



# Advocate

Kenton Beachy, Executive Director

Maureen Traverse, Editor

## Schizophrenics Anonymous Facilitator Reaches Milestone

by Maureen Traverse

When Darrell Herrmann was thirty, he began experiencing delusions. A United States Army Captain specializing in field artillery and nuclear weapons, he believed he'd been drugged as the subject of a secret Army conspiracy to produce super soldiers. That was why he could no longer sleep and struggled to perform his duties. Darrell sought help at an Army hospital, where doctors realized he'd become psychotic and transferred him to a military psychiatric ward. "At that point, it was obvious that I needed to make a career change," Darrell says. "Psychosis and nuclear weapons just don't go together." What followed is a common experience for those living with schizophrenia— withheld diagnoses, little to no education on mental illness, and low expectations on the part of mental health professionals.

But Darrell's life didn't grind to a halt at the moment he was diagnosed. The year after his hospitalization, he went back to college to study computer programming, finished his degree two years later and successfully worked as a computer programmer for eighteen years before going on disability in 2004. One of the biggest misconceptions about people with schizophrenia is that they cannot work or live fulfilling lives. Darrell is proof that simply isn't true.

Darrell continued with treatment, even as his diagnoses changed and his medication was adjusted. Still, much of what he learned about schizophrenia in the early years of living with the illness came from his own library research. Eventually, he discovered Schizophrenics Anonymous (SA), a support group sponsored by Mental Health America of Franklin County. While Darrell had communicated with others living with schizophrenia via an online forum, this was the first time he was able to talk about his symptoms openly in face-to-face conversations with people who shared the experience. In 2003, members of the group were invited to speak to patients at Riverside Hospital,

and Darrell eagerly joined them. The following year, after going on disability, he approached MHAFC about conducting SA groups in other psychiatric wards in Columbus. Today Darrell leads eight hospital groups and one group in the community each week. Ten years ago, he began tracking attendance. Since that time, he has reached more than 30,000 people with his message of self-acceptance and empowered recovery.



Schizophrenics Anonymous is a self-help support group that focuses on seeking solutions to problems and making positive choices. As a facilitator, Darrell hopes to provide patients with something he didn't have when first diagnosed—clear, accurate and encouraging information about mental illness and recovery. What he finds fulfilling about leading these groups is the opportunity to help others, especially given how many are new to the message. But his work has helped him maintain his own recovery, as well. "The best way to help yourself is to help others," Darrell says. "It gives you a sense of motivation and a sense of accomplishment." (See SA Facilitator on page 4.)

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# To Your Mental Health

by Kenton Beachy



Synergy. That's the best way to describe when our ability to fill gaps in service needs coincides with funder interest. We're so grateful to our funding partners, the ADAMH (Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health) boards in both Franklin and Fairfield Counties for

their vision and priorities. And, of course, they need your support for tax levies funding critical services in our communities that otherwise would not be possible.

One such example is recent funding from the ADAMH Board of Franklin County to provide **peer recovery supporter training**. We will coordinate quarterly peer certification trainings in Franklin County and create a collaborative and a job board to bring certified peers and service providers together to support successful employment.

Evidence-based peer support services have been shown to reduce expensive inpatient stays and hospitalizations for patients at risk of readmission, improve individuals' relationships with their health care providers, better engage individuals in care, and significantly increase ability to manage symptoms and reduce reliance on formal services while still achieving positive recovery outcomes. These results are possible because peer supporters are able to use their personal experience and example to help others who are experiencing similar challenges. Peer supporters help develop natural supports and engender ownership of treatment and wellness. And peer supporters themselves gain from helping others and grow in interpersonal competence, social approval, professional growth, and self-management. It's a win-win scenario that MHAFC can now help support more directly.

We're also excited to expand our Ombudsman services through funding from the Fairfield County ADAMH Board. We'll now be able to place a half-

time **Navigator**, based in our office in Lancaster, who will help clients and family members access services in a system that is often confusing and difficult to navigate.

In particular, certain financial, insurance, and life circumstances can cause people to fall between the cracks in the system. Provision of behavioral health services has expanded to residents in the northern part of Fairfield County, increasing the need for assistance with accessing and navigating services in the Pickerington/Violet Township area. And even though Medicaid has expanded, many insurance exchange purchasers are no longer eligible for a sliding fee scale as in the past, creating a significant barrier to getting mental health and addiction services. High deductibles and co-pays make services unaffordable. Low reimbursement rates from Medicare make it an unprofitable insurance for providers to accept, so it's difficult for Medicare beneficiaries to access local services. Our Navigator will help individuals and family members link with needed services at the most appropriate level and place of care and bring service providers and funders together to help develop services that will address previously unmet needs.

