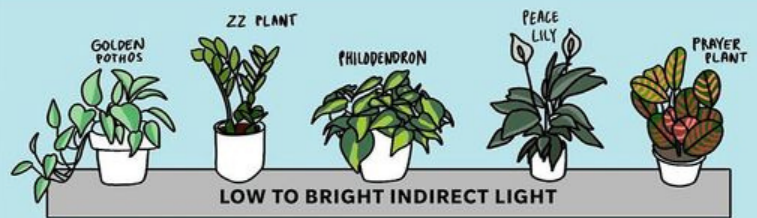
Some provide aromatherapy

Learn something new



Low-Light Indoor Plants

THAT THRIVE IN NEAR DARKNESS



Ask staff at your local garden center about houseplants that will grow well in the light conditions of your home environment

May is Borderline Personality Disorder Awareness month

MHANJ's online wellness center offers a weekly, peer-run group for BPD called "Unapologetically Me" on Wednesdays at 5 pm. Scan the QR code to join United By Wellness or register online <https://surveymonkey.com/r/8VXP2K8>



Our IFSS program offers support, education and advocacy to family members. See page 10 for more information

BPD IS A SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS THAT CAUSES AN INABILITY TO MANAGE EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY.

SOME PEOPLE WITH BPD ARE HIGH-FUNCTIONING IN CERTAIN SETTINGS, WHILE THEIR PRIVATE LIFE MAY BE IN TURMOIL.

MOST PEOPLE WITH BPD SUFFER FROM INTENSE EMOTIONS AND MOOD SHIFTS-AND HAVE DIFFULTY REGULATING THEIR EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS, AND IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOUR.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT, WITH SPECIALIZED THERAPY, MOST PEOPLE WITH BPD NOTICE THEIR SYMPTOMS ARE REDUCED AND THEIR LIVES ARE IMPROVED. UNDER STRESS, SYMPTOMS MAY RETURN, AND FURTHER SUPPORT MAY BE NEEDED.

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

COMMON CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS INCLUDE:

- DEPRESSION
- BIPOLAR DISORDER
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE
- EATING DISORDERS
- ANXIETY DISORDERS

DID YOU KNOW ?

1 OUT OF **5** PEOPLE ADMITTED TO PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS HAVE BPD.

1 OUT OF **10** PEOPLE SEEKING OUTPATIENT MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT HAVE BPD.

Your donations support programming for families and individuals in Atlantic County

MHANJ'S WALK FOR WELLNESS & RECOVERY



Join Team Atlantic or be a sponsor



Boardwalk fun for individuals & family members of all ages, including the dog!

June 10, 2023
Nomahegan Park,
Cranford, NJ

Festivities begin at 8:30 am and the walk begins at 10:30 am.



Planned Giving

How You Benefit from Planned Giving

Planned gifts are charitable contributions that are part of your financial or estate plans. Including a gift to the Mental Health Association -Atlantic County in your will or trust allows you to create a legacy which provides families like you with the education, support, empathy and options to provide the best care for your family. It only takes 20 minutes or less.

YOU LEAVE A LEGACY

Making a bequest in your will is a powerful way to leave a lasting impact. Another way to leave a large gift is through establishing your legacy by making a bequest, showing your support for years to come.

YOU GET A TAX BREAK

Did you know that bequests can reduce federal estate taxes for heirs? And these deductions are not limited to cash — they can include assets like real estate, IRAs, and stock as well!

YOU DECIDE HOW YOUR GIFT IS USED

When you leave a bequest in your will to Mental Health Association in Atlantic County, you can allocate a program where you would like to make an impact.



Wellness Bulletin Board

AT THE LIBRARY

Adult Board Games

@ EHT Branch Thurs., May 17 from 5:30 to 8 pm

Registration requested

@Ventnor Branch on Wed., May 10 from 6 pm to 7:30 pm

Crochet Group at EHC Branch

Thursday, May 18th at 6:30

Registration required

House Plants at the Ventnor Branch

Monday, May 22nd at 2pm Learn how to plant, propagate, and care for a variety of popular plant species

View the complete calendar at atlanticlibrary.org

Click on "Calendar of Events"

Friday Morning Birdwalk

Friday, May 19th 8am-10am

Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife
Refuge, Oceanville

609-652-1665 or forsythe@fws.gov



SMITHVILLE

Smithville Mayfest
Saturday, May 20 & 21 from 10 am to 5 pm
Vendors, crafters, music, performing arts,
interactive activities

Car Cruise
Friday, May 26 from 5 pm to 8 pm
See cars, talk cars, show yours!



