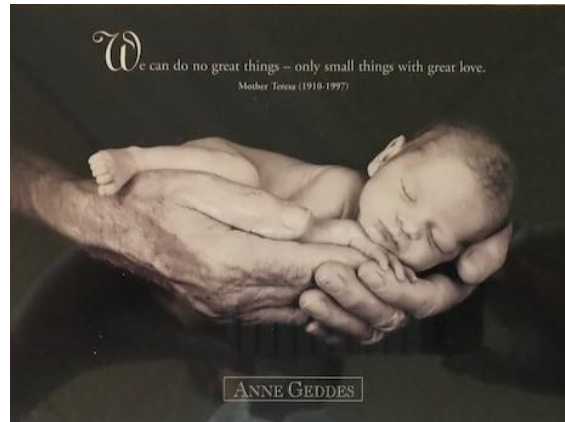


Spreading Hope, Spurring Action, Supporting Families, Saving Lives!

"We all have the power to show love and compassion to those who are struggling in our community."



Mental Health Matters:

A Monthly Blog Post from the Director

From Darkness to Light

On May 8, Mental Health America of Central Carolinas held its Fourth Annual *Wake Up for Wellness* event and what a wonderful event it was. I want to personally thank all those who worked so hard to make this such a success, especially the MHA staff, Board of Directors and Development Committee. A special thanks to Tamlin Hall, creator of the movie, *Holden On*; Board President

Mary Ellen Ezarsky; Alex Hambacher, husband of the late Belle Duseault Hambacher, a former MHA Board member; and incoming Board Member and MHA Storyteller Rob Jones, and Rabbi Judy Schindler for being a part of the program. Finally, gratitude to all those who got up extra early to attend and to those who so generously supported the mission of MHA through your gifts.

Below is my message from *Wake Up for Wellness*:

Good morning, everyone! It is such a pleasure to have you with us today as we celebrate MHA of Central Carolinas and the movement to promote mental wellness throughout Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.

For as long as I can remember, I have had this picture hanging in my office (see above) and while some may not agree with Mother Teresa's words, they inspire me. "We can do no great things—only small things with great love." Our theme today is **The Power of One**, and we all have the power to show love and compassion to those struggling in our community.

Author Barbara Johnson wrote, "Faith is seeing light with your heart when all your eyes see is darkness."

We know there are thousands of people right here in this community who are living a life in darkness.

We know there are young people every single day sitting in a classroom who have thought about suicide. Tragically, there are too many of all ages who have died by suicide and too many families who are coping with those losses.

We know there are parents of young children who need mental health services, who can't access help for their child because of the cost, or the lack of providers, or because of the stigma surrounding mental illness.

We know there are men and women who go to work each day who can't or won't talk about their mental health diagnoses because they feel they will be discriminated against.

We know that individuals with mental health disorders face significant economic struggles, and that 1/3 of the homeless population is made up of people with untreated psychiatric illnesses.

We know that each year there are one in five people in our community who are dealing with a mental health issue.

Author Donna Goddard writes, "Anything that is held in secret cannot be healed. The light cannot reach that which is locked away in the dark."

We cannot, as a community address the needs of those who are often the most vulnerable, if we can't talk about the issue.

All who are involved with MHA—staff members, board members, volunteers and our donors—are committed to bringing light where there is darkness. Through the work that we do, we are fighting to eliminate stigma, improve services and create a community that embraces those who need our help the most.

Through our Compeer program, we are bringing light to individuals struggling with a chronic mental health concern. Those individuals who participated in the program last year consistently reported they felt cared about, understood and less lonely.

Free evidence-based trainings, such as Mental Health First Aid and QPR suicide prevention, are helping to reduce stigma and increase understanding of mental health issues, and how to support individuals we may interact with on a day to day basis. By the end of June, all 1,100 Charlotte-Mecklenburg firefighters will be trained in Mental Health First Aid thanks to the MHA training collaborative made up of MHA, Atrium Health, Novant Health and Cardinal Innovations Healthcare.

MHA's ParentVoice program brings light to nearly 500 family members and caregivers each year who are struggling to find help for their children who have behavioral, emotional and/or mental health challenges. Parents who have children in Youth Treatment Court or with special needs in school, have an advocate through MHA who will help them navigate the judicial and education systems. Through PhotoVoice projects—young people who may be struggling, can find a way to express themselves in a healthy creative way.

Last year, more than 1,500 individuals went online at MHA's website to access our screening tools and nearly 150 individuals came to MHA's monthly coffee and conversations to have an open dialogue about mental health, many sharing their own personal stories.

Our advocacy efforts brought legislators and grassroots advocates together to work for systemic change, increase access to services and provide more resources to mental health. I've presented two scenarios—one of darkness and one of light. There is no doubt that the mental health system in our community and across the country is fragmented and difficult to navigate, but MHA has been fighting since 1933 to bring light to those struggling in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and now Cabarrus County. There is still so much work to be done to reduce stigma, improve parity between mental health and physical health, and to provide those who are struggling to see beyond the darkness, to have the quality of life we all seek—a life of dignity, with economic opportunity; a life free of loneliness and isolation; a life full of joy and light.

And you have the power to light the way. This year marks our 85th year at MHA and as we move into

the next 85 years, our vision is to create an organization that can meet the multitude of needs around mental health. I have every confidence that as you share your time, talent and treasure, you will help us achieve our mission to advocate, educate and prevent.

You are getting ready to hear the stories of several who have been impacted by the work of MHA. I want to leave you with one last quote as I invite you to [WATCH OUR VIDEO](#).

Desmond Tutu said “*Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness...*”

P.S. To see some pictures from *Wake Up for Wellness*, [CLICK HERE](#).

#PowerOfOne

Kathy Rogers
Executive Director

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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas promotes mental wellness through advocacy, prevention and education in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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