

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Updates and information from the Atlantic County Office

Brain Injury Awareness Month, Social Work Month, World Bipolar Day

Spotlight on Mental Health and Brain Injury One man’s story of healing both physically and mentally after a life-changing car accident

BY BETH WADE

Note: Suicide is mentioned in this story which may be triggering for some readers

Two and a half years after a car accident caused a traumatic brain injury resulting in effects similar to a stroke on his left side, David is still relearning activities of daily living. Like many other people with a serious brain injury, he experienced challenges with mental health. This is his story of healing both physical and emotional wounds.

During David’s first months of recovery, he amazed people with herculean-type progress in learning to walk and talk again, but he says what he achieved with his mental health ever-so-slightly eclipses those big accomplishments. Though that process took longer, it was worth the wait to be well.

Up to half of all people who survive a moderate to severe brain injury will be diagnosed with a mental health disorder, and David is among them.

Following the months that he dazzled his therapists, he entered a difficult period that took an emotional toll. He had lost an important romantic relationship with a fiancé and then he feared he’d lose a dream home he’d worked so hard to buy.

After moving back home with his parents, he attempted suicide several times and survived.

“I was at the lowest points of my life. I had no hope,” he recalls. “I didn’t see any way out of the situation. Now, I think that was selfish of me. I would have left a hole for a lot of people.”

He says that he would not have addressed his mental health concerns if he had not had those experiences.

“I didn’t want to admit I needed help,” he said. “You have to ask for help. It’s OK to ask for help.”

He said therapy, medication, coping skills, and group work with others who have survived a traumatic brain injury (the Traumatic Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey) have been helpful in his recovery. Among his go-to coping skills are meditation and a breathing technique.

Today, at age 33, he recognizes how he’s grown. His family and friends noticed the change, too. And his former fiancé, the person whom he describes as his best friend, agrees.

“They say I’m much more thoughtful and kind. I have more empathy,” he said. “I’m a better listener.”

Before the accident, Dave said was a person with a short fuse, easily quick to anger. Looking back, he says he was likely living with a mood disorder. In those days, he never

“ I hope it helps people to hear my story. If someone else is struggling the way I’m struggling, I want them to see there’s light at the end of the tunnel if they just stay focused. ”

Inside this issue

“7 Reasons Why Bipolar Day Is Important” with social media specialist Shannon Hazlitt

A SALUTE TO OUR SOCIAL WORKERS

WELLNESS BULLETIN BOARD

RESOURCE OF THE MONTH Church By the Bay

Stigma Free Update, News Briefs and More!



would have worked on his mental health, he said. The progress he made to regulate his emotions enabled him to repair a fractured relationship with his father. They each recognize triggers and find ways to give one another space when it's needed, he said.

He has a new interest, growing mushrooms for food. That hobby ties into one of his passions, cooking. Dave was a professional chef at one time. His long-term plans are to study agroforestry and permaculture. Dave's parents have purchased some land that he will develop and farm one day.

Dave continues to work on strengthening his left hand which is contracted and curled inward. Part of that daily routine is 2 hours of massage, exercise, and stretches that he learned at occupational therapy. Recently, Dave shared a hopeful new sign of improvement – he moved one of his fingers, his pinky.

Another milestone reached – his vision is corrected. In January an eye surgeon successfully corrected his double vision which prevented him from reading, driving, and seeing clearly.

His first “field trip” as he called it was to Sugar Hill in Mays Landing where he and his father sat down for a great deli sandwich. He's enjoying the ability to read again though he says he developed a fondness of audiobooks during the years following the accident.

He also recently mastered the ability to chew (his jaw was broken in the accident). Having to consciously think about every bite was exhausting, he explained, especially given his love for gourmet food and cooking.

Lately, Dave and his mother have been making soups together in the kitchen. He says he does what prep work he can. He also talks her through some of the process and helps with an important step, tasting!

