



MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Updates and Information from the Atlantic County Office

National Recovery Month and Suicide Prevention Week

More than a Moment, It's a Movement **'Stigma Free' coming to Atlantic County**

BY BETH WADE
Public Relations Specialist

Atlantic County will join about a dozen other New Jersey counties with a Stigma Free campaign that aims to increase the number of people who seek help and receive treatment for mental health and substance use disorders.

The initiative is well-timed given the recent nationwide awareness which made great strides during the pandemic.

A local committee of stakeholders, called Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative, are working in a concerted effort to launch a campaign that they envision will include training and education opportunities, town hall meetings, pins, signage, and opportunities for students to participate via poster contests.

MHA Atlantic is part of the group planning an official kick-off on Tuesday, October 4 at the Carriage House in Galloway where members of local, county, and state government,

members of law enforcement, the faith-based community, as well as business and education leadership and other interested community members will be in attendance.

The breakfast will feature speaker Rebekah Leon of Passaic County who is among the planners of their Stigma Free campaign. She is the Executive Director of the Mental Health Association in Passaic, a social worker, co-chair of Passaic Crisis Intervention Training, and a Disaster Response Crisis Counselor.



The official logo for the Stigma Free Atlantic campaign is green, black, and white, which are the colors used statewide.

Other speakers expected that day include members of the New Jersey State Legislature.

The Atlantic County event will provide opportunities to learn and network, according to the planners.

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September aster

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“Stigmatized individuals may experience isolation, depression, anxiety, or public embarrassment,” said Vicki Phillips, Executive Director of MHA Atlantic and a member of the Atlantic Stigma Free Collaborative. “Stopping stigma is important to making all communities and community members safer and healthier. When there is acceptance, community members are more willing to seek help they may need.”

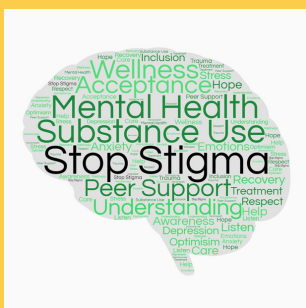
Family members, members of NAMI, and individuals in recovery for mental health and/or substance use disorder will be in attendance and will have the opportunity to share their stories and concerns with local leaders and state legislators. Vicki said the opportunity to increase awareness and advocate for change is an important, integral part of the process.

Vicki is joined in the Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative by: Laurie Smith, Community Initiatives Coordinator for Atlantic Prevention, Inc; Gretchen Halfpenny, Facilitator for the Opioid Fatality Review Team; Kathy Quish, Atlantic County Mental Health Administrator; and Brian Wilson, Atlantic County Municipal Alliance Coordinator. The team was assisted by an intern with Atlantic Prevention Inc.

Throughout the year, the members of the collaborative will be available to offer support as various communities implement strategies.

Since Atlantic is one of the counties most affected by the opioid crisis, Stigma Free Atlantic is expected to be well-received. According to the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety, Atlantic County currently ranks third among New Jersey Counties for suspected overdose deaths in 2022.

New Jersey rates of mental illness are similar to those nationwide, but South Jersey stands out for one dubious distinction -- a lack of practicing psychiatrists, which some attribute to our geographic location, sandwiched between New York and Philadelphia, where specialists command higher pay.



Stopping stigma is important to making all communities and community members safer and healthier. When there is acceptance, community members are more willing to seek help they may need.”

Stigma Free campaigns are effective in raising awareness about mental health and substance use recovery. Reducing stigma, educating the community about these common issues, and promoting wellness initiatives are ways to improve the overall health of residents. These combined efforts contribute to a shift in attitudes and enable people to feel comfortable talking about their challenges and seeking help.

The first Stigma Free campaign in New Jersey was started by Hoboken in 2011. Atlantic County's initiative is most closely modeled after Somerset and Bergen County's.

Any community leader or interested resident who would like to join in this endeavor, but cannot attend the event, can email StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org or call 609-652-3800. Tickets may be purchased via Eventbrite. Cost of the breakfast is \$25. The event is scheduled for 8:30 to 10 am on Tuesday, October 4 at the Carriage House, 25 S. Pitney Road, Galloway.



Carriage House, Galloway

Spotlight on PEWS

A statewide outreach making a difference among faith-based communities

BY BETH WADE
Public Relations Specialist

In church halls, libraries, school auditoriums, and gathering spaces across New Jersey, Laverne Williams has provided countless presentations and workshops for a range of audiences about mental health with a goal in mind -- bridging the gap between theology and the behavioral sciences.

