



MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Updates and information from the Atlantic County Office

May is Mental Health Awareness and Borderline Personality Disorder Month

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Increasing awareness, building community, and providing an outlet for those with Borderline Personality Disorder

BY Devon Dorso
Guest Columnist

Devon is a peer and facilitator for Unapologetically Me, a weekly group for those who live with Borderline Personality Disorder, BPD.



Mainstream movies portray BPD as a female who is toxic and manipulative. The typical story is about a female and a bad breakup with a boy. As a result, people tend to put us all in that one box, but, in truth, this condition affects everyone differently.

My fears about abandonment come from the loss of a close family member. In my case, I have difficulty trusting others and myself.

For many years I was treated solely for depression, but I always felt there was something more going on. Looking back at my teen self, my emotional responses were much bigger compared to my peers.

While in a psychology class at college I learned about Borderline Personality Disorder, which rang familiar. That led me to ask my therapist for a screening.

With that diagnosis came awareness, but also an extra dose of stigma because BPD is considered severe mental illness. I met with additional stigma in my search for a therapist. Few specialize in the disorder, and some won't take on individuals who live with the illness.

BPD has been isolating at times, but I've been fortunate to have friends, family, and a boyfriend willing to learn to understand my behavior, how my brain works, and ways to respond that help me through the difficult moods and instability that occur daily.

At times, I have called out of work or am sent home early. Occasionally – more often than I like -- I miss out on social plans or events.

For me and many people who live with BPD, relationships are often hard, not just romantic ones. Friends, family, work. They're challenging for several reasons that stem from both inherited factors and trauma. *continued on page 2*

BPD continued from page 1

Over the years I've learned to ask for the reassurance I need. I ask sooner than I have in the past -- a lesson learned along the way. I practice coping skills that work for me, though I do find it challenging to use them when my moods are very intense. Stopping intrusive thoughts is also hard, even when I am aware and, rationally, I recognize the thoughts are not true.

Each morning I wake up and wonder what to expect. I could wake up ambitious with a long list of things to accomplish. Other times, I wake angry or very sad.

Mood stabilizers were somewhat helpful to me. I've been off them for 2 years now. My moods are still switch rapidly and intensely, but asking for help in my time of need has made a big difference. In the brain of person with BPD, the parts that control emotion, particularly rage, fear, and impulsive automatic reactions are affected. They light up on MRI scans. Though some people see the disorder as a character flaw or personality defect, that view is short-sighted and incorrect.

BPD affects everyone differently. My trauma is not the same as another person, and my reaction to a similar trauma isn't the same as another person's. BPD is different for everybody. We have similar symptoms, but each person's response is individual and unique.

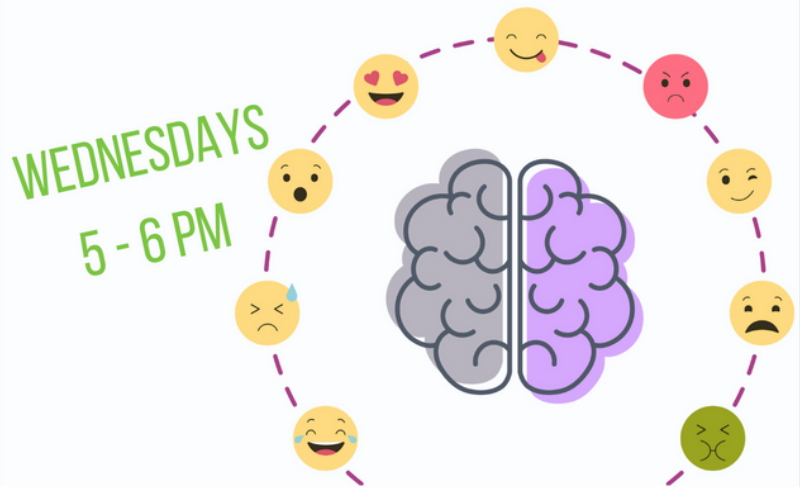
Starting the weekly support group Unapologetically Me has been very gratifying. I feel good that I can offer a safe space -- an outlet -- for group members.

