



MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Updates and Information from the Atlantic County Office

National Family Caregivers Month

In the “No Casserole Club”

The forgotten caregivers

BY BETH WADE
Public Relations Specialist

There’s an imaginary line drawn across the threshold of a front door. You “see” that line when no one arrives with a covered dish after your spouse or child is admitted to the hospital for a psychiatric disorder.

The neighbor downstairs or down the street received a delivery of comfort food when word circulated that a person in the household got COVID, cancer, or another upsetting diagnosis.

Bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, major depressive disorder and other serious mental health conditions don’t typically send the neighbors into a cooking frenzy.

A dear friend of mine explained to me her experience in the “No Casserole Club.” She’s in a tight women’s social circle who has been meeting for years once a month every month to chat about vacations, their children, books, life.

Her son experienced a psychiatric break in his 20s and was hospitalized. She recalls that the friend gathering was really hard to attend during that time. “Beth, I’ve known these women for years, and as I sat at the table, no one asked about him.” Similarly, family members who were loving, thoughtful people didn’t call to check on how he was doing.



She’s cried about that from time to time. Today she offers them grace. “People don’t know what to say,” she summarized to me, “so they don’t say anything.”

Her son is in recovery, receiving treatment, finished college, and working. As for my friend, she’s a comfort to others, in fact she’s a “go-to person” for several other mothers in her town where adult children experience a serious mental health challenge.

In a separate but related conversation, a coworker explained a term to me that I (continued on p. 2)

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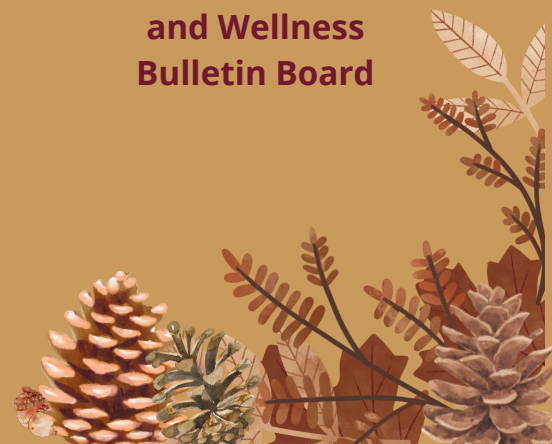
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Resource of the Month

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didn't know existed, "NAMI Mommy." It's a derogatory term that refers to the women who go to support groups. (Typed in a whispering voice... You know, the moms who are to blame for their child's mental illness.)

According to a growing and well-documented body of research, a significant percent of people inherit genes for mental illness – just like cancer, diabetes, or red hair runs in families. Some mental illness is a result of a brain injury, a fall or car accident, for example. Other experts attribute mental illness to experiencing trauma. Environmental factors, such as living in a neighborhood plagued with crime, can trigger for mental illness. Extreme stress at college is associated with the onset of symptoms.

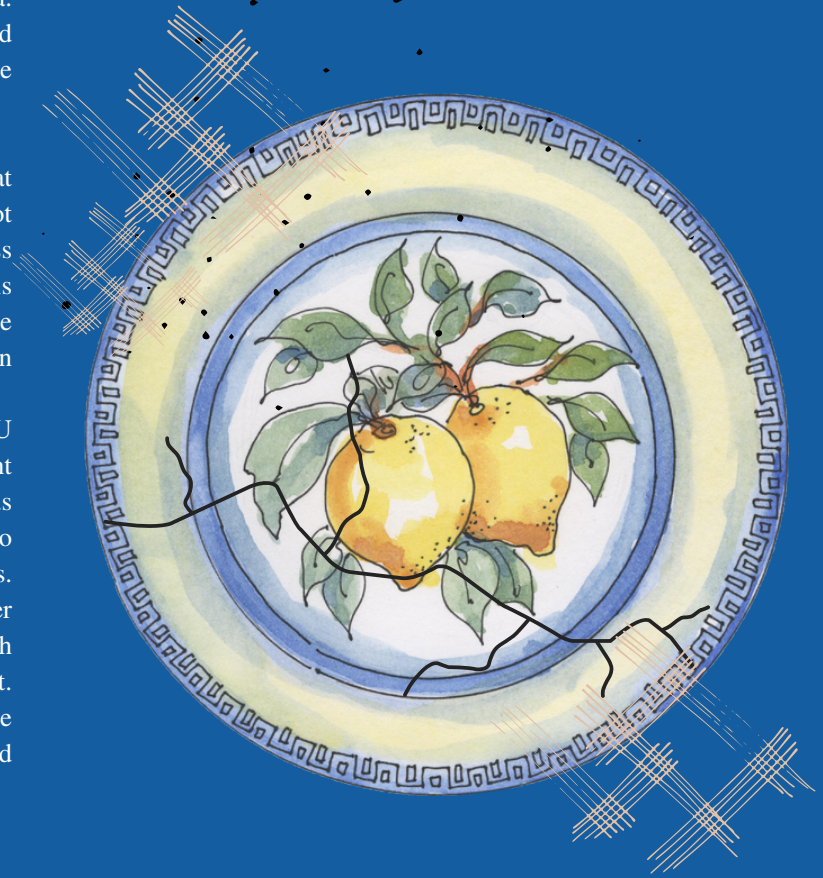
Yet, "NAMI Mommy."