A certified social worker with 38 years of experience in mental health service and a deacon at her church, "Ms. Laverne," as she is affectionately known, has been a great fit and longtime leader as the Director of the MHANJ's Promoting Emotional Wellness and Spirituality Program, known as PEWS.

MHANJ initially launched PEWS as an outreach to communities of color, but the program has expanded to many other faiths. Today's PEWS program provides spiritual leaders and health ministries with direction, education, and support so that they are better equipped to respond to congregants with mental health challenges. Many have enthusiastically accepted the offer of training for their ministry and lay persons.

Through PEWS, she provides a mental health overview, information about resources available in the community, and training offered by other agencies. She often returns to present about a specific population, such as seniors, grandparents raising grandchildren, or single parents, depending upon the needs of the church community and its makeup.

Since PEWS started in 2005, Ms. Laverne has spoken to more than 60,000 individuals across New Jersey and has provided programming in every county via her educational seminars, presentations, conferences, and individually tailored workshops.

During the pandemic, PEWS expanded with a new, weekly online event called "Thankful Tuesdays," which can be seen on Zoom and the Facebook Live platform. This interactive hour has broad appeal to the general public and is helpful to staff and volunteers at mental health organizations and agencies as well as individuals living with an emotional challenge.

Each week, "Thankful Tuesdays" features a special guest(s). They represent a vast range of disciplines and areas of expertise such as the faith-based community, law enforcement, diversity and inclusion specialists, and community leaders. As the host, Ms. Laverne interviews her guests who share perspectives and experiences during the hour.

"I wanted to have a safe place for anyone to come, to share their thoughts, wisdom and what they were experiencing," she explained. "I knew people were more isolated and becoming anxious and depressed during the pandemic due to an array of losses. Some lost loved ones, some lost jobs, and others were just losing their sense of normalcy."

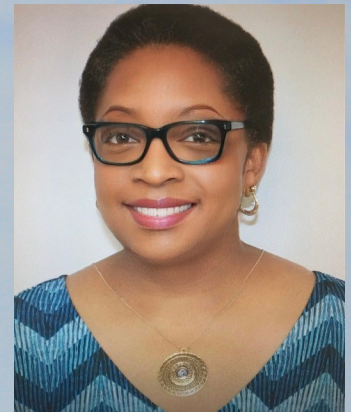
Her ability to captivate and connect with an audience is evident by the large numbers of people who join her online. Some weeks she's drawn more than 100 viewers. Her charisma and charm make her hard to resist. (Laverne is known for closing with the words, "I love you all on purpose and there ain't nothing you can do about it.")

Ms. Laverne is dedicated to her mission to provide education about mental health issues, services, and resources. In fact, many of her various roles with MHANJ tie into teaching. She is a certified instructor of Mental Health First Aid and Wellness and Recovery Action Plan, or WRAP, facilitator. She also is a Certified Grief Recovery Specialist.

Her mission to educate others is succeeding in all directions. She says she's pleased with the overwhelmingly positive responses to the work of PEWS and "Thankful Tuesdays." Among the most treasured moments are the times that she's reminded of how her message changes lives.

"Participants have disclosed that because of programs like PEWS and 'Thankful Tuesdays,' they have sought professional help and/or joined support groups to better their emotional wellness," Ms. Laverne explained. "They said that's something they would not have done due to the stigma, shame, and lack of information."

Her strength in the spoken word is apparently matched in her writing ability. She wrote a manuscript "Implementing a Mental Health Ministry Committee in Faith-Based Organizations: The Promoting Emotional Wellness and Spirituality Program," which is published in the Social Work in Health Care journal.



Laverne Williams, Director of the MHANJ Promoting Emotional Wellness and Spirituality Program, PEWS.

In addition to her work with the faith-based community statewide, Ms. Laverne has provided public engagements for law enforcement, educators, family members, behavior health institutions, and other groups.

Along with Ms. Laverne, other members working on the PEWS staff are Clarissa Wheat, Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator and Kim Reynolds, Community Outreach and Training Specialist.

Ms. Laverne is a Deacon at her church, Union Baptist Church in Montclair, Essex County, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Campbell B. Singleton III, the Senior Pastor.

