

Lighting the Way

A publication of Monroe Community Mental Health Authority



May 13, 2022

From the Director's Desk

Happy Spring!

Spring is often associated with new life and new beginnings. This Spring, in addition to green grass, sunshine, and blooming flowers, I am thankful that, for the first time in about two years, we are seeing faces again—faces in our building, uncovered by masks!

As we move toward a new normal—living life with COVID-19, we are seeing more staff working back in our buildings, more individuals opting to receive their services in person again, and more community events. It feels good, and it feels like a good time to update everyone on other “new beginnings” here at MCMHA.

Telehealth: MCMHA is very happy to offer in-person services to every individual who requests them. The pandemic taught us, however, that some services can be provided through telehealth services and that some individuals prefer to receive services virtually. MDHHS continues to allow us to provide services virtually and by telephone, if necessary. When you schedule your appointments with your clinician or doctor, feel free to indicate your preferred method of service.

COVID-19 Protocols: MCMHA is committed to doing our best to assure that everyone who enters our buildings is healthy. For this reason, we continue to ask anyone entering our buildings to complete the health questionnaire, which included a temperature check, and to reschedule if you have any symptoms or a temperature of over 100.4. Masks are now suggested, but not required, for either the person being served or the staff providing the service. MCMHA staff will wear a mask if the person receiving services makes the request.

Behavior Health Home (BHH): MCMHA is very excited to announce that we are now a Certified Behavioral Health Home! Beginning July 1, MCMHA is initiating a new service option for individuals with severe and persistent mental illnesses and co-occurring physical health diagnoses. The BHH allows eligible individuals to work with a multi-disciplinary team of healthcare professionals who will attend to the individuals’ complete health and social needs. A 2019 report of Medicaid beneficiaries with mental illness indicated that nearly 50 percent of those individuals do not receive adequate treatment. The BHH is a proven model to increase access to coordinated and integrated care. We are looking forward to reporting out on what we know will be a successful program!

Finally, May is Mental Health Awareness month! You may know that one in five adults will be diagnosed with a mental illness in any given year—20% of us! Depression and anxiety are the most common, but also the most responsive to treatment! You may also know that individuals with a mental illness continue to face stigma. I’m thrilled that this year’s theme for Mental Health Awareness is “Fight In the Open!” MCMHA is honored to “fight in the open” to assure that mental illness and the surrounding issues are discussed openly in our homes, communities, and among our representatives. To celebrate this important month, MCMHA is hosting a Mental Health Fun Day! If you or someone you love receives services with us, please come by for food and fun on Friday, May 27th from 10 to 2. I look forward to seeing everyone there!

Lisa Graham, LMSW

Executive Director

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Customer Services is Here for You!

As you seek or receive services from our agency there may come a time when you may need additional information. This may be in regards to available services, how to access services, how to file a complaint or an appeal, or other areas of information or questions you are seeking answers for.

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As Customer Services I may be an employee of the agency but I want to assure you that my main function is to be an advocate for the consumers/families and guardians. I also ensure that the organization provides care that is respectful and free of stigma.

I am available to talk to you in person or by phone Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. After hours by appointment. If you wish, you may also send me an email at bgates@monroecmha.org. My direct line is 734-384-8780.

Affordable Connectivity Program

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is working to help build awareness about the [Affordable Connectivity Program](#), a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) program. The new long-term benefit will help to lower the cost of broadband service for eligible households struggling to afford internet service.

The Affordable Connectivity Program provides:

- Up to \$30/month discount for broadband service;
- Up to \$75/month discount for households on qualifying Tribal lands; and
- A one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet purchased through a participating provider if the household contributes more than \$10 but less than \$50 toward the purchase price.

The Affordable Connectivity Program is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household.

Who is Eligible?

A household is eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program if the household income is at or below 200% of the [Federal Poverty Guidelines](#), or if a member of the household meets at least *one* of the criteria outlined at <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>.

Two-Steps to Enroll

Go to [ACPBenefit.org](https://www.acpbenefit.org) to submit an application or print out a mail-in application; and

Contact your preferred participating provider to select a plan and have the discount applied to your bill.

Some providers may have an alternative application that they will ask you to complete.

Eligible households must **both apply for the program and contact a participating provider to select a service plan.**

For more information and full details, visit <https://www.fcc.gov/acp> or call 877-384-2575.