This synergy is what MHAFC is all about as we continue to respond to our communities' needs. And we're so pleased to have funding in 2018 to help with both peer recovery supporter training in Franklin County and behavioral health system navigation in Fairfield County.

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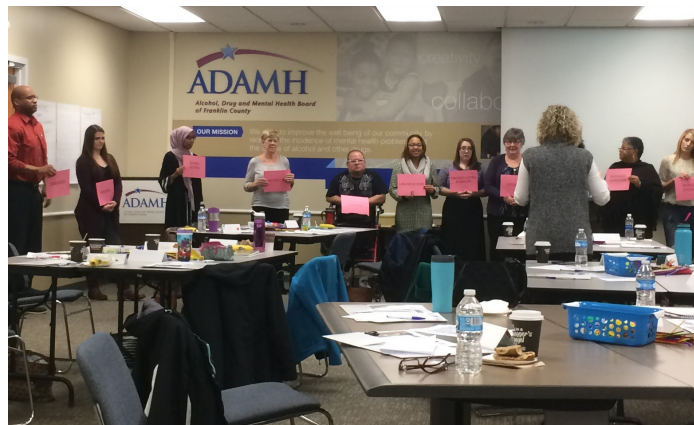
## Tremendous Response to Mental Health First Aid Reveals Need in Franklin County

by Maureen Traverse

One in five Americans experience mental illness in a given year. Last year, 20.2 million (8.4% of the population) had a substance use disorder. These statistics suggest any one of us knows someone with a mental health or substance use issue—shouldn't we know how to help? Just as we learn how to put pressure on a wound or perform CPR, we can also learn to respond to someone experiencing a major depressive episode or a panic attack.

The premise of Mental Health First Aid is that anyone can aid a person with a mental illness or substance use issue. Designed for the general public (not for mental health professionals), the eight-hour certificate course provides detailed information on the symptoms and prevalence of particular disorders, a simple action plan for response in crisis and non-crisis situations, and a guide to professional help and other community resources. But one of the major objectives of Mental Health First Aid is to reduce the stigma around these disorders. Sadly, popular portrayals of mental illness remain sensational and often stoke fear by focusing on violence. Substance use carries its own stigma, as many still assume that addiction is caused simply by a lack of will power rather than a more complicated intersection of genetics, history and comorbidity. Mental Health First Aid seeks to combat these reflexive feelings with information. Participants learn how and when to intervene, how to be direct but understanding, how to listen nonjudgmentally and what to say to show support and guide someone to professional help.

Last year, MHAFC and the ADAMH Board of Franklin County partnered to offer six Mental Health First Aid courses for the public, free of charge. The community's response was overwhelming, and the classes quickly filled to capacity, leaving a long wait list. Participants came from a variety of professions—teaching, libraries, churches, human resources and community organizations—while others wanted to



Mental Health First Aid participants with instructor, MHAFC's Program Director, Tonya Fulwider, in the foreground.

better understand how to help a family member or friend. Feedback from participants demonstrated the course's effectiveness, with participants raving, "I feel educated and enabled to help others in crisis," and "[The course] was excellent—I will recommend it to others in the community, at school and at work."

Two of the six courses focused on the unique needs of those working and volunteering in public safety roles, including how to respond to a mental health crisis while on the job and how to care for yourself after experiencing trauma. Participants from private security, EMS, campus police and other groups learned to recognize the signs of mental illness and substance use, how to provide nonjudgmental support, and what professional help and other resources are available in the community. The public safety courses were co-taught by a mental health professional and a member of the Columbus Police, each bringing their own expertise to the scenarios and action plan.

The tremendous interest in this course reveals a great need in Franklin County—many of us encounter mental illness and substance use in our families, schools, jobs and churches. We want to help, even when it may be uncomfortable. At MHAFC, we were thrilled to see such an enthusiastic response and will partner with ADAMH again this year to continue providing Mental Health First Aid.

## Give Mom the Mic Is Back, Funnier Than Ever

by Maggie Hallett

It's the eighth year for our hilarious and heartwarming girls' night out event, *Give Mom the Mic*, benefitting our POEM (Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms) program, and we are so excited for what the evening has in store. This year will include a new, interactive format (think: Family Feud), and because they were such a hit, we're bringing back local comedians Sarah Bucher Greer of Hashtag Comedy and Sara Given, author of *Parenting Is Easy: You're Probably Just Doing It Wrong*, to lead the festivities. We also look forward to introducing another new experience to guests—the wine toss! It's as fun as it sounds and guests can walk away with up to three (good) bottles of wine for as little as \$25!