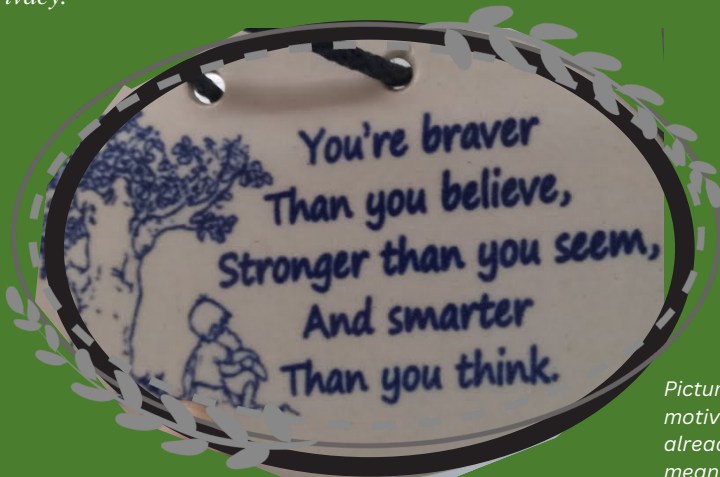
Cooking with his mom is a form of compromise for Dave, and that comes easier now. Years ago, that skill wasn't in his wheelhouse. A saying that means a lot to him now is one that he shares with his father. They like to say, “Progress, not perfection.”

His next goals with physical therapy are to learn to walk without a cane, jog, and jump.

If the growth he's made on the inside is any indication, Dave's on his way to meeting more milestones. His determination and spirit are easily matched by his faith in himself. He's says he's been blessed by two people in particular who have supported him through these difficult years.

“I want to be the best person I can be to honor the gifts my parents have given me,” he said. “I am blessed by having them.”

Note: The name in this story was changed to protect the family's privacy.



Pictured at left: A photo of a special gift from his mother that he said keeps him motivated. Other words he says he lives by are, “The key to having it all is knowing you already do.” He first read them in a meditation app. Now, he said, that quote holds deep meaning for both him and his father.

Behavior and Emotional Changes Sometimes Associated with Brain Injury

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Anger
- Insomnia
- Risky behavior
- Verbal or physical outbursts
- Impulsivity
- Lack of empathy for others
- Difficulty in social situations

Sources: Mayo Clinic, Veterans Administration



Support Groups
Helpline
One-to-one peer support
Workshops

bianj.org

732-745-0200

or email *info@bianj.org*

Wellness Bulletin Board



St. Patrick's Day Parade
Sat., March 9
starting 12:30/1pm
AC Boardwalk



QiGong/Tai Chi

Free class 12:30 pm Tues., March 12 at
Oceanside Family Success
201 Melrose Ave., AC

Call to register
609-236-8800



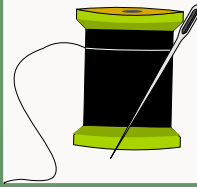
AT THE LIBRARY



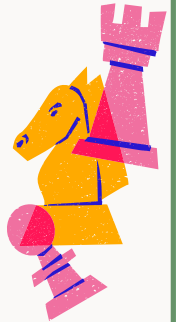
Tech help, by appt.
Meditation
Yoga
Chess Club
Movie Events
Writers Meet Up
Mahjong
Crochet, Sewing, and Knitting
Book Club
Adult Board Game Night
Senior craft & activities



Each library branch offers special events,
classes, and activities.
View the full calendar atlanticlibrary.org.



[Click here to view](#)



ART GALLERIES

Kramer Hall

Current exhibit with various artists focused on ecology
Stockton's Hammonton Campus
30 Front Street, Hammonton
609-626-3840

Noyes Art Garage of Stockton University

Several current exhibits: Art of the Quilt: Fiber and Clay;
contemporary folk art exhibit; and Complex Planet
Contemporary Art
2200 Fairmount Ave., AC
609-626-3805

Stockton Art Gallery

"Indigenous Approaches/Sustainable Futures"
Galloway Campus - L Wing
Use parking lot 5, 6, 7
609-652-4214



Performing Arts at Stockton

Danú - Traditional Music of Ireland
Sunday, Mar. 10 at 2 pm

Poetry and Power
Bay Atlantic Symphony
Sunday, Mar. 17 at 2 pm

For ticket info call 609-652-9000

Stigma Free to Host Spring Event

Awards, networking, planning

Existing members of Stigma Free Atlantic, new individuals interested in the group, and community members celebrating special honorees will meet at a breakfast event, Thursday, May 29 at 8:30 am at the Stockton University Campus Center, Galloway.

Jared Lombardi, a master's student who is President of Active Minds, will be recognized for his work and a successful initiative, The Positive Pursuit, that he established to increase awareness of mental health and suicide prevention. Jared will speak about personal experiences with trauma and a suicide attempt. His passion for the field of mental field is truly inspiring.

Stigma Free leadership will also recognize the work of several community standouts who exemplified the Stigma Free mission in 2023.

All community members interested in attending are welcome. A donation of \$15 is suggested.

