

Fall Edition: October 2020

# The Voice



A letter from the Board of Directors President

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
in Niagara County

**Greetings! I would like to introduce myself as the newly elected President of the Board of Directors at the Mental Health Association in Niagara County, Inc. I have served proudly on the Board since 2013, first as a member, and as Treasurer and Vice President, respectively. I am a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and have been practicing in the Buffalo area for seven years. I am passionate about bringing mental health services and awareness to our community, now more than ever. I joined the MHA Board of Directors as a graduate student at the University at Buffalo. My main goal was to contribute to the expansion of vital services in Niagara County. While working as a new counselor, I noticed that there was a need for more mental health resources in the area. Organizations like the MHA are critical to ensuring that everyone can access additional supports, such as therapeutic groups, respite care, peer support, and education.**

**I hope to emulate the dedicated leadership of our former President of the Board of Directors, Becky Wydysh, who served on the Board for more than a decade, and as President from 2013 until 2020. Alongside the entire MHA and Board of Directors, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Becky for her years of service and commitment to mental health care in Niagara County.**

**Covid-19 has brought unprecedented changes to our world and our day-to-day lives. Mental health has come to the forefront of concern, and it is our mission at the MHA to continue to reach those in our community who need support. Our dedicated staff has worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to ensure that services are reaching those in need. We are excited to welcome several new staff members to our team, including Amyjo Blackwell, peer advocate at NFMCM, Delilah Roman, peer specialists for Mobile Transition, Alyssa Heitman as the Youth Social Inclusion Specialist, and Kristina Connolly as the Adult Social Inclusion Specialist for Compeer Niagara. Lastly, Mara Scive has been promoted from her previous role as peer specialist for Mobile Transition to Coordinator of In-Home Respite, Summer Schebell has taken on additional responsibility at Hope House, and Rhiannon O'Shea has been promoted to Peer Wellness Coach at the Trott Access Center. Best luck to everyone in their new roles!**

**We appreciate and value the support of our community members, which is vital to our continued growth. I am proud to share that our programs continue to grow and flourish.**

**Be safe and be well,**

**Emily Shields  
MHA Board of Directors President**

# 2020 MHANC Board Scholarship recipient

**Thomas Christensen**  
PhD, NCC, LMHC  
Executive Director  
ext. 310

**Mary Ann Scales**  
Finance/HR Director  
ext. 302

**Crystal Hites**  
Peer Activities Director  
ext. 311

**Tara Porter**  
Compeer Niagara  
Director  
ext. 307

**Alyssa Heitman**  
Compeer Niagara Adult  
Social Inclusion  
Specialist  
ext. 303

**JOHN DOE**  
Compeer Niagara Youth  
Social Inclusion  
Specialist  
ext.

**Mara Scive**  
In-Home Respite  
Coordinator  
ext. 313

**Danielle Conlan**  
Community Education &  
Referral Coordinator  
ext. 309

**Kathy Kephart**  
Legal Aid

**Congratulations to Diega Ciraoło on receiving the 2020 MHANC Board Scholarship! Diega, graduated from Niagara Wheatfield High School in 2020 and is currently a Freshman at Niagara University studying Psychology. She hopes to become a counselor and serve others in her community. We wish her the best of luck!**



*Joel Grundy: Treasurer, Diega Ciraoło, Ryan Parisi: Board Member*

# Thank you United Way!

United Way of Greater Niagara is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of people in Niagara County by addressing critical human needs. The organization is unique in that they collaborate with 29 partner agencies, including the Mental Health Association in Niagara County, to affect positive changes in Niagara County.

85 cents out of every dollar donated to United Way goes to programs/ services who help people. Every bit of help from United Way of Greater Niagara is greatly appreciated by the MHA! With their help we are able to provide free mental health education to the Niagara County community.



## The Poinsettia & Wreath sale is back!

This is a great deal for BEAUTIFUL festive pieces and proceeds go towards helping the MHA provide high quality services to the Niagara County community.



Order forms are included in this newsletter and are due Wednesday, November 18th between 8:30am-4:00pm.  
*We are always grateful for your support!*

Need to find information about resources/services in Niagara County call the Mental Association in Niagara County, Inc. **HELPLINE**

**716-433-5432**

Compeer Niagara is looking for volunteers that are interested in improving other's quality of life through FREINDSHIP!

Information can be found at [www.mhanc.com](http://www.mhanc.com) or call Tara Porter, Compeer Niagara Director

# **Ripples**

## **By Crystal Hites**

*Peer Services Director, NYS Certified Peer Specialist*

**A while ago I had a peer express a great deal of frustration over feelings of worthlessness, because they were no longer able to work and felt they were no longer making an impact on the world. This is a complaint I hear frequently. Disability can take a great toll on self-esteem and agency.**

**Regardless of one's ability to work, there is still a great deal of opportunity to impact the world in a positive way. When I took on the position, Director of Peer Activities, I accepted that I would be working with patients far less than I used to. Initially, I was bothered because it felt like I wasn't making as big of a difference. I wasn't able to help those in crisis as much due to the change in position tasks. But then I upped the ante and focused on training my team to be as educated and skilled as possible when they work with peers. Through the excellent work they do, I now affect more people at a time than I would have on my own. My investment in their skills has a ripple effect. Though I work with far fewer people in a day, I actually help more people through my team!**

**The same can be true of someone who is no longer able to do work they once found meaningful. But there are many ways to make a positive impact! The way we act towards others can have a major impact. A smile shared may break a bad mood. A bit of wisdom given may set a person on a new path in life. A positive attitude towards others while waiting in line might help others exercise patience. These small acts of kindness make a difference. Further, the people you impact with kindness will go on to impact others and so on.**

