

THE SEEKER

A Newsletter of Mental Health Association of South Central Kansas



Mental Musings

Years ago, a co-worker kept telling me about a man I needed to meet. So one afternoon while passing by, I stopped in to make introductions. We sat in his living room and he shared with me that his wife had passed away three years earlier and he was no longer able to drive, so he spent his days watching re-runs of "Ponderosa" and "Walker: Texas Ranger". I asked him about exercise and he let me know that sometimes he did a few laps around his living room. He had a daughter who lived a couple hours away and she tried to come visit once a week to bring him groceries or get him to doctor's appointments. But she wasn't always able to make it.

Aging-in-place has been the housing option of choice for older Americans for years. But what many people don't consider is the implications on their mental health. Staying in the home you know sounds ideal, but was it constructed with an eye toward mobility when using a walker or having trouble navigating stairs? Having family and friends close-by is wonderful, but what happens when family members move away, or friends begin to pass on? What seemed like a perfect situation a few years ago can turn into social isolation practically overnight.

To offset this isolation, MHA has been operating a program called Senior Companions through a contract with the Department of Health and Human Services for many years. The program pairs volunteers over the age of 55 with isolated seniors throughout south central Kansas. They might play a game together, run errands, prepare meals, or just have conversations. But the time spent together each week is invaluable in maintaining the socialization of our older consumers.

However, the grant through HHS requires a private match, and that match was recently placed in severe jeopardy. One of the local agencies which had been contributing \$30,000/year to the program has shifted their priorities, leaving MHA with only a few months to scramble for a new source of funding. Despite the on-going commitment of the Federal government to this important program, the inability to meet the private matching requirement of the grant means that on January 1, 2023, this vital service to our senior neighbors may disappear. If you would like to see this program continue, please consider directing your investment to the Senior Companions program by calling our office at 316-651-1241.



In these difficult economic times, MHA asks you to consider giving the nickels and dimes that would otherwise collect in your couch or change jar. We have partnered with www.RoundUpApp.com to allow you to round-up your credit card purchases to the next dollar, and send the remaining change to MHA. Your spare change makes a tremendous difference in our ability to serve thousands across south central Kansas each year.



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Getting Back to Nature

- An estimated 32 million Americans grow a vegetable garden each year.
- 40% of the US population lives in coastal counties, with tens of millions more living on lakes and rivers.
- In 2019, our system of State and National Parks reported nearly 1.4 BILLION visitors, and that doesn't even count use of the thousands of municipal parks across the nation.

What do all these things have in common? Nature. Dirt. Plants. Fresh air. Human beings have long found that access to nature has a calming effect on our souls. Studies of this effect have borne that out, with quantitative and significant reductions in stress hormones, lowered rates of depression and anxiety, shorter hospital stays, less need for medications, etc.

With all this in mind, MHA is thrilled to have begun a pilot program suggested by one of our therapists to offer horticulture therapy. At our main office at the intersection of Central and Woodlawn, consumers will be able to start their own vegetables from seed, water them, care for them, and eventually cook with them as well. In fact, our friends at KAKE-TV have suggested a cooking segment when the fruits of this program are ready.

Your donations of hoses, pots, garden soil, grow lights, seeds, gardening tools, and other assorted items - or funds so that we can buy them - will allow those living with mental health issues to experience the joy of seeing that first green plant emerge from the soil. It is one more avenue available to our therapists to help those we serve find the recovery that we know is possible.

To offer an in-kind or financial gift to this new program, please call our office at 316-651-1241 and let us know how you can help.



Everybody Deserves Access to Care

Tiffany* became a ward of the state in 2012. Her mother was an innocent bystander of a drive-by shooting in 2009, and her father turned to drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms. Over the years, his addiction got out-of-hand and he was sent to jail for home invasion and burglary as he attempted to support his habit. Although he wasn't there for long, he was deemed unfit as a parent.

Tiffany will hit her 18th birthday in a few months, aging-out of state supports that have provided her with only the most basic of needs. She lives with a learning disability that was not properly diagnosed until it was too late, and the resulting limited job prospects, stress of her pending homelessness, and the childhood trauma of attempting to care for and protect her father during his rampant addiction have taken a toll on her mental health.

The only bright spot in her life is that she was offered case management through MHA thanks to an attentive grade-school teacher. Our case manager is working to arrange local resources for the moment of Tiffany's birthday, but one of her most pressing needs - mental health counseling - is at risk.

The Access to Care program - a fund supported by annual donations - has historically been used to offer therapy to those without financial resources. But due to huge increases in need over the last two years, the ATC program is nearly depleted. In the first quarter of 2022 alone, 80% of the funds given to this program had to be utilized, leaving very few resources to cover the remainder of the year. At this point, the Access to Care program will likely be empty before Tiffany turns 18.

If you can help teens like Tiffany, or seniors living on fixed incomes who cannot afford the co-pay for their mental health needs, please call our office to help at 316-651-1241.

A Foundational Need

We all likely have a favorite meeting place. A place where - if you are given the choice of location to get lunch or grab coffee - you will suggest because it has the best cocoa or that guilty pleasure meal that you need an excuse to order. When I first stated working at MHA, I quickly noticed trends of where people suggested meeting for coffee. There were three clear winners in Wichita. But it struck me recently that one of the three is no longer mentioned, and hasn't been for several months. Why? Because one of the three is in an area that has seen a surge of homelessness.

It still sometimes surprises people when I tell them that MHA is the largest non-profit housing provider in the state for people living with mental illness. Even with 300 units across the region, the waitlist for our housing services continues to get longer. And while we have identified our Residential Care division as the area we desire to grow in the coming years, one major hurdle exists... the ability to staff that additional housing.

To address this hurdle, MHA is working hard to find people throughout south central Kansas who have a passion for our mission and want to join us in this important work by finding a dedicated fund for salary adjustment. After all, we are all affected by mental illness each year, even if you're not aware of it. It's your co-worker who keeps missing days because of debilitating anxiety, leaving you to finish up their projects. It's your spouse or grandchild who seems distant even if they are standing beside you, because their depression doesn't allow them to engage with you emotionally anymore. If you've been touched by mental illness or know someone struggling now, consider reminding them that a truly fulfilling career may be just a click away at www.MHASCK.org/careers.

MHA would like to show our sincere gratitude to all of the supporters that have and/or are currently supporting our mission financially!



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