Check out the Consumer Outreach Toolkit at <https://www.affordableconnectivity.gov/community-resources/>

Read more about the ACP in the recent White House Fact Sheet: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/09/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-vice-president-harris-reduce-high-speed-internet-costs-for-millions-of-americans/>

You're Invited.....

**To Become a Member of one of MCMHA's
Performance Improvement Committees!**

MCMHA has multiple committee opportunities that focus on improving our practices to better serve you and our community.

Citizens Advisory Council

Committee Purpose: Review and develop policies and procedures related to anti-stigma and advocacy efforts and sharing of local knowledge. Advocacy and Legislative outreach.

Meeting Dates: 2nd Tuesday of each month from 1 - 2:30 p.m.

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Care, Treatment, and Services Committee

Committee Purpose: Review MCMHA clinical performance improvement activities, systemic areas of clinical improvement, and compliance standards for The Joint Commission, MDHHS, Regional and Local Policies.

Meeting Dates: 4th Tuesday of every month from 1 - 2:30pm

MCMHA Board Meetings

You are also welcome to attend the MCMHA Board Meetings on the 4th Wednesday of every month.

Board Meetings are currently call in only due to COVID-19.

To attend please call: (929) 205-6099

(This is not a toll free number, standard charges will apply according to your phone service carrier)

Meeting ID: 954 5153 4313 #

If you are interested in joining one of our committees or for more information, please contact:

Bridgitte Gates, Customer Services Manager
Phone: 734-384-8780



Consumer Success Story

Phase 1 Summary and Commitment to change

What did life look like: My life has been full of challenges. Some beyond my control, some were results of my choices. Then in 1999 I was shot in the head. My life drastically changed. My mental health issues were greatly magnified. I was no longer able to work in a career that I based my identity on. I found myself in a revolving door, in and out of jail and prison. I have spent approx. 16 of the last 21 years in lock-up. Mostly as a direct result of consequences related to mental health episodes. Then finally, in April, God and man intervened and I was offered help for my mental health affliction instead of punishment.

Barriers/challenges/stresses: I have many challenges in my life. I feel there are two major ones worth mentioning.

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1. Mental health challenges—the two main aspects are paranoid schizophrenia and agoraphobia. It is very challenging for me to deal with the public, unfamiliar people, unfamiliar places, unfamiliar circumstances and surroundings and to fulfill commitments and obligations where these issues factor in. +
 2. The challenges associated with my mother's health and my brother.

Personal accomplishments: I am satisfactorily meeting all the requirements necessary to maintain my freedom. I feel my biggest accomplishments, the two I am most proud of are my commitment to my family, and the decision I have made to do something, whether how big or small, every day to better my life and to be a benefit to those around me.

Progress toward goals: I am on an exciting journey. For the past 20 years I have been on a slow trajectory. Progressing from confusion over—then to education about—and finally acceptance of my mental health challenges. These last 20 years I have been primarily focused on controlling and addressing the symptoms. I am now just beginning to explore and get to the heart of the matter, the root cause. In that area I have too many thoughts to share. I would like to be known that I realize I have a lot of work to do and a long way to go. But presently I am content. I am very grateful to be able to do what matters most to me within my current limitations. I would also like it to be known that contentment should not be confused with complacency. I will move forward. Through my faith, the help of the court, agent Alvarado, Kristel and Allison (my therapist) progress is being made and I am confident it will continue.

Consumer Success Story cont.

I would like to end with a few words of encouragement:

- To the advocates of this program: Thank you! This program is making a statement. At the core, at its very foundation, it is saying I see those afflicted and place value on them as a human being.
- To the administration and staff: don't grow weary. I realize the facts of recidivism and relapse may sometimes be disheartening and discouraging. But know this, even if you don't see immediate tangible results you are still planting seeds for the future.
- To the participants: take time to think about what is really going on. You are here because you have value and are worth helping. Be encouraged and accept the challenge. Consider your perspective. Do the right thing, not because you have to, but rather because ultimately, it is beneficial for you, those you love, and everyone around you.