A huge misconception is that BPD is a rare, but it actually affects more people than bipolar and schizophrenia combined. I hope that people take the time to learn more about BPD. There are great blogs, like "Living with Borderline" on Quora. This is a tough, serious, and severe mental illness that is often isolating and exhausting. Hopefully reading my story will create more empathy, compassion, and understanding, which is one way I can make a difference in Borderline Personality Disorder Awareness Month.

Devon manages a Wawa in Ocean County. She graduated Stockton with a degree in psychology and will return in September to work on her master's degree. Devon plans to work as a counselor.

Unapologetically Me

BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER SUPPORT GROUP



A compassionate, honest group for people who live with BPD to meet and empathize with one another.

You are not alone!



Meeting ID: 955 2819 8211
Passcode: MHA



609-652-3800



Unitedbywellness@mhanj.org



mhaac.info/ubw

This is a Group of United By Wellness: MHANJ's Virtual Wellness Center

Special thanks to
Devon
for her time and
dedication to
Unapologetically Me.

She is a volunteer
facilitator who
helped develop the
group.



Borderline Personality Disorder
Awareness Ribbon

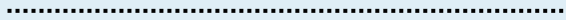


Bern's New Adventure

Moving on from Atlantic, but her legacy will endure

BY BETH WADE and CAROLYN QUINN

Bern, your Atlantic and statewide coworkers as well as a close-knit contingency of group members are going to miss your laugh, positive energy, and peer presence! We've watched you evolve from an inspirational and respected peer facilitator, to a group facilitator, and then Individuals Concerted in Effort, ICE, Program Manager.



In her early days with us, Bern successfully developed and nurtured a much-needed group for young adults called **Rising Minds**. That group is just one of her many enduring legacies. At the time we all marveled at her technology know-how that helped her launch Atlantic's first online group (pre-COVID), which was an impressive success.

Her other interest and talent – art – touched the groups because some of her work has been featured on our fliers, including **Rising Minds** and Atlantic's **Depression Group**. She's also a gifted singer who shared her talents on our social media and during a holiday event in December.

During the pandemic she very notably helped us transition all of our groups to the virtual world. That herculean effort ensured that our consumers had a continuity of services.

We are grateful that she accepted the job of program manager for ICE when the office reorganized. In another giant accomplishment, she worked on the super team who created the online wellness center, **United By Wellness** that provided 80+ virtual groups across the state.

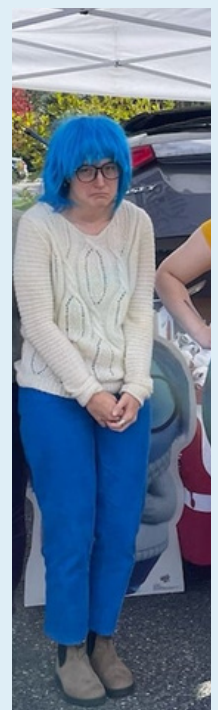
Of all her many abilities, one that is superior to her knack for technology is her people skills. Bern can see the best in everyone. She's a person who easily identifies a strength in another, then helps them see it in themselves, and believe in it. Some have become leaders in the peer community. As a facilitator, she's known as being a superior listener, someone wise beyond her years, and a person who puts others at ease. During her time at Atlantic, she expanded a base of group facilitators to record-breaking numbers, which speaks to her ability to motivate and inspire others.

Bern will be remembered as one of the women who started a group for those with **Borderline Personality Disorder** where nearly a dozen group members have found a safe space among peers who often feel isolated and misunderstood. Additional partnerships and projects with our interns have led to expanded services and some inspiring social media campaigns. She's provided consistent support and encouragement to the interns that have passed through Atlantic.

For these reasons and more, the words "honest," "considerate," "genuine" and "kind" all come to mind. With confidence, we can say that the culture she created will last and endure.

Among the peer community, her star shines brightly. We have been fortunate that her light illuminated so many existing and new paths here. We are proud to have walked with you, Bern.

We wish you well on your exciting new adventure in Colorado!