So here it is -- National Caregivers Month. I'd venture to say that family members with a loved one living with mental illness are not at the top of the list in November, not even the top 5. I'd guess people think of the elderly couple – a husband taking care of his wife who lives with dementia. People read "caregiver" and see the parent of a child who battles a disability or physical illness that can be seen (all the people who get casseroles.)

Today we shout like Oprah giving away cars on her show – YOU SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN A CASSEROLE! Being in the front seat of the rollercoaster experience of a family member's serious mental illness is really hard. Not knowing when and if it's going to end is hard. That includes learning what the illness means. Discovering that a person's difficult disposition wasn't a character flaw or choice but a mental illness. Wrestling with the mental health system. Watching others living under the roof unravel or disconnect. The painful pang of anxiety when the phone rings. Seeing the imaginary line being drawn in the neighborhood or among extended family.

It's. Freaking. Hard.

I've interviewed a mother who drove 10 hours to a university across the country after her son made alarming social media posts. I remember talking to a husband describing the scene of police cars at his home when his ill wife called to say she was being held hostage. One mother told me the story of the winter night when her son disappeared on a train while following the delusion that he was a rapper.



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**An estimated
27 percent of adults who
identify as caregivers
help someone with a
mental illness.**

Source: Mental Health America

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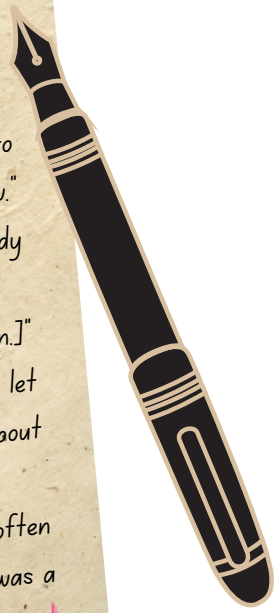
How many people thought to send a meal to these families?

Today we serve the following words like a traditional “blessing” that is spoken before special meals. Let us all acknowledge the patience, caring, love, nights of lost sleep, and many hours of reading or talking to doctors. We recognize the hardships of lost work hours, lost friendships, strained family ties. We honor the tears, the worry, the uncertainty, the shame, the embarrassment, the stigma.

I serve these words with the same grace that my friend extends to the people who didn't know how to talk to her when her son was in the deepest, darkest throws of his illness. (See “Dear Readers” on page 3.)

We serve these words because it's National Caregivers Month and you are among an elite group bound by this common, heartbreaking experience that sometimes delivers slivers of hope and miracles. But no casserole. ●

Note: NAMI uses the casserole reference in its Family to Family class



Dear Readers,

Though it's hard, we have to speak up for ourselves. If we stay silent, no one is going to know, learn, or understand. I have often said, "People don't know what they don't know." Telling our story helps to break stigma. It's up to us. If you don't tell your story, somebody else is happy to tell it for you -- and it won't be accurate.

One day talking over the fence, I said to my neighbor, "You don't ask about [my son]." She paused. She thought asking about him would upset me, she said. I told her that I'd let her know if I wasn't up to talking about him, but that it hurt that she'd not asked about him. That moment changed everything. I never had to repeat it -- she understood.

That dear, dear neighbor became the one person who would pack my lunch. She'd often drop off dinners so we'd have an easy meal on hard days -- and she knew every day was a hard day. She was an absolute light in the middle of darkness.



A tribute to great neighbors like "R.O." who listened, cared, asked, and "made a casserole."

Resource of the Month Spotlight: Family Service Organization



This month's feature is on an agency that provides support, education, and advocacy to families who have children with emotional, behavioral, developmental, substance abuse and/or mental health challenges.