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Phase II Summary

Legal involvement—

On the most current offense, I entered Masserant Feed store in the midst and culmination of an extreme paranoid delusion. I forcibly entered the closed business during the evening hours. This was observed by a concerned citizen who took my license plate number A couple of hours later several police cars and a number of officers converged on my home. I was extremely delusional and scared and was reluctant to leave my home. My brother exited first and was detained and treated very physically and aggressively. When I exited the home I obeyed all verbal commands. While walking backwards toward the officers, hands up submissively, I was tackled by several officers and my face was ground into the asphalt. I sustained lacerations to my forehead, face, and multiple cuts on my knees and legs. I only mention this aspect of the event to bring to light the need for training and education in part of law enforcement. Especially when dealing with someone as myself with a well documented history of mental illness and absolutely no history of violence or resisting officers thru multiple encounters throughout the years. The factors leading to my offense are lengthy and complicated spanning two decades. In a nutshell, I was shot in the head in 1999. When I was shot I saw the appearance of a demon in the man's face who shot me. Then in the 2001 attack of 911 I saw the same demonic face in the dust of the falling towers. Since that time I have had an obsession and on multiple occasions extreme paranoid delusions about terrorist attacks and demonic activity. I have entered businesses illegally in attempts to gather evidence and information to stop what I believed at the times to be imminent terrorist attacks. Largely, as a result of these actions and delusional episodes. I have endured six different incarcerations for a total of approximately 17 years.

Consumer Success Story cont.

(4)prison terms and (2) county sentences. In the past, these episodes were the result of a addressed mental illness, changing of medication doses and changes of types of medication. In this offense I believe the delusional episode was a result of escalating external stimulus and inconsistent mediation due to the covid policy of shelter in place. I was not taking prescribed medication consistently at that time due to not going to my mothers house daily. At that time she was monitoring and encouraging my medication.

Worst days—

Time does not permit the mentioning in totality the darkness and devastation involved emotionally and physically as a result of 17 years of separation from family, loved ones, and all that encompasses. I think the hardest aspect to process was the repeated punishment for what I now understand is a mental illness. I accept the fact that punishment is necessary when laws are broken. But in my offense there are always culpability issues. Especially in mine.

Initially, proceeding my first prison term, I was sent for a psychiatric evaluation. In hindsight, this leads me to believe that mental illness was always suspected as a contributing factor. I was diagnosed as suffering from traumatic brain injury. As a result of head trauma in a car wreck and a gunshot wound to the head n close succession, among other mental health issues. At that time this compounded the fact that I did not possess the capability to articulate and explain my actions sufficiently.

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In several later offenses, when my mental illness was finally recognized and addressed, independent analysis assessed my actions as not guilty by reason of insanity. I believe my circumstances were considered, and they helped alleviate the severity of the punishment, but it was still harsh punishment nonetheless. To be misunderstood by society and the judicial system and treated in a way that I perceived as conveying the message that you are defective and of no value to society. The damage caused was the hardest thing to overcome. How I viewed myself as a result of these interactions was challenging to say the least. My worst period was being unable to be with my father and family during the diagnosis of his cancer and his eventual death. Not being there to support him and my family during this time and not to be able to process his death and grieve in a healthy manner was devastating. I am told that in my fathers last days he said he wished he could hug me just one last time.

Process of Change—

I could spend hours on this alone. I will try to be brief and concise in this summary. I believe my faith to be the foundation. I believe the hand of God to be evident in every aspect. During multiple incarcerations I have been on a journey. Moving ever so slowly from chaos and confusion over, education about, and finally acceptance of my mental illness. It has been a long and hard fought journey. There have been many setbacks and obstacles. To stay on an upward trajectory in light of everything that has transpired has taken a lot of determination, hard work, and courage. It has been a very, very long and extremely challenging endeavor. I am on a multifaceted and complicated journey. I believe the most important part of this journey is that I am now finding my identity in Jesus Christ. Not in what society and circumstances may seem to dictate. The most important elements of this journey has been the process of self-education and engaging in activities that enforce the reality that I have value and are of value to others.

Consumer Success Story cont.

I do not want to paint a picture that I think I have arrived. But I am on a journey that is leading upward. I will never stop and never give up. I still have many, many challenges. But that's life. Everyone has challenges.

Positive Aspects -

The biggest positive aspect of Mental Health Court to me is its very existence. It is saying to the participants you have value, are worth helping, and I exist to help you. Participation in Mental health court, at least for myself, is validating what I have been convincing myself of for the last two decades. You have value and are worth the effort. I am extremely grateful and appreciative for the opportunity offered to me. What I am most proud of is that even in spite of everything that has transpired and my current limitations I am able to do what matters most to me. I am able to help support and be a positive presence for my mother and brother and those I interact with. After three decades of addiction and two decades of incarcerated separations I am finally there for them. What would you say to former self—"What took so long." What advice would I give—Never Give Up! Thank God you didn't give up, those who loved you never gave up, and more importantly God never gave up on me. How am I different today—words can't describe.