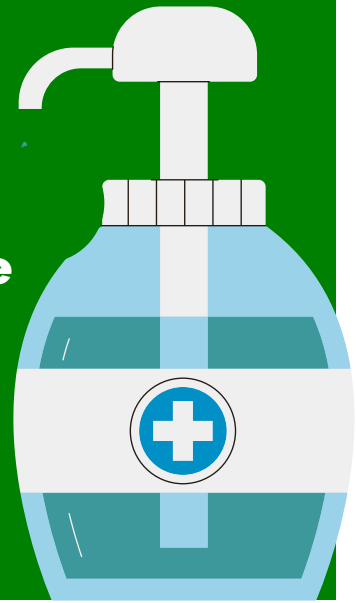
Photos: Bern's good-bye luncheon, a painting group, and Bern dressed up for Halloween as "Sadness" from Disney's Inside Out



Workplace Wellness following a return to the office

*How MHANJ is helping ease the mental stresses
locally and across the state*

BY BETH WADE
Public Relations Specialist



When workplaces reopened following the prolonged pandemic and a period of social unrest, some turned to MHANJ to provide much-needed programming, town hall meetings, and wellness workshops to prepare employees for the transition back to the workplace.

Important and necessary discussions about unmasking, managing family-work balance, and feeling conflicted about the return to an office environment came out of the work done by Community Educators like long-time, respected facilitator and award-winning public speaker Lynette Sheard.



Pictured: Lynette Sheard

Across the state, support was provided to a variety of employers such as the Associated Press, TEDx, AARP, NJ Performing Arts Center, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Carnegie Association and nearly a dozen others. Locally, the FAA William J. Hughes Technical Center in Egg Harbor Township called on MHA to help ease the transition. They are one of the largest employers in Atlantic County.

“Employers sought out external programming to talk about some difficult subject matter, the discomfort emotionally that many experienced over the past two years,” said Lynette, who is the Community Education Coordinator and the Director of the NJ Mental Health Players, NJMP. “It’s important for employers to provide a platform to discuss the emotional impact of change and acknowledge how uncomfortable it is for some.”

The presentation entitled Managing Pandemic Re-entry Anxiety is a part of the NJMP’s “Uncomfortable Change Series.”

Some employers, like the FAA, chose to offer virtual town hall forums to employees who were provided the option to submit questions in advance as well as during a live chat. Nearly 840 staff attended the virtual town hall.

During the town hall, she provided an overview of mental health and the emotional impact of change, tips on how to cope with anxiety, and mental health resources and support information.

Lynette’s work will continue there later this month when she returns to offer additional programming specific to a Black coalition of employees. She will be presenting a performance entitled “Taking off the Masks -Taking off the Real Mask – Break the Stigma of Mental Illness” that includes facts, information, a scenario/improvisational performance, and audience engagement/discussion with the players who remain in character.

The work of Lynette and the Mental Health Players has reached about 15,000 members of the workforce during the pandemic.

“The emotional landscape is enabling this sort of discussion and work to happen. What’s come out of this tumultuous and uncertain time period is an opportunity for people to feel OK to discuss mental health and its connection to everything,” said Lynette. “At the same time, technology is enabling MHANJ to do this work virtually and reach so many more people across the state.”

The Mental Health Players is one of the many Community Education Programs offered by the Mental Health Association. To learn more about how you can schedule a community presentation for your organization, please call 609-652-3800 ext. 307 or email vphillips@mhanj.org

For more information about programming provided by the Mental Health Players, use the QR code above or email lsheard@mhanj.org

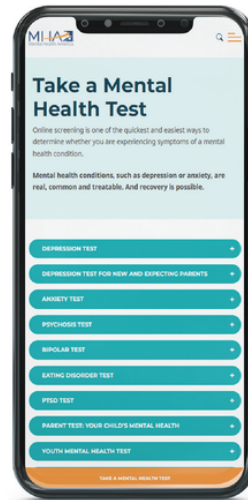
Acute Care Family Program serves

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

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

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

Help is a phone call away



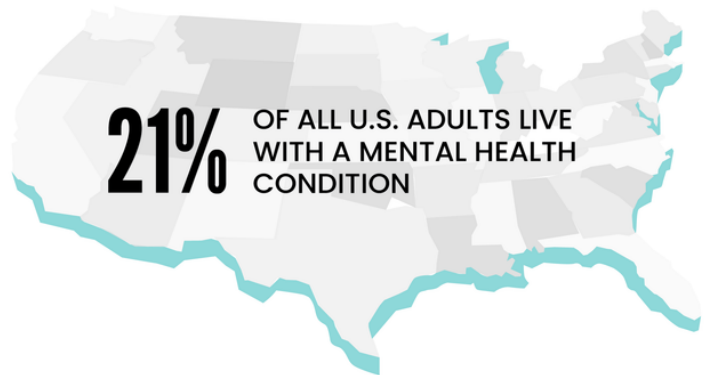
Feeling like something "isn't quite right"?