[Click here to register](#)



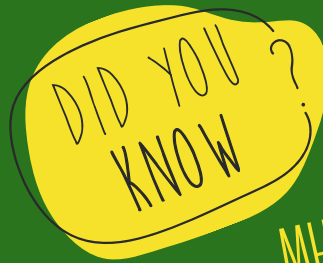
Save the Date

May 29, 2024

8:30-10:00am

Stigma Free Atlantic Networking Breakfast

Stockton University
Campus Center



MHA ATLANTIC IS A FOUNDING MEMBER
OF THE STIGMA FREE ATLANTIC COLLABORATIVE

2024 CIT-ATLANTIC CLASSES

REGISTER NOW TO GET A SEAT

MHA Atlantic is a proud community partner working to ensure CIT training is offered to all law enforcement and mental health workers with the goal of providing a safer and more effective response to people with mental illnesses who are in crisis.

MARCH 11-15

Stockton-Galloway

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CITMarch2024>

APRIL 15-19

Hard Rock-AC

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CITApril24>

NOV. 18-22

AC Special Services School

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CITNov24>

To register, click on the links above. Registration is required.

For more information email: CITAtlantic@MHANJ.org

7 Reasons Why Bipolar Day Is Important

BY SHANNON HAZLITT
Social Media Specialist

On March 30th each year, the world comes together to raise awareness of a mental health disorder that affects nearly 6 million Americans, each in a distinctive way.



Bipolar disorder has an impact that goes far beyond numbers. I've learned this working at bp Magazine for Bipolar, a print and online publication that educates and empowers people dealing with bipolar. I have been incredibly inspired by our bipolar community's strength and resilience through interacting with bloggers, professional writers, social media followers, and mental health partners.

So, on World Bipolar Day, here are some aspects of bipolar disorder that are important to understand, so you can help combat social stigma:

Bipolar disorder affects every aspect of life: It may be difficult to fully comprehend the toll bipolar disorder can take on someone because it is an invisible illness. As bp Magazine vlogger Natasha Tracy describes in a powerful video, it can be as crippling --impacting relationships, working, and all aspects of everyday life—from sleeping to showering.

Bipolar disorder has many causes, from genetics to life events: After a study that spanned nearly two decades, a team from the University of Michigan found that there is no single genetic change, life event, or chemical brain imbalance that could be the root cause of bipolar disorder. Many times, it is a combination of several biological and environmental factors that can trigger bipolar disorder.

Bipolar disorder rarely exists alone: As if a mood disorder that involves long-spanning depressions and manic episodes wasn't enough to deal with, bipolar disorder can also come with other physical and psychological conditions to worry about. These include metabolic disorders and migraines.

Everyone's bipolar disorder is different:

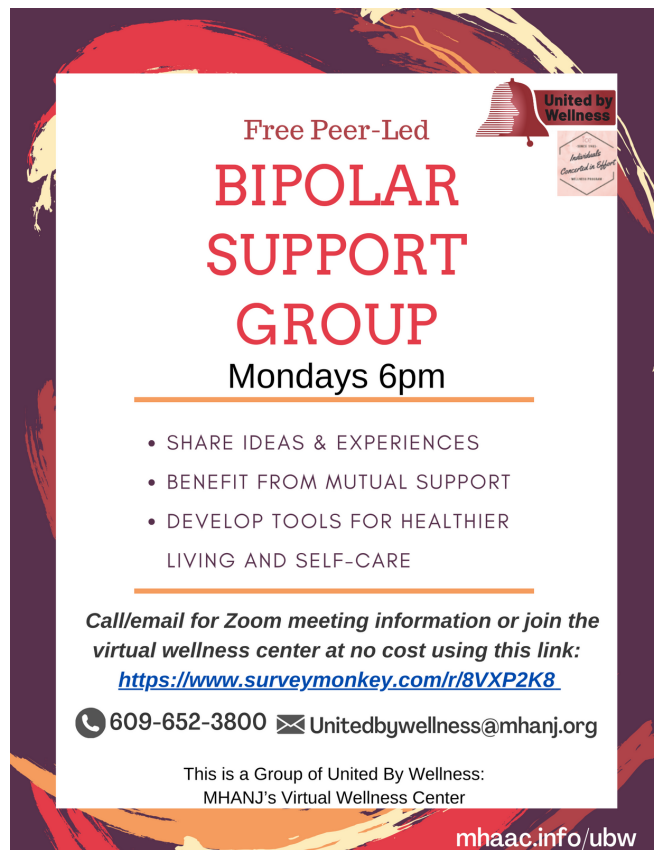
Bipolar disorder is like fingerprints and snowflakes—no two people have the exact same symptoms and each diagnosis can vary greatly. However, there are two main types of bipolar disorder: Bipolar I which is characterized by one or more manic episodes that last at least a week and require hospitalization; and bipolar II, which is characterized by more depressive episodes.