**So though you may only act in positive, meaningful ways to a small number of people now, those people will go on to impact others based on how you impacted them, and you will still truly have a large and meaningful impact on the world. It's the ripple effect! You have power- use it!**

**We provide FREE mental health education services on a variety of topics to all Niagara County groups, clubs, organizations, and schools. All you need to do is ask!**

**For Information call Danielle Conlan, CE&R Coordinator**

**In-Home Respite is always accepting applications for employees!**

**Work as many or as little hours as you want helping families in your community.**

**Interested?**

**Just call Mara Scive, In-Home Respite Coordinator**

# An Update from Compeer Niagara

Hello Everyone,

I wanted to thank the Grigg-Lewis Foundation on behalf of myself, the MHA, and Compeer Niagara program participants for sponsoring the annual Grigg-Lewis Workership program. I know the goal of the workership is to allow non-profits to expand summer programming, which benefits the community at large; our Grigg-Lewis intern allowed us to do that ten-fold!

Compeer Niagara's programming was greatly impacted by the pandemic and required us to "dig deep" in order to provide service delivery that our participants were voicing they very much needed. In fact, one participant had not left their home in 92 days until myself and the intern, Sierra, were able to step in and provide the support he needed to feel safe in the community

Sierra hosted small group activities that had regular/ongoing attendance. This allowed us to keep our service delivery numbers in the same area as pre-COVID19. Sierra was also able to assist in non-direct service delivery as well, ensuring our program as a whole could run smoothly and serve as many people as possible.

Again, thank you so much for assisting us and our Niagara County community members to do and be our best during this time.

Best Wishes & Good Vibes,

Tara Porter  
Compeer Niagara Director

## *A Special Thanks to Becky Wydysz!*

The MHA staff wants to thank Becky for her decade of dedication, time, effort, and service! We are wishing her the best of luck in this next chapter. We are positive that it will be a great one. Thank you!



Joel Grundy: Treasurer, Beck Wydysz, Emily Shields: President

# Recognizing The Signs + Knowing What To Do: Suicide Awareness

## Signs could include, but are not limited to...

- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose.
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain.
- Giving sentimental possessions away.
- Extreme changes in behavior.
- Avoiding or canceling plans for the future for no apparent reason.

## Risk Factors could be, but are not limited to...

- Mental health conditions
- Life/environmental stressors
- Previous suicide attempts
- History of trauma

## To help someone having thoughts/feelings of suicide you can...

- Check for an emergency: is this person in immediate danger or need of medical assistance? This may include asking "Do you have a plan to complete suicide?"
- If there does not appear to be an emergency, listen in a non-judgmental manner.
- Give reassurance and support. It is important that they know they are not alone.
- Encourage them to seek professional help. Resources are provided below.

## If you are having thoughts/feelings of suicide...

- Call one of the resources listed below. They are trained professionals and are there to help you 24/7.
- If you don't want to call a crisis line, call a best friend, family member, or any loved one that you trust. Get connected...you're never alone!
- Try to refocus yourself. Take life one minute or one task at a time until you feel grounded.
- If you have a plan, call 911 right away for immediate help/services. You deserve it!

## Resources include, but are not limited to...

- Niagara County Crisis Services: 716-285-3515
- Text Services: TEXT "MHA" to 741741
- For emergencies: 911
- National Suicide Prevention Line: 800-273-8255
- Trevor Lifeline: 1-866-488-7386
- Trevor Support Center for LGBTQ+ Youth: [thetrevorproject.org/resources](http://thetrevorproject.org/resources)

# **The Mental Health Association is now able to provide *Mental Health First Aid Training!***

For more information or to schedule a training call Danielle Conlan, Community Education & Information Referral Coordinator or email [dconlan@mhanc.com](mailto:dconlan@mhanc.com)



*\*Groups can be a minimum of 8*

*\*Cost is finalized and given after a request is submitted*

## **MHA Support Groups**

### ***Depression & Anxiety Support Group***

*Every 1st & 3rd Thursday of  
every month*

*Group 1 4:30pm – 5:15pm*

*Group 2 5:20pm-6:05pm*

### ***Grief Support Group***

*Every 2nd & 4th Thursday of  
every month*

*4:30pm – 5:15pm*

**Location: 36 Pine St. Lockport, NY 14094**

*\*Masks and social distancing are required*

Please RSVP by calling Crystal Hites, Peer Activities Director



**Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Lockport, NY 14094  
Permit NO. 453**

36 Pine Street  
Lockport, NY 14094

Office: (716)433-3780  
HELPLINE: (716)433-5432  
www.mhanc.com



@MHANiagara



@MHANiagaraCounty

The Mission of The Mental Health Association in Niagara County, Inc. is to promote mental wellness by sponsoring and implementing advocacy, education and community service programs.

### **Executive Board**

Executive Director: Thomas Christensen,  
PhD, NCC, LMHC  
Board President: Emily Shields  
Board Vice President: Katherine Zunner  
Secretary: Alix Hutchison  
Treasurer: Joel Grundy

### **Board Members**

Brian Bloom  
Kristen Braunscheidel  
Sarah Mack  
Ryan Parisi  
Robert Richards



The Mental Health Association in Niagara County, Inc. is funded by the New York State Office of Mental Health, the Niagara County Department of Mental Health, the United Way of Greater Niagara, grants, memberships and voluntary contributions.