Peter Pan and the Pirates by
Riddlesbrood Touring Theater Co.
Smithville Village Greene

Sat., May 27 at 1 pm

Sun., May 28 at 5 pm

No cost to attend



Weekly
Tues and Sun
8 am to 4 pm
Admission and
parking
are always free.
Donations
accepted

**Funny Farm
Rescue**
AN ANIMAL SANCTUARY

Live on Facebook Sundays at 10 am



SPRING CONCERT

MATT RICHARDS ELECTRIC TRIO

"Electric Jazz" music (guitar, bass, drums)

Ocean City Free Public Library

1735 Simpson Ave

Sunday, May 21 at 2 pm

Ventnor Cultural Arts Center

Classes in pottery, watercolors/mixed media, oils and
acrylics, pastels, jewelry making. Ballroom dancing for
beginners. \$20 per class
609.823.7952



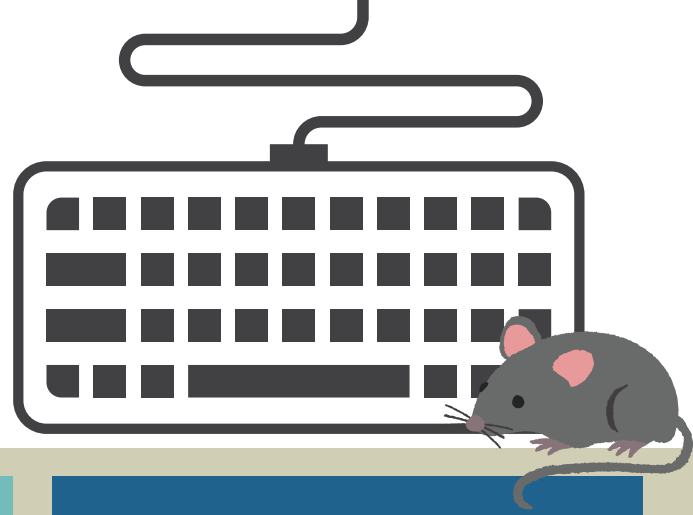
Memorial Day Parade

EHT on Ocean Heights Ave
from North Mt. Airy/Zion to
Veterans Memorial Park
Marchers and a flyover

Monday, May 29 at 9 am to 12 pm

NEWS

briefs



Invaluable,
impactful.
Our
inspiring
interns



On Wednesday, May 3, we recognized interns from Stockton University and Georgian Court University for their months of service during a breakfast at No Reservations, Galloway. Back row: Bianca Cicchino, Lauren Jackson, Christine Conaghy, Kaylee Frampton. Front row: Serena Petullo, Audrey Reppert, Riley Finnegan. We appreciate you!

From our Community Partners



Jewish Family Service announced the promotions of Lillian Whitcraft, LCSW, to Senior Director, Mental Health Services, and Samantha McManus, LSW, to Director, Mental Health Services, for the agency.

Lily is responsible for directing the agency's Mental Health programs including Integrated Case Management Services (ICMS), Behavioral Health Health Home (BHH), Supportive Supportive Housing (SH), and Intake Services. In addition, she will supervise the Nurse Educator and Clinical Specialist.



Working with Lily, Samantha McManus has been promoted to the position of Director, Mental Health Services. In this role, Samantha handles the day-to-day program management of ICMS, At-Risk Supportive Housing, and the Intake Services department. She will ensure the delivery of community-based care that is safe, efficient, and client-centered.



Training with Law Enforcement

As part of our ongoing partnership with local law enforcement, a Crisis Intervention Training was held in March at Stockton University. More than 40 participants working in fields related to law enforcement or mental health graduated. The training aims to divert community members from the criminal system to the mental health system, share resources, and increase awareness.



Pictured at left is Jessica Reinhardt of JFS, who presented at the March CIT class on the topic of mental health disorders.

Pictured below: Members of CIT Atlantic Class #254. They included law enforcement from 8 different police departments, security personnel from 4 casinos, Stockton police, the Sheriff's Department as well staff from Legacy Treatment Services, Centers for Family Services, Family Center, Jewish Family Service, and HR Recovery Initiative that supports survivors of human trafficking.



MHA - Acute Care Family Program

Support and assistance for families with a loved one in crisis and in need of linkage to treatment and other services.

7 days per week
Available 8 am to 8 pm
609-517-8614

Our team engages families who are often navigating the mental health system for the first time. Staff educate families about mental illness and offer resources and referrals that can help their loved one

When your family needs help...



we are a phone call away
609-517-8614

NAMI Hosts Monthly Support Groups in Somers Point

NAMI Family Support is a support group for adults (18+) with a loved one with a mental health condition. Participants gain insight from the challenges and successes of others facing similar experiences in an empathetic and supportive environment.

Register online at namiacm.org or call (609) 741-5125.

Meeting held the 2nd Monday of the month in St. Joseph's Catholic Church, 606 Shore Road, Somers Point, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Peer Run Support Groups



United By Wellness (UBW) is a virtual wellness center where peers offer hope and skills for recovery to people living with mental illness and/or substance use disorder. This is accomplished by providing support, education and advocacy in a safe, and diverse community which embraces the uniqueness of its members and their chosen path toward recovery.

United By Wellness Center is a virtual center designed to engage all members to promote a sense of commonality... purpose...unity. Within the umbrella of the UBW community, members will be able to explore sub-communities for engagement depending on their interests or needs.

Join United By Wellness at
<https://mhaac.info/ubw-how-to-join.html>
More than 30 weekly groups offered

Your NAMI Connection is a recovery support group for adults (18+) who have experienced symptoms of a mental health condition or a dual diagnosis. Participants gain the support of peers who understand their experience and gain insight into others' challenges and successes.
(See NAMI above for date/time/location)