PEWS is currently funded by the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

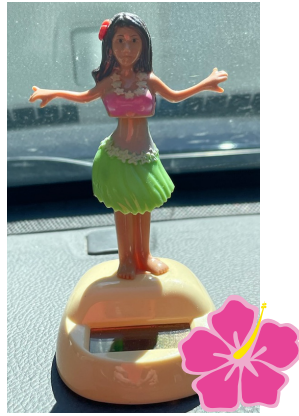
For more information,
contact Laverne at
lwilliams@mhanj.org or call
973-571-4100 ext.130



Out of Darkness

Karen's story of struggles that led her to a job helping others

BY BETH WADE
Public Relations Specialist



A cheery, solar-powered hula dancer sways back and forth on the dashboard of her car. That two-inch trinket tells you a bit about Karen Williams – she loves the beach, music, and a good sense of humor.

Years ago, though, back in 2012, Karen describes what she calls “the dark hole,” a period of struggling with serious depression. During part of that time, she was so ill she did not drive. One of her treatments had compromised her memory and she didn’t feel safe.

Karen had exhausted many potential avenues to wellness including medication, therapy, and partial care. Her bout with depression came on after she was laid off from a job she’d worked and loved for 10 years, and then she experienced “empty nest.” A serious personal problem compounded the situation.

“I’d dealt with post-partum depression years before, so it wasn’t entirely new to me,” she recalls. “But this was really bad.”

At one point, the psychiatrist said she didn’t know what else to try to help her. She’d tried medication for months. Sometimes they’d help, but she’d plateau or backslide again.

That’s when her dear friend Jean suggested trying a group. Jean drove her to Collaborative Support Programs, and the connection led her to MHA – Atlantic.

That was a turning point for her.

“I had been so isolated, but there, I wasn’t alone,” she said. She benefited from hearing other people’s stories, and she learned coping strategies. Karen found the weekly camaraderie helpful. Her husband faithfully drove her to the meetings.

She described the group as like “an extended family.”

“People shared, all cared for one another – rallied round to help each other,” she said. “Talking and listening helped bring me out of my dark place.” And, following the recommendation from a new psychiatrist, she tried a medication that has helped.

She also developed a WRAP through CSP. Karen says putting time and effort into that process also contributed to how she found and maintained wellness.

Once she made progress on her road to recovery, she began to set her sights on returning to work. For a while she volunteered at her local library. When she felt ready to go back to the workplace, she’d heard about the part-time office manager position that opened up at MHA – Atlantic.

Recently she celebrated her fifth year on the job, which is one that she finds to be a good fit. In her role she often shares resources and describes services to callers in need of help for themselves or someone they know.

“I definitely believe in what I’m telling people. I got out of the dark hole,” she said.

Karen’s firsthand, personal experience and struggles make her a compassionate person on the other end of the phone and at the front desk where her office space is decorated with uplifting quotes and colorful acrylic paintings she’s done.



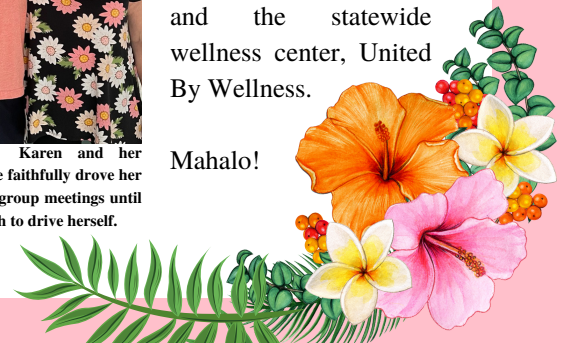
Though there is no tropical dancer, photos of her children and family are plentiful – and her daughter ironically now lives in Hilo, Hawaii.



Pictured above: Karen and her husband, Dave. He faithfully drove her to weekly support group meetings until she was well enough to drive herself.

Thank you, Karen, for being a kind and patient listener who helps so many people seeking help through the Atlantic County office and the statewide wellness center, United By Wellness.

Mahalo!



Boarding Home Outreach

Items we are currently collecting for
holiday gift bag deliveries

- Shampoo
- Body wash and soap
- Shaving cream
- Aftershave
- Deodorant
- Toothpaste and toothbrushes
- Dental floss
- Puzzle books, gently used games/cards



Thank you

**The majority of the residents are men*

Note: Gift cards for Amazon, Target, or WalMart help, too! MHA will do the shopping

You can help make someone's season brighter

Contact Vicki Phillips at 609-652-3800 ext. 307 vphillips@mhanj.org

More about our work in Atlantic County boarding homes

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

About 170 residents of boarding homes are supported by staff and interns at MHA-Atlantic. We provide year-round support groups, recreation, and advocacy to individuals living in Atlantic City, Egg Harbor City, Hammonton, Pleasantville, Mays Landing, and Elwood.

Individuals residing in boarding homes are people who live with a mental illness that makes activities of daily living, work, or socialization very difficult. They do not have family who are willing or able to take of them. We have been a part of the support system of boarding home residents for more than 40 years.