Atlantic County Family Service Organization, ACFSO, provides support, education and advocacy to families who have children with emotional, behavioral, developmental, substance abuse and/or mental health challenges. Program staff, called Family Support Partners, are peers, which means they are parents or caregivers with lived experience and have navigated the children's system of care.

Families served by ACFSO are engaged with the Care Management Organization (CMO), Cape Atlantic Integrated Network for Kids, and provide peer support. Family Support Partners partner with the parents/caregivers to attend meetings with the CMO and schools, go to court, and provide education and resources. They meet with parents/caregivers face to face at convenient times and locations for the family.

"We let the families know that they are not alone. In keeping with our mission of *strengthening families for life*, we provide resources to help the family meet their concerns and develop skills to become more successful and to manage their needs moving forward," said Rob Schober, director.

Staff at ACFSO also advocate to ensure families receive needed services and are being heard during their journey. Families connected to the agency are invited to participate in other programs, such as support meetings in both Atlantic and Cape May Counties, which are during the day and in the evening. Additionally, they host family friendly events such as outdoor movies, picnics and more.

Another part of the agency involves programs for the youth. For example, a Youth Partnership program (for ages 13-21); a Junior Youth Partnership for youth who are 9-12; as well as a Young Ladies Leadership Partnership. These initiatives assist youth with behavioral/mental health concerns to support each other, develop confidence, discover their strengths and creative spirit. They also "give back" and complete volunteer work for the benefit of the community, while educating the community about mental health concerns affecting youth.

ACFSO is funded by the NJ Department of Children and Families. Services are free. They serve all families regardless of language. To learn more visit www.acfamsupport.org or call 609-485-0575. The office is located at 950 Tilton Road, #108, in Northfield.

GUESS
Who?
B A B Y
PICTURE GAME

Cutie
Pie



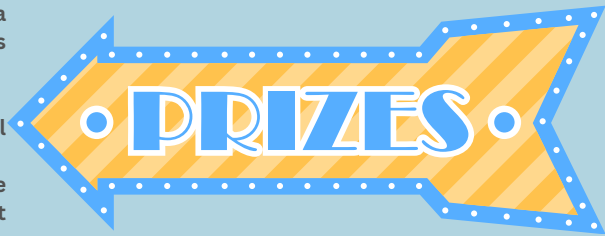
Use our website (mhaac.info) and use your amateur detective skills to try and figure out which MHA Atlantic staff member this is! Click on "About Us" and "Team" to see us as grown-ups!

(Vicki's idea! Note: she doesn't take bribes)



Each month, we'll show you a new baby face. Game ends when we run out of staff pics.

Everyone who participates will be put in a drawing to win a t-shirt. Drawing date TBA. The person who guesses the most correctly wins a gift card.

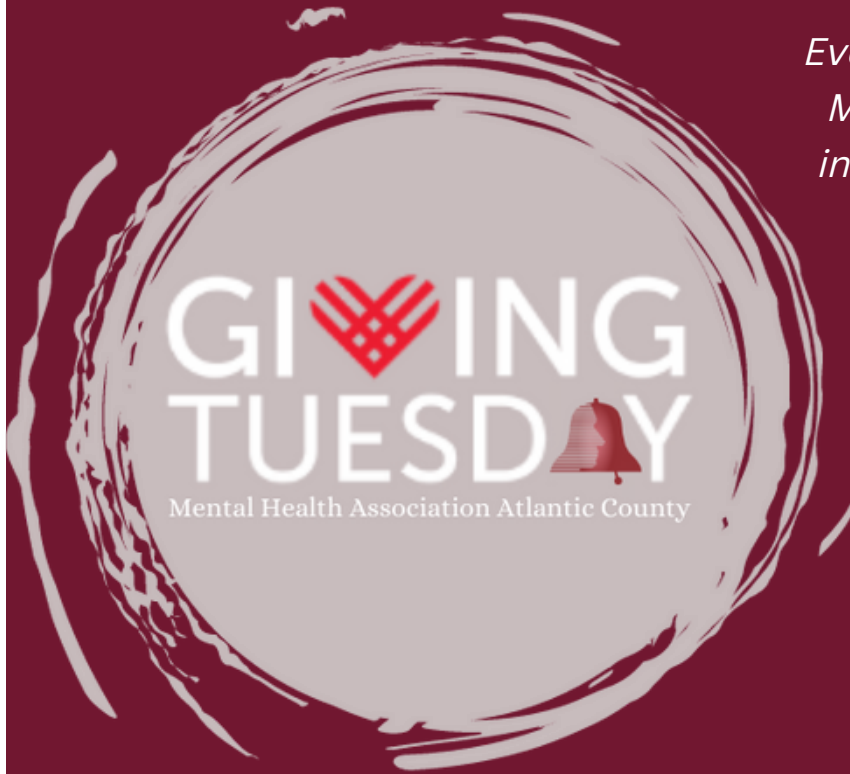


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**Who was Baby November?
That's Linda Bastedo, Family
Advocate!**