There are many celebrities that live with bipolar disorder: Celebrities including Demi Lovato, Richard Dryfuss, and Mary Lambert are using their high-profile platform to combat bipolar disorder stigma. Demi Lovato in particular is making headlines for bringing the CAST Foundation on her Tell Me You Love Me Tour. CAST is an extension of a Los Angeles-based mental health awareness organization that Demi says helped her stay sober for six years.

There may be a creativity connection: Did you know that World Bipolar Day occurs on Vincent van Gogh's birthday? Van Gogh, considered one of the most influential artists of all time, was posthumously diagnosed as having bipolar disorder. Another famous face of creativity is Carrie Fisher, known for her role as Princess Leia in the Star Wars franchise. She's considered a heroine for rebelling against mental health stigma.

It is life-threatening, and support is vital: An estimated 1 in 5 people diagnosed with bipolar disorder dies by suicide. World Bipolar Day is an opportunity to show those living with the day-to-day challenges of this condition they are not alone, they have your support, and there is always hope.



Free Peer-Led
**BIPOLAR
SUPPORT
GROUP**
Mondays 6pm

- SHARE IDEAS & EXPERIENCES
- BENEFIT FROM MUTUAL SUPPORT
- DEVELOP TOOLS FOR HEALTHIER LIVING AND SELF-CARE

Call/email for Zoom meeting information or join the virtual wellness center at no cost using this link:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8VXP2K8>

📞 609-652-3800 ✉ Unitedbywellness@mhanj.org

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

mhaac.info/ubw

Source: Mental Health America

NEWS

briefs

Family Forum set for April

An event that will provide family members with an opportunity to express their concerns, unmet needs, suggestions, and successes in the mental health system of care is being organized by the Intensive Family Support Services Program.

“This event will give family members an opportunity to help identify systemic issues and provide solutions from a system user perspective,” said Gail Christian, Intensive Family Supports Coordinator.

Family members will talk to MHANJ CEO Carolyn Beauchamp who will relay the needs to state level officials.

Called a “family forum,” the event is scheduled for 3:30 pm on Thursday, April 18 at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Linwood. Following the forum, a light dinner will be served.

Family members who are interested in participating in the forum are asked to register by April 15, 2024. [Click here for more information, or to register.](#)

Civic Engagement Initiative Introduces Coaches

Along with the existing workshops offered through the Civic Engagement Initiative, coaches have been added to support participants with their individual pursuits.

The coaches, Carolee Marano and Julia Gimbel, have a combined 25 years of experience in the field of human services. They will be offering one-to-one support and assisting individuals who are navigating the advocacy system.

Some current issues that workshop attendees may champion include: affordable housing, public transportation improvements, access, and the bill before the House of Representatives that would eliminate the penalty for SSI beneficiaries with intellectual and development disabilities who are married.

This initiative was funded by an Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant from the Division of Disability Services, New Jersey Department of Human Services. Atlantic Center for Independent Living is our partner in this effort.



Coach Carolee Marano



Coach Julia Gimbel

Resource of the Month

Church By the Bay



Note: Pastor Lou wishes to say special thanks to church volunteers especially Sandy, Tracey, Peggy & “Peggy’s Posse.”

A Galloway church with a pastor who is also the NJ State Police Chaplain is March’s featured Resource of the Month. We spotlight three services provided by Church By The Bay -- a mobile clothing trailer, feeding ministry and a food pantry.

The volunteer-led food pantry is intentionally set up like a corner grocery store and opens once a week, Thursdays 2-5 pm. The majority of the people who use the service are living in motels along the White Horse Pike, but any community member is welcome. No registration or appointment is needed for the food pantry. The one requirement is a form of identification.

In addition to the food pantry, church organizers maintain a refrigerator of donated home cooked meals and food prepared by NJ State Troopers at the Pic-a-lilli Inn. Meals are given away in Atlantic City at monthly events that include distribution of Narcan, a life-saving shot given in instances of overdose (the church has a partnership with Project Rise, a referral recovery service).

“The state police prepare between 250 and 300 meals for any given event,” said Pastor Lou Stragala, adding that the initiative is a way for law enforcement to encourage conversation and cooperation. It’s part of community policing, he explained.