Taking a free, anonymous mental health screen at mhascreening.org is one of the quickest and easiest ways to determine if what you are experiencing might be signs of a mental health condition.



LEARN MORE
mhanational.org/may

FAST FACT:



STUDIES HAVE FOUND CHILDREN OF PARENTS WITH GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD) TO BE **2-6X AS LIKELY** AS OTHER CHILDREN TO RECEIVE A GAD DIAGNOSIS.

GREAT INFORMATION ONLINE FOR
Mental Health Awareness Month
mhanational.org/May

**MAY IS MENTAL
HEALTH MONTH**

TIME TO
GET

**BACK
TO
BASICS**

LEARN MORE
mhanational.org/may



**You'll find webinars, podcasts, blogs PLUS
info on public policy, resources, tools
and MORE**

TERMS TO KNOW



COPING SKILL:

a strategy to help you deal with difficult situations and reduce unpleasant emotions, thoughts, or behaviors.

PEER:

someone who shares the experience of living with a mental health condition and/or substance use disorder.

LIVED EXPERIENCE:

first-hand, personal experience dealing with a mental health or substance use challenge.

RISK FACTOR:

something that increases the chances of developing a condition.

STIGMA:

negative, judgmental, and/or discriminatory attitudes toward mental health challenges and those who live with them.

RECOVERY:

a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential.



THE SPECIAL "I-TEAM" SUPPLEMENTING MHA ATLANTIC PROGRAMS



Pictured above are MHA Atlantic interns: Ashleigh Zappala, Yvonne Tran, Brendan Deal, Nimra Khurram, Emily McCall, Dena Tartaro, and Adam Erskine

From providing programming at boarding homes to co-facilitating groups and creating a variety of presentations for the family program, the current Stockton and Rutgers interns, (affectionately called our "I-Team"), have been instrumental in supporting the mission and work here.

In addition to that list of accomplishments, some special side projects, like one related to Crisis Intervention Training, CIT, and another related to veterans, were possible because of an intern who is current law enforcement and former military. Another side project, a self-care toolkit for school guidance counselors, was developed by a group of interns and shared with all the districts in the county.

Still other interns worked one-on-one with consumers receiving services through the Peer Outreach Support/Community Advocates Team.

"We are fortunate to have such hardworking and passionate interns as a part of our MHA Family. The excitement and creativity they brought to the projects they took on shined through," said Carolyn Quinn, Community Engagement and Wellness Programs Director.

During recent months, the work and commitment of the interns helped Atlantic maintain services while three staff went out on medical leave, she said.

The interns were honored May 11 during a luncheon at Celina's in Galloway. We congratulate and thank each of them for the dedication and enthusiasm they showed toward their work here.

Continue to make us proud! We look forward to seeing what you will do in your respective fields and future endeavors.

Well Done

Dena Tartaro is graduating from Rutgers with a Masters Degree in Social Work. She facilitates the Adult Survivors of Child Abuse group and will stay on as a volunteer post-internship. She also worked on POST, IFSS, co-facilitated two cohorts of a Healthy Living group with Jewish Family Services, and was trained as a Crisis Counselor to facilitate a COVID support group through a FEMA grant.

Emily McCall will be graduating from the Stockton University with a Masters Degree in Social Work. Emily created several presentations for the Family Program, provided the group "After Lunch," assisted POST/Community Advocate clients, and offered groups in the boarding home program.

Adam Erskine will graduate from Stockton with a BA in Social Work. He co-trained in CIT for the law enforcement segments; worked on a project for veterans, and provided several groups through the boarding home program.

Ashleigh Zappala is a senior at Stockton where she studies psychology with concentrations in mental health and empirical research. She co-facilitated the LGBTQ group; worked with POST/Community Advocate clients; helped to develop the Self-Care Toolkit for school guidance counselors; provided a group in the boarding home program; and developed some educational social media posts during Women's History Month that related to standouts in mental health.