*Join the global generosity movement and
celebrate nonprofits, like us*



*Every donation supports the mission of
MHA Atlantic to improve the lives of
individuals affected by mental illness
and their and family members.*

Thank You



To make a donation,
scan the QR Code
or use the link below

Click here for the link

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Cape Atlantic Caregiver Coalition


Caregivers can find support, information, and resources as well as training and wellness opportunities through a group of volunteers from a variety of specialized fields related to caregiving. All members of the coalition are professionals working toward improving the quality of life for residents serving in the important role of caregiving.

The Cape Atlantic Caregiver Coalition is made up of more than 90 agencies, nonprofits, businesses, and organizations. Because of the wide range of backgrounds of its membership, this group serves caregivers who support a loved one across the entire lifespan -- from infants to seniors.

The Cape Atlantic Caregiver Coalition is active in the community through events, fairs, online presentations, and support groups.

**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

*Atlantic is one of 13
counties in New Jersey
with a designated group of
volunteers that provide a
variety of supports,
resources, and referrals to
caregivers.*

For more information, call 609-652-3800
or CapeAtlanticCaregivers@gmail.com.
Follow us on Facebook 

Wellness Bulletin Board

Recycling Day Open House



Saturday, Nov. 18 1-4 pm

Recycling crafts, recycling games,
art from recycled materials, tips on
composting, touch-a-truck

ACUA
6700 Delilah Road, EHT

Drum Circle

Thursday, November 16
at 5 pm
Absecon Library



Pumpkin Centerpieces

Sunday, Nov. 19 1-2:30 pm
Noyes Arts Garage
Atlantic City
BYOP (Bring your own pumpkin)
Register



Winter Concert Atlantic Youth Orchestra

Sunday, Nov. 26 at 4 pm
Free Admission

ACCC, Atlantic Cape Community College
Walter Edge Hall
Building C
Use parking lot #1 or #2

Gary Erbe Art Exhibit - trompe l'oeil "trick the eye"
609-626-3840

At Kramer Hall, Hammonton. No cost.
(30 Front Street/part of Stockton University)





Ways to Cultivate Gratitude

Keep a gratitude jar. When you think of something or experience something, write it down. Open up the papers and read them as often as you like.

Call, email, or write to a person and tell them why you're grateful for them (a family member, friend, coworker, or neighbor)

Start a gratitude journal. Some journals provide prompts.

Collect change - for each coin you drop in the container, think of a reason you are grateful. When it's full, use it to do something nice for yourself.

Gratitude meditation

Gratitude rock or another visual cue (Carry a small trinket or place a visual reminder somewhere you'll see it often. When you see it, pause to remember a gratitude)

Take photos. You can reflect back on them or create a collage.

Exchange gratitude aloud with a loved one. Giving and receiving gratitude can benefit both of you!



Intensive Family Support Services program hosts online family support group meetings
2nd and 4th Thursdays at 10 am
AND
3rd Thursday 7 pm

Call 609-517-8614
or email
gchristian@mhanj.org
for details and to
receive a link

**You are not
alone**

Finding Time For You



Caregiving is a great act of love...and also can be a great challenge. Caring for yourself is one of the most important—and most often forgotten—things you can do as a caregiver.

“Time Out”

Caring for your own physical and mental health will help you take better care of your loved one. Continue to go to your own doctor appointments and other personal commitments. Do things that you enjoy by yourself, with your loved one, and other family or friends. Taking a few minutes for yourself everyday will help you to recharge and help more effectively. You may feel selfish by taking time out for yourself, but doing so will help both you and your loved one in the long run.

Get Enough Sleep

Finding enough time to sleep or sleeping without worrying is often hard for caregivers. Not getting enough sleep commonly leads to making poor decisions. If you are having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or feeling rested when you wake up. Find tips from National Sleep Foundation [thensf.org](https://www.sleepfoundation.org).