The church also provides a Saturday Feeding Ministry. Led by volunteers, this team plans and prepares the meals that are distributed weekly. Meals are prepared with love and are all made from scratch to distribute to unhoused Veterans and seniors in need.

Church By The Bay leadership also provides a mobile clothing trailer that serves Atlantic County and surrounding South Jersey locations once or twice a month. In addition to clothing and coats, those in need can pick up a blanket, socks, and hygienic products. Volunteers sort, hang, and pack the clothes to go out on trailers for pop-up events. At these events, they set up racks of clothing in a way that is like a shopping experience, explained Pastor Lou.

“While we give people God’s love, we also give them dignity,” he said. “That’s an important part of what we do.”

For more information, to request the clothing trailer, or to make a donation of food or clothing, contact Pastor Lou at ChurchByTheBay@yahoo.com or call 609-652-0246. Church by the Bay is located at 244 E. White Horse Pike, Galloway.

During National Social Work Month
we recognize and honor these
special members of our team



Linda Bastedo
Emily McCall
Vicki Phillips

Thank You!



*Social workers are
listeners, protectors,
community organizers,
system navigators,
helpers, change agents,
advocates, defenders,
counselors, voices,
inspirers, motivators,
cheerleaders, and
coaches*



GUESS
Who
BABY
Picture
GAME

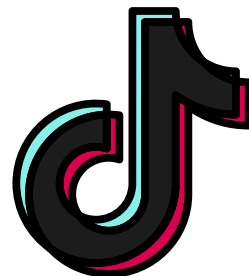


Which Atlantic staff is this?

Make your guess
using the link or
scan this QR code



Baby February is Carolyn
Quinn, Director of
Community Engagement
and Wellness Programs



Click on any of the above

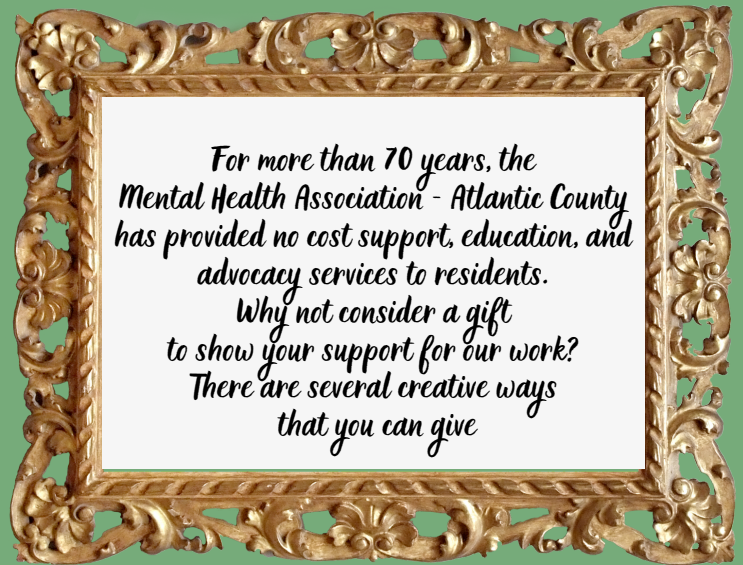
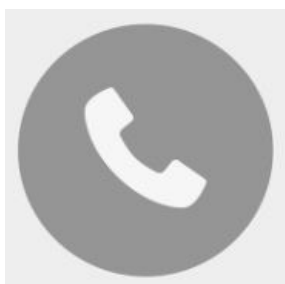
**Acute Care Family
Program serves
families in crisis
7 days per week
Available 8 am to 8 pm
609 517-8614**

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*



How You Benefit from Planned Giving
Planned gifts are charitable contributions that are part of your financial or estate plans.
Including a gift to the
Mental Health Association -Atlantic County
in your will or trust allows you to create a legacy which provides families like you with the education, support, empathy and options to provide the best care for your family.
It only takes 20 minutes or less.

**You Get to
Leave a Legacy**

Making a bequest in your will is a powerful way to leave a lasting impact.
Another way to leave a large gift is through establishing your legacy by making a bequest, showing your support for years to come.

**You Get a
Tax Break**

Did you know that bequests can reduce federal estate taxes for heirs? And these deductions are not limited to cash — they can include assets like real estate, IRAs, and stock as well!

**Decide How Your
Gift is Used**

When you leave a bequest in your will to Mental Health Association in Atlantic County, you can allocate a program where you would like to make an impact.