Sara Given at last year's show

Not only is the night full of fun, laughter and connection, we have the opportunity to share the important work that the POEM program is doing to help pregnant, postpartum and parenting women get the mental health support they need. We'd love for you to join us. Tickets are going fast: [www.mhafc.org/gmtm-tickets](http://www.mhafc.org/gmtm-tickets).

## We are pleased to announce our 2018 Board Officers:

*President*

**Matthew Endress, MBA** Cardinal Health

*Vice President*

**Stephanie Pavol** Cardinal Health

*Secretary/Treasurer*

**Dave Speas, CPA** Columbia Gas of Ohio

## Welcome to our new 2018 board members:

Allison Mitsui, Nationwide Insurance

Todd Lacksonen, AstraZeneca

## SA Facilitator (con't from cover)

Facilitating hospital groups means Darrell shares a brief connection to patients but cannot follow their recovery after discharge. Sometimes he wonders what happens to them, he says, but, in his characteristic practicality, admits that's just the way it has to be. Still, nurses on the units have told him that after he leaves, they observe attitude changes in some patients. He recalls how a man in one of his groups appeared to have an epiphany. The man admitted every time he'd been in trouble, he hadn't been on medication, but was self-medicating with drugs and alcohol instead. A year later, Darrell happened to run into the man again at a community mental health center. He told Darrell what that realization had meant—he now had his own apartment and was doing the best he'd ever done in his life.

There is one patient whose story Darrell knows quite well. Although he does not recall meeting her in his hospital group, his wife, Kristen, clearly remembered that was the first time she saw him. They became friends after she began attending a Schizophrenics Anonymous group at Concord Counseling in 2007, and eventually they married. Mental illness certainly complicates marriage, Darrell says, especially when both partners are affected. But it's also like any other marriage—you have to be committed to working things out. The unique problem, as Darrell describes it, is what would happen if he stopped taking his medication, became psychotic and ended up homeless. He has a legal right to do so, and there is nothing Kristen could do to stop it. There is no way for them to give each other power to override those decisions. When they married seven years ago, they agreed to always listen to each other. If she thinks he needs help, he will follow through regardless of what he feels in that moment. She committed to do the same. It's about trust, Darrell says, and so far it has worked.

Despite the grim perception of schizophrenia so many still hold, the statistics of recovery provide some hope. As Darrell points out, "About 90% of the people with schizophrenia improve with medical treatment, and new scientific research offers hope for all those who live with the illness." For 30,000 men and women with mental illness in Central Ohio, Darrell Herrmann has offered support and encouragement. He lives out MHAFC's vision every day, ensuring no one he encounters feels alone on the road to recovery.

## Meet Our Intern

by Sheronda Palmore

Edward (Eddie) Appiah-Boateng comes to MHAFC as our MSW-I intern from The Ohio State University's School of Social Work. Eddie's interest in social work started long before he entered the classroom, and he is now focused on how he will effect change as a social worker with a macro level focus. Eddie is interested in how current policies impact adolescents of color in the school system. With a growing knowledge of the school-to-prison pipeline, Eddie now knows many of his peers may have met a better outcome had others acknowledged and advocated for change amidst barriers and challenges. He is grateful for his own mentors who directed him toward options that expanded his horizon.



When asked what he likes about his placement thus

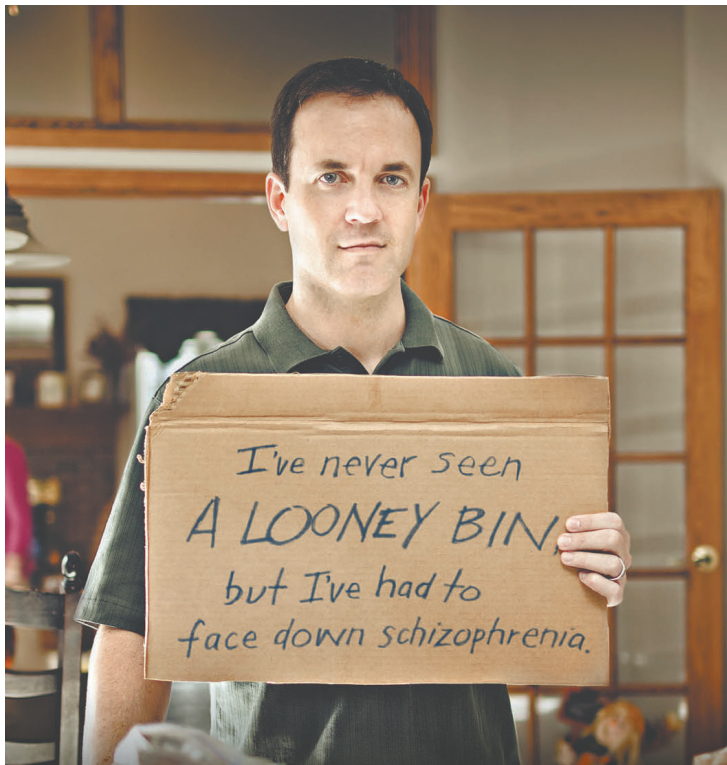
## Want to make a difference?