Exercise

Exercise not only keeps you physically well but also improves your mental health. Those who are caregivers commonly feel they do not have time to exercise because they put their family or friend’s needs before theirs. Be creative in your workout. It could be as simple as parking further away in a parking lot or planning a time to go to a gym. For more simple and creative ways to increase physical activity with a tight schedule.

Balance

Finding balance in your life is especially hard when you are a caregiver. By yourself and with your loved one, determine boundaries you will set in regards to ways you can and cannot help. This will help you to maintain control of your life and will help your loved one be active in their recovery process. As you say no to helping in certain ways, it is common to feel guilty, but there is nothing wrong with caring for yourself.

Get Help

Remember that therapists, counselors, and also support groups are not only for the individual with a mental illness. Seeking professional help will help you to be more aware of how you are doing, feel supported, and get answers to questions you may have while caregiving.

NEWS BRIEFS



Holiday Programming for Grief

The Cape Atlantic Caregivers Coalition will present “Managing Grief During the Holidays.” The content includes information on the different types of grief and incorporate some creative strategies on how to manage grief during the holiday season.

The presentation is scheduled at 2:30 pm on Thursday, Nov. 16 at the Hammonton Library.

The Mental Health Association in Atlantic County is a founding member of the Cape Atlantic Caregivers Coalition.

Holiday Drive



MHA Atlantic programming provides groups, recreation, social visits and supports to residents of seven boarding homes throughout the year. During the holidays, staff organize an annual drive in order to provide a gift bag to residents.

The annual Holiday Boarding Home Outreach is currently collecting toiletries such as body wash, soap, shampoo, conditioner, shaving cream, deodorant, body lotion, lip balm, toothbrushes, floss, and toothpaste. More men than women are currently living in our county’s boarding homes.

If you’d like to contribute toiletries or a gift card to the drive, contact kwilliams@mhanj.org or 609-652-3800.



Seth Edwards and Yvonne Tran unload hand-knitted hats generously donated by Linda’s Hats for Hope, one of the groups that supports our annual holiday drive.

National news and mental health: resource

In response to the humanitarian crisis and global conflicts, Mental Health America created an online resource guide with articles, tips, and resources. Among the featured sections are: "Racism, Discrimination, and Identity-Based Hate," "Dealing with Traumatic Online and News Content," and "Grief and Anger In Times of Conflict."

View the full guide on mhanational.org/global.

Gaming Activity for Veterans

A group of military veterans has started a gaming group for veterans who live with PTSD. Currently a Dungeons and Dragons campaign is offered every Wednesday. Participants meet at the VFW in Hammonton, NJ.

“Veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life often struggle with that transition,” said one of the organizers, Adam Erskine. “Going from being a part of a team and going on deployments to civilian life is difficult to process. Through roleplaying games, you can still be part of a team (of adventurers) that complete missions (adventures). Through role playing games, veterans can find that commonality.”

Studies have shown that role playing games are an effective therapy for individuals suffering with PTSD, anxiety, and depression.

If you are a veteran and are interested in exploring roleplaying games as a form of therapy, please reach out to adamerskineiii@gmail.com. No charge; no experience necessary.

Does someone in your family live with a mental health disorder?

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

Acute Care Family Program

**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

Help is a phone call away



United by Wellness

United by Wellness (UBW) is a statewide virtual wellness center, sponsored by the Mental Health Association in New Jersey (MHANJ), where peers offer skills and tools for recovery to people living with mental health and/or substance use disorder(s).

- **Discover a sense of community in a virtual atmosphere**
- **Find support**
- **Peer-led groups for anyone and everyone**
- **80+ FREE groups, M-F and weekends**

How to Become a UBW Member:

Register at www.surveymonkey.com/r/8VXP2K8

Call: 609-652-3800 Email: wellnesscenter@mhanj.org



WWW.MHAAC.INFO/UBW

UNITEDBYWELLNESS@MHANJ.ORG

[609-652-3800](tel:609-652-3800)

Individuals Concerned in Effort
MHANJ- Atlantic County Office
4 East Jimmie Leeds Road Suite 8
Galloway NJ 08205
Phone: 609-652-3800
Fax: 609-652-3801

Journey to Wellness
MHANJ- Ocean County Office
25 South Shore Drive
Toms River, NJ 08753
Phone: 732-244-0940
Fax: 732-244-0948

Esperanza
MHANJ- Union County Office
673 Morris Ave. Ste. 100
Springfield, NJ 07081
Phone: 908-810-1001
Fax: 973-218-0636