



May, 2010

The Mental Health Association works with community partners to advocate for solutions that will improve the lives of people living with mental illness. MHA works with public policy leaders, service providers, researchers, advocates, consumers, and educators to providing the latest news and information about mental health and wellness. Among the priorities of the Mental Health Association are:

- **Increasing understanding** about mental health issues among all residents of the county to reduce the stigma of mental illness. Understanding the racial and ethnic disparities in access to and treatment of mental illness.
- **Countywide mental health system capacity-building** that will lead to more coordinated care delivery systems and patient centered care among all providers of mental health services, including independent practitioners, primary care and mental health clinics, hospitals, food and shelter providers, prisons and jails, employers, and educators.
- **Partnership program development.** MHA works with a variety of community partners to implement targeted strategies to address critical community mental health needs.
- **Increasing assistance and support to special populations** such as caregivers, veterans and their families, older adults, children and families, populations who are reentering society, specific ethnic/racial groups, rural populations, and more.
- **Including mental health issues** in the Health Care Reform and other policy discussions.
- **Improving mental health wellness** support and access to information and referral resources for all in the community.

Older Adults Initiatives

Older adults has long been a focus of our work in a variety of programs. The Webster H. Hurley Endowment from Retirement Research has been used to support a variety of efforts over the last two years. Below is an overview of our programming that is related to older adults. The attached spreadsheet indicates how the money was used to support these efforts.

Listen to Children (Since 1997)

MHA has provided opportunities for many older adults to mentor school age children. Children need a caring adult to listen to them when they need someone to talk to. Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, children can't get the attention they need at home. Listen to Children uses trained volunteers in the elementary and middle school setting to provide confidential one-on-one listening sessions with children who have been identified by their teachers as needing extra help due to family problems such as divorce or death, isolation, low self-esteem, or other behavioral clues. The volunteer visits the child once a week to listen and problem solve with the child. This wonderful program helped 267 children in

38 schools during the 2008-09 school year using 54 volunteers. Almost all of the volunteers (93%) said Listen to Children made a difference in the children's lives. This program helped 194 children in 37 schools so far during the 2009-10 school year using 55 volunteers. Almost all of the volunteers (93%) say Listen to Children makes a difference in the children's lives. Most of the mentors are older adults and they love doing this important work.

Caregiver Conference (March 2009)

The Mental Health Association sponsored a conference for caregivers that was attended by over 200 people. Attendees were able to hear speakers and learned about a variety of topics related to older adults and caregivers including:

- Laugh 'til it Helps: How to Prevent Hardening of the Attitude" by Judy Garmaise, MSW,
- "Senior Sensitivity" by Joyce M. Bailey, MA, Senior Wellness Coordinator, Area Agency on Aging
- "What About YOU? Care for the Caregiver? By Barbara Ivanko, LCSW, Chief Operating Officer, Hospice of Palm Beach County
- "Reducing the Physical and Psychological Symptoms of Stress" by Dr. Alice Domar, Executive Director, Domar Center for Mind/Body Medicine and Reverend Dr. Barbara H. Nielson.
- "Harmony and the Caregiver's Journey: Relax with Breathing Techniques, Aromatherapy, and other Integrative Therapies" by Chelsea Johnson, MS, MT-BC, LMT, manager of Integrative Therapies, Hospice of Palm Beach County
- "Life Change in an Instant: A Caregiver's Story"
- "Children as Caregivers: The Invisible Heroes" by Connie Siskowski, RN, PhD, President of Volunteers for the Homebound and Family Caregivers
- "Navigating the System" by Richard Hart, BA, Director of Programs, Area Agency on Aging
- "Caring for the Veteran of Yesterday and Today" by Deborah Grassman, ARNP, MS, BSN
- "Advocacy and the Caregiver" by Florida State Representative Mark Pafford

It's Okay to Get Help! (2010)

The Mental Health Association of Palm Beach County is leading a community collaborative effort to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health treatment and increase access to care. This groundbreaking collaboration is focused on the prevention of a problem before it reaches a critical stage.

The Mental Health Association of Palm Beach County has been working with our community partners to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health care through this media and education campaign. This project benefits the community because it encourages:

- Education reduces stigma and fear of labeling and improves public perception of health care.
- Current systems are not always sufficient to prevent devastating outcomes.
- Increases access to information in your own home.
- Improves access to care and a better system of care.
- Increased access to other resources on www.mhapbc.org

We created a unified message for caregivers and made the messages available to the public on Comcast television. Comcast reaches 94% of adults 18+ who subscribe to Comcast. The films aired on such shows as: Star Trek, Weather Center, That '70s Show, Volcano, Frasier, The Nanny, Boxing, Baseball games, and many more.



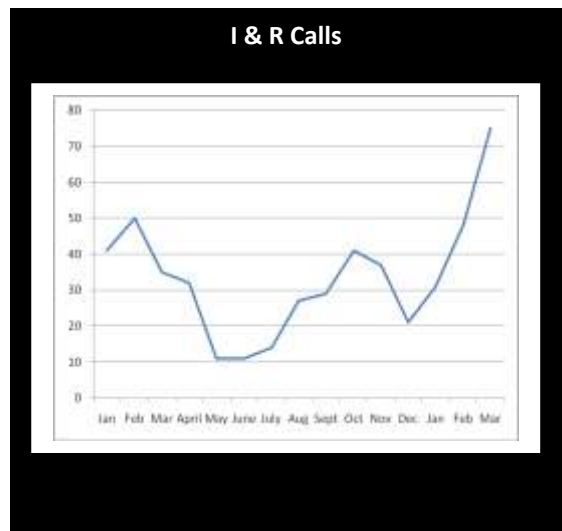
Caregivers need help too! Click on the picture to view the one-minute video

Mental Health Resource and Learning Center

MHA fulfills hundreds of requests for information each year, many from people who are in desperate need of help. Calls to Mental Health Association for Help have increased significantly over the last year as the line graph attached shows. Many of the calls we receive are from older adults who are struggling with the stress and anxiety of an uncertain economy and a variety of other reasons.

Our Information and Referral Specialist helps approximately 600 people each year by telephone and by referring people to our web site for more resources. Our resource center on line has a special section dedicated to providing resources for older adults including depression screening, support groups, and articles about mental health.

<http://www.mhapbc.org/ResourceCenter>



Calls to MHA for information and referrals are up significantly!

Focus Group with Hispanic Older Adult Volunteer Caregivers.

MHA conducted a focus group in partnership with the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to learn more about the challenges of Hispanic older adults in a culture where they may not be eligible for many of the social services that American Citizens have. We met with community volunteers and caregivers to discuss challenges such as isolation, loneliness and depression which affect the people they work with. We also discussed the challenges of caregivers who themselves have feelings of depression, attributing those feelings to the lack of support and her lack of knowledge about how to help people in her community.

For more information, please contact Pam Gionfriddo, CEO pgionfriddo@mhapbc.org

Thank you for your support!