### Become a Pro Bono Counselor!

We're currently looking for Spanish-speaking therapists, African-American male and female therapists, and male therapists of all races/ethnicities.

For more information, or to apply, contact Sheronda Palmore, Pro Bono Counseling Program Director at 614-884-7227 or [spalmore@mhafc.org](mailto:spalmore@mhafc.org)

far, Eddie shares he has a better understanding of the challenges individuals face as they try to access care. He hopes to leave MHAFC with a better understanding of how mental health organizations and other community entities collaborate to produce best outcomes for clients.



End The Stigma  
**#StopTheCrazyTalk**

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## Board Spotlight



**Susan Jagers** directs the Ohio Poverty Law Center, which advocates for policies that improve the lives of low-income Ohioans. Although relatively new to the job at the Center, Susan has more than twenty years of experience in policy, lobbying, and communications work.

She joined the board after working with MHAFC's Executive Director, Kenton Beachy, on legislation that would improve patients' access to needed medication. One of the first things Susan worked on after joining the board was creating a process through which the organization would take positions on public policy.

Having family and friends who have experienced challenges in accessing care for mental health issues, Susan sees the importance of expanding access to care. She likes to highlight MHAFC's Pro Bono Counseling Program and enjoys attending *Give Mom the Mic* with friends.

Susan lives in Grandview Heights with her husband, Chris, and two kids, Brad and Courtney.

# Thank You!

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*In Memory of Phyllis Kotwis Gonot*  
Josie Gonot

# Programs

## MHAFC Welcomes Michel Coconis

by Maureen Traverse

MHAFC is happy to welcome Dr. Michel Coconis, who is providing essential Ombudsman services while LeeAnn Mattes is on maternity leave. With a PhD in Social Work, an extensive history of teaching at Central Ohio universities, proven ability to conduct research in a variety of capacities, and years of volunteering for local social justice organizations, Michel is uniquely suited for the position. She brings knowledge of the Franklin County mental health system and the dedication and passion to thoroughly research and resolve problems. “Working as the Ombudsman for MHA has been so rewarding,” Michel says, because she has the opportunity to connect people with emotional needs to the committed professionals who perform their jobs with enthusiasm and compassion. She also cites her appreciation for our “resource-rich community” as

an important result of doing this work. She says, “Every social worker should work as an Ombudsman for a period in their lives, and their gratitude for life would be spilling over indeed!”

MHAFC is grateful to Michel for the invaluable assistance she is providing to the Ombudsman program. LeeAnn, who gave birth to her daughter, Gwen, at the end of January will return as Ombudsman later this spring.



## Ending 2017 with Holiday Magic

by Maureen Traverse

In early December, MHAFC celebrated the commitment and generosity of volunteers, donors and community partners at our annual Holiday Magic awards banquet and gift drive for Twin Valley Behavioral Healthcare (TVBH). It was a lovely night with a room full of supporters, mental health care providers, consumers and friends who share the MHAFC mission to promote mental wellness.

In this amazingly generous year, we collected over \$1,500 in gifts and monetary donations for patients with severe mental illness at TVBH. These patients spend their holidays in the hospital, and the gifts help to make a difficult situation a bit brighter, so thanks to all who contributed!

Holiday Magic is also a night devoted to thanking and awarding our most outstanding partners and any departing board members. This year, we recognized Corey Perry for his two terms as board president, and Leigh Householder, who served on the board for three years. We are forever grateful for their invaluable perspectives and leadership.



Norman Guitry award winner Marian Stuckey with Kenton Beachy

### Norman Guitry Award

*Marian Stuckey*

### Corporate Partner Award

*Fifth Third Bank*

### Community Partner Award

*The ADAMH Board of Franklin County*

### Pro Bono Counseling Program Volunteer of the Year

*Nancy Watson*

### POEM Volunteer of the Year

*Erin McLaughlin*

### Support Group Volunteer of the Year

*Scott Hauser*



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Showtime @ 8 pm

**Tickets are going fast! [www.mhafc.org/gmtm-tickets](http://www.mhafc.org/gmtm-tickets)**