

THE SEEKER

A Newsletter of Mental Health Association of South Central Kansas



Mental Musings

In my daily conversations with folks throughout the south central Kansas region, I get interesting snapshots of what mental illness looks like to them.

- To CEOs, it may look like an expense on their balance sheet.
- To elected officials, it may look like homelessness.
- To those who are directly affected by mental health concerns in their families, it may look like a wayward brother or granddaughter who needs diagnosis and treatment.
- Even to those who directly utilize our services, mental illness often looks only like their particular illness.

And while each of these facets of mental health is true to some extent, each paints only a small picture of the true nature of how mental illness affects our community.

- To the CEO, untreated mental illness costs their company \$7,000/employee/year in profit for each and every person employed by their business. It is also the driver behind an estimated 40% of job turnover and the associated recruiting and training costs.
- To elected officials, untreated mental illness is far too common among those experiencing homelessness. But simply giving them a place to live does not make the causes behind their situation disappear. Without broader support, they will continue to be high-utilizers of the social safety net which is funded by public tax dollars.
- To those who see first-hand the effects of mental illness in their families, you know better than anyone the drive and the passion to find the resources that your loved ones need. Depression, anxiety, substance use, schizophrenia, and many more illnesses undoubtedly shape your vision of mental health, and you know that so much more is needed!
- To our consumers, the breadth of programs offered by MHA each year is there to ensure that a holistic treatment plan is available to you without having to send you all over the city, county, or even the state while creating the risk of dangerous gaps and expensive duplication of services.

The fact is that no one person has a full picture of what mental illness truly entails. It is a complex and multi-faceted concept that requires an equally robust organization able to offer the scope of care required for Wichita and beyond. With your support since 1957, we have been that organization, and it remains an honor to serve.



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.



Follow MHA on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for the most recent updates!

Checking-in

It's a concept we hear about often. On 100+ degree summer days. When they missed a day of work. And of course, if they are struggling with their mental health. But what does a mental health "check-in" really look like?

A check-in is far less about what you say than it is about the environment in which you say it.

- Shut off and put away your phone. Turn off the television. Close the door. Removing the threat of possible distractions demonstrates to the other person that you are making time for them and only them. They are not a pit stop on the way to your next meeting or obligation. They are the destination.
- Sit down and look them in the eyes. Even if they won't look at you, your eye contact lets them know that you are focused on them. It also helps you read facial expressions as you prepare to have potentially a difficult conversation.
- "How are you?" It's not a hard question but genuinely asked, these three words have a tendency to crumble walls and open floodgates. You may hear things you didn't expect, but it's all the more reason to...
- Come to the conversation prepared. MHA began life as an educational organization, and a huge part of our mission remains to raise the level of education surrounding mental health, along with being a resource for families, employers, and the community in general. We re-fill our literature cabinets and brochure racks by the box, offer free speaking services, and present at dozens of health and resource fairs each year. So we can provide both the educational materials and the programs for nearly anything you may hear.

People in the midst of a mental health crisis tend to be very honest, so take the time to provide them with a safe space to tell you what is happening in their lives and make genuine inquiries about their well-being. And if they need it, our therapy center is available at 316.652.2590.



A week in the Caribbean

Last year's Beautiful Minds Gala on October 8 was remarkable in attendance, quality of the event, and money raised to support the programs in our children's division. And this year is shaping up to be even better!

By March, all 30 tables have already been sold out; though we did keep enough seats aside for any additional corporate sponsors that may commit between now and the end of September. And the live auction experiences continue to come in, including a 7-night Caribbean cruise from Celebrity Cruises, and an African photo safari!

Of course, the real prize is seeing the passion with which the south central Kansas community invests in mental health for children, families, seniors, veterans, and all others willing to raise their hands and seek the help that we all need sometimes. MHA believes firmly that your access to quality mental health care should never be dictated by your financial situation. If you need mental health care, you need mental health care. Period. Our entire staff lives this truth each day and chooses to serve you through their position at MHA because they care. And you can't put a price on that.



What about Bob?

Bob* spent years being abused by his mother's boyfriend but when he told her, she dismissed it despite often having bruises on her face. In his teens, Jacob started drinking to temporarily quiet the pain. Eventually he got out of the house, but not out of the habit.

In his 20's, Jacob met a woman at work. They bonded over drinking and had two boys before she left. Jacob had custody, but was a high-functioning alcoholic with write-ups at work for missing Mondays after hard-drinking weekends. And he was a heavy user of the company health insurance. His co-workers got annoyed with having to cover when he wasn't there, and his sons had learned to stay away when he was drinking...often staying with friends when it was particularly bad. The younger son struggled with dyslexia but couldn't ask his dad to pay for a tutor since there was hardly money for food, and it was not uncommon to see a "Final notice" in the mailbox. The older son started acting out and skipping school, so he didn't bother applying to college. With his truancy rate, his odds of graduating high school were about 20% lower than his peers, and he was 25% less likely to get any education beyond grade 12.

When the pandemic hit, Jacob's drinking worsened to the point he blatantly went to work drunk and was fired. When the boys got home from school, Jacob was passed out on the floor and they called 911 because they couldn't wake him up. It wasn't helped by the eviction notice on their door. When 911 wasn't getting called to take Jacob to an emergency room, they were getting called by the younger son's teacher who lived next door because she heard yelling late at night and saw his social withdrawal. Finally, the teacher told a friend who works at MHA. Our 200-person staff got Jacob substance abuse counseling, and therapy for his childhood trauma. When he's ready, we'll add Supported Employment to help him find a job suited to his skills that has a culture where mental health is openly supported.

The boys attend group programs with our school prevention staff to learn healthy, sustainable coping skills. And the case workers in our youth division help them find tutoring and assistance for the learning disability while holding them accountable to achieving their goals on a personalized treatment plan. Our Youth and Family Stabilization program offers Jacob parenting classes. He is getting outpatient therapy to break the cycle of abuse that he experienced as a child. And finally, Jacob is on the wait list in our residential division to get safe and stable housing that he can afford for his family.

It's easy to think Bob's story doesn't affect you. But Bob works for your company. The work-place resources that he required drained your profitability by over \$30,000 each year, which affected your paycheck. His sons took up limited educational resources, depriving your children of the quality of education they could otherwise have been receiving. And the resulting limitations on employment prospects for them mean fewer good applicants for the jobs at your firm that could otherwise have helped you grow. And without MHA's intervention, this family would have been well on their way to these issues becoming generationally-entrenched. Bob's story DOES affect you. But you have the power to stop this cycle now by supporting MHA. Call 316.651.1241 to learn how.

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