Purple is the color associated with recovery. Ribbons are worn to celebrate people who have made the brave choice to be in recovery and to expand education and awareness.



September is National Recovery Month

National Recovery Month is an annual observance set aside to celebrate the recovery community, promote treatment and recovery options, and recognize the dedicated service providers who make recovery possible.

MHANJ is among the proud agencies that provide programming to the recovery community. Through its statewide online wellness center (United by Wellness), peers offer dozens of virtual groups throughout the week.

The relationship between mental health and substance use disorders is clearly documented. Depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder are among the most commonly co-occurring with substance use disorder. Mental health services are important to those with substance use disorder because the illness affects their brain and behavior.

Building up the wellness community at John Brooks Recovery Center

Earlier this year, MHA Atlantic and John Brooks Recovery Center began partnering to help meet the mental wellness needs of individuals in recovery at the Pleasantville location where our staff now offers a weekly in-person group.

Recently the group was in a need of a new facilitator and Emily McCall enthusiastically stepped up and offered to take on the role. She was familiar with and fond of the group, called Mental Wellness, during her MHA internship and it felt like a natural fit for her. In addition, she has a personal stake in the recovery community as a person whose family has been affected by substance use.

For Emily, her most favorite workday of the week is the one that is shared with the folks at John Brooks. That's Thursday.

"There are about 10-15 people, both men and women, who regularly attend," she said. "I enjoy seeing them return each week and making progress. They're connecting and helping each other, developing a community across so many generations [they are ages 30 through 60]."

Mental Wellness provides individuals at John Brooks Treatment Center with an open space to talk about mental health, which is often related to substance use.

Participants discuss the struggles with relationships that have been affected by their relapse and recovery, she said. The strongest theme that evolves during the group is learning how to set boundaries or standing up for oneself, according to Emily.

Another topic that is tackled in group is related to the participant's expectations about the duration of the recovery process. Most, she said, believe the recovery process should be faster and feel frustrated with the time that is needed.

"They work on accepting themselves in their treatment recovery journey. We spend time talking about how it takes time and it's better to take time," she said.

During some weeks she introduces an activity or journal prompt or some aspect of wellness such as finding strategies and replacements (exercising, working, writing, for example), she said.

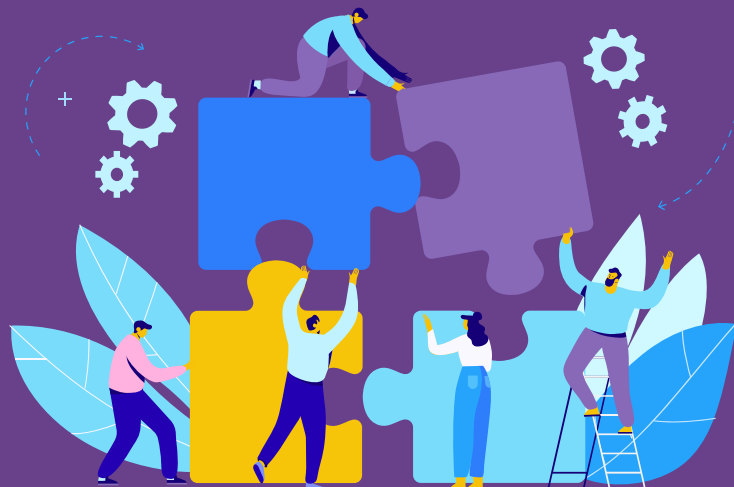
For Emily, the group is an extension of a positive experience she had while interning at a detox facility in Cherry Hill.

"I'm grateful for this opportunity to continue to give back," she said.



Emily McCall facilitates the Mental Wellness group at John Brooks Recovery Center.

Thank you, Emily, for your time, dedication, and contributions to the recovery community. We are proud to recognize you during National Recovery Month.



New Jersey trainers provided suicide prevention at international conference



During a recent conference in Pittsburg, PA, some of our community partners with Tri-State K-9 Crisis Response provided Question, Persuade, Refer, QPR, training, which is an important suicide prevention initiative.

The nationwide conference “Coming Together and Building Bridges” was hosted by CIT International. Vicki Phillips, MHA-AC is the Co-Chair of the CIT Atlantic steering committee.

During the 3-day conference, which drew over 1800 attendees, leaders from Tri-State facilitated QPR, an evidence-based educational program designed to teach the warning signs of a suicide crisis and equip them with tools to respond.