Maintenance -

I have reached a conclusion and I believe it to be accurate. In my opinion my mental illness is basically two fold.

1. Physiological and
2. Mental perspective

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The physiological aspect, or chemical imbalances are beyond my control but may be addressed thru medication. I am convinced it is absolutely necessary to stay on and to be involved in all aspects of determining what is effective for me and to take medication consistently. It is also important to continue to educate myself about warning signs and to take measures to deescalate external stimuli and detrimental thought patterns. The other aspect at least in my case, is how I view the world. This perspective, or how I view the world has been shaped by a difficult childhood, 5 decades of addiction and incarcerations, and traumatic events too numerous to count. That is where faith, therapy, counseling, positive self disciplines, and a continual quest of discovery is essential. The Mental health court is good in that it is structured in a way that it encourages disciplines and obligations that develop positive attributes. It is also an encouragement and affirmation that I am on the right path. With that said, it is the intangibles of the court that are proving to be the most beneficial to me. The help and advice of Kristel, the encouragement of agent Alvarado, and the encouragement and compassion of the staff and judicial system itself are inspiring. I think that one of the most revealing moments to me was that after my very emotional and heart felt phase I summary was when people, especially the staff, were openly moved with compassion and empathy for me for such a painful process. Afterwards, Judge Vitale (a judge) actually hugged me. It was a very touching and moving event. I think it is very important to stay in counseling with Kristel and Allison (my wise-mind therapist) after my legal obligations are fulfilled. I was relieved when I discovered this will continue if I choose to. It is also extremely important to stay on medication and be involved with MCCMH. Also, to not grow complacent but to keep moving forward in my daily disciplines (faith and family) and to develop and nurture positive

Consumer Success Story cont.

Characteristics. I am thoroughly convinced I will continue to move forward.

Goals/Where do I see myself—

In one year I see myself completing or at least nearing the end of my legal obligations and continuing to be a help, encouragement, and positive stable influence; especially to my family and also to everyone I interact with. In five years—overcoming, at least in part, the aspects of my mental illness that are so restrictive to me socially and geographically. Eventually, I can't put time constraints on it, but I would like to be a help and encouragement to others who are hurting, no matter what challenges they are facing. I would especially like to help those in bondage to addictions and those who are incarcerated. These are areas I have intimate experience in. My heart is especially toward going to the prisoners and to bring them a message of hope and value.

In conclusion—I was talking to my Mom recently about her current medical challenges. She said something that stuck with me. She declared “It is what it is.” I immediately responded with “I refuse to accept that,” Let me be clear, there is wisdom in being a realist in certain situations. But there is also wisdom in not accepting “it is what it is” mindset. Don’t use present situations, circumstances, or past behaviors to stay stuck in the rut of an “It is what it is” mindset. Assess your challenges and do everything within your power to change a “what is” situation and improve it.

Two quotes:

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“Falling down doesn’t make you a failure, staying down does.” And the most important thing I can convey to you today, and what is at the very heart of this summary, “You will act like what you believe you are.”

By: Lewis Russell Jr.

Consumer Success Story

In partnership with Sarah Phillips, who oversees Children's Programming at the Navarre Library, an ACT consumer kicked off this mental health series with a shared experience of her own struggles with mental health and addiction. This first segment introduced the basics of mental health.

What is mental health?

Is mental health the same as mental illness?

What are coping skills

Who do I talk to if I, or someone I care about, might need help with some of these things?

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ACT could not be more proud of HK, who shared the incredible story of her journey with mental health challenges and addiction. The kids received her story with great kindness and genuine interest.

HK has been volunteering during children's programming hours, which take place each Tuesday and Thursday, from 3:30pm-4pm, at the library. Here, she has gained not only the trust and affection of these kids, but an increase in her confidence and a true sense of meaning and purpose.

Building Open and Face to Face Contacts **Resuming**

MCMHA's building is open! Masks wearing is suggested, but not required. You can have a face to face contact with your case manager, therapist or prescriber.

Please specify when making your appointment.

Thank you and we look forward to seeing YOU!

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