Brendan Deal is studying psychology at Stockton. He developed a medication workshop for the Family Program; created and facilitated a trauma support group; and offered a support group through the boarding home outreach program.

Nimra Khurram is studying psychology at Stockton. She developed a group "Stopping Stigma" offered through United By Wellness and provided a support group through Boarding Home Outreach. She developed and presented "Understanding psychotropic medications and their side effects" to IFSS. In addition, she developed video reels for May Mental Health Awareness Month and created a TikTok for MHA.

Yvonne Tran is studying psychology with a concentration in mental health at Stockton. She co-facilitated a meditation group; supported clients in the POST/Community Advocate program; assisted with Point In Time; created social media posts during Women's History Month related to standouts in mental health; and provided a group through Boarding Home Outreach.

Community Bulletin Board

Local Library Activities

DIY Adult Craft

Wed., May 25 at 6:30 pm Hammonton Branch
Register 609 561-2264

Mindfulness Meditation

Saturday, May 14 & 28 at 2 pm Northfield Library
Register mdillon@nflibrary.org

Trivia

Monday, May 16 at 6 pm. Northfield Library.
Team or solo. Registration required 609-646-4476

*View the complete calendar at atlanticlibrary.org
Click on "Calendar of Events"*



Admission and
Parking
are always free
*Live on Facebook
Sundays 10 am*

Green Fair

Eco-friendly event with vendors,
exhibitors, sustainable food sales,
demos, recycling, live performances,
animal groups
Oakcrest High School
Saturday, May 21
10 am to 2 pm

Mayfest

Crafters, vendors,
food court, music

Smithville
Sat, May 14 & Sunday, May 15
10 am to 5 pm

Memorial Day at Resorts, AC

5,000 beach ball drop, DJ, games,
strolling entertainers
Friday, May 27 9 am - 5 pm



Memorial Day Parade

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

Monday, May 30 at 9 am

NEW

In-person meeting options

In addition to the online groups meeting throughout the week, MHA Atlantic has transitioned several meetings to in-person. More will be added in the coming months.

Prior to the pandemic, groups were offered around the county in community centers, church meeting spaces, and in offices of community partners. In keeping with that original model, the current in-person groups are being held at a variety of locations.

Because the meetings are not offered in MHA Atlantic Office meeting space, the COVID protocols vary by location. Staff and group members follow the guidelines put in place at each location, which can change in accordance with the CDC and the number of local cases. As a result, staff suggest that individuals carry a mask in the event it is required.

“It’s an exciting new phase to be offering in-person groups again. We are welcoming back familiar faces and introducing ourselves in the community to new people as well,” said Vicki Phillips, Executive Director. “As we all know, the pandemic placed stressors on everyone, and mental health services are in need now more than ever.”

Dozens of other meetings are offered online throughout the week through the MHANJ United By Wellness Center. Interested participants who wish to register and receive a daily newsletter with details on the groups can call 609-652-3800 or email unitedbywellness@mhanj.org.



In-person groups

Mental Wellness Group meets Thursdays at 9 am at The All Roads Recovery Center, Pleasantville

Adult Survivors of Child Abuse meets 6:30 pm on the first and third Tuesdays at Atlantic Cape Family Service Organization, Northfield

Got Stress? Meets at 11 am on the first and third Fridays at Oceanside II Family Success Center, Atlantic City

*NOTE: Group moves to Thursdays starting in June

We're still collecting submissions for
our May online project
You're not too late!



Notes of Kindness

IN HONOR OF MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH WE ARE SPREADING THE MESSAGE THAT KINDNESS COUNTS BY ASKING FOR NOTES OF THANKS! SHARE A TIME THAT SOMEONE SHOWED YOU GREAT KINDNESS AND WHAT IT MEANT TO YOU!

- Finish the sentence starters below.
- Keep responses 1-2 sentences
- Use your name or remain anonymous
- Add an image if able
- Submissions will be shared online

I NEVER FORGOT WHEN...

IT HAS HELPED ME IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS...

IT IS MEANINGFUL TO ME BECAUSE...



Send your responses or questions to mhaac@mhanj.org

This is a Program of the Mental Health Association in Atlantic County
www.MHAAC.info 609-652-3800