The goal of QPR training is to reduce suicidal behaviors and save lives by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention training. The initial training is concise and requires a short, one and half hour commitment. It is designed for anyone with no previous training in suicide prevention.

The process follows three steps in order:

- Question the individual’s desire or intent regarding suicide
- Persuade the person to seek and accept help
- Refer the person to appropriate resources



Members of Tri-State K-9 Response are pictured: Marge/Abigail, Janice/Logan, Daniela/Diego, Eve/Eliana, and Pam.

Training educates and empowers people to make a positive difference by recognizing someone may be in distress and then having the courage and confidence to let the person know you are concerned.

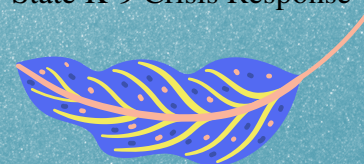
It can be used by both professionals and lay people known as “gatekeepers.” Gatekeepers can include anyone who is strategically positioned to recognize someone at risk of suicide and refer them to appropriate services.

QPR-trained Gatekeepers learn to:

- Recognize the warning signs of suicide
- Know how to offer hope
- Know how to get help and save a life

To learn more about community education programs like QPR and others call 609-652-3800 ext 307 or find out more at www.mhaac.info.

For more information about Tri-State K-9 Crisis Response Team, check out their website: tri-statecanineresponse.org.



MORE INFO

NEWS

FROM MHA ATLANTIC

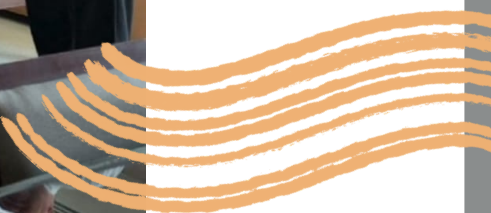


Ashleigh Zappala and Emily McCall of MHA Atlantic provided screening and literature the AtlantiCare Health Service FQHC Community Health Fair. The event was held at Atlantic Cape Community College, Atlantic City Campus, on August 12. (FQHC is a Federally Qualified Health Center.)



Caesars Atlantic City was recently honored by the Atlantic County CIT Steering Committee for their contribution and commitment to Atlantic County CIT-NJ. Caesars hosted CIT training at their property that was open to all city casino security.

Representatives from the Atlantic City Police Department, Legacy Treatment Services, and MHA Atlantic were present for the recognition. Pictured are: Joseph Haber, MA, MSW, LCSW, Vice President of Ambulatory and Emergency Services at Legacy Treatment Services; Carolyn Quinn, Community Engagement and Wellness Programs Director at MHA Atlantic; Sergeant Brian Shapiro of the Atlantic City Police Department; Michael Kane, Vice President of Security at Caesars Atlantic City; Joseph Lodise, Senior Vice President & General Manager, Caesars; Lt. Alexis Zeilinger with the Atlantic City Police Department; and retired Chief Edward C. Dobleman CIT-NJ Director with Legacy.



Wellness Bulletin Board

Free Summer concerts

Somers Point - Friday Sept. 2 and 9th
7-9 pm at William Morrow Beach

Ventnor - Saturday, Sept. 3
6 pm Newport Beach

Gardner's Basin Atlantic City
Sat., Sept. 3 & 10 from 1 pm to 7:30 pm

Bark in the Park



Saturday, Sept. 17

11 am to 5 pm

4-H Fairgrounds, Rte. 50 Mays Landing

Dog-friendly, family-friendly event

\$5 Dog show, pet participation activities, dog training demos,

kid pie eating contest, dog pie eating contest, raffle baskets, food trucks, and more

FESTIVALS

Good Old Days Festival

JFK Park, Somers Point Sat., Sept 10 11am to 6pm
music, games, vendors, antique cars, K-9 unit, inflatables

Margate Fall Funfest Sat., Sept. 24 11am to 6 pm

music, food, character parade, cornhole tournament, exhibits, nature tours

Food Truck Festival

Sat., Sept. 24 2pm to 8pm
Galloway Municipal Complex

ART WALK

40 LOCAL ARTISTS IN
SMITHVILLE

Sat., Sept. 17 @10 am

Raindate Sept. 18

Latin American Festival

Saturday, Sept. 17
12 pm to 8 pm

545 Albany Ave, AC
Outdoor event celebrating
Hispanic cultural heritage with
entertainment, authentic food,
dance groups, vendors, and more

ACCC Summer Symposium
"Media and adolescent mental health"
Wednesday, Sept. 7 at 5:30 pm
Room C3, Mays Landing Campus
register: atlantic.edu/symposium

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

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