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Fall Edition: October 2022

The Voice

A letter from the Executive Director



Bittersweet news!

October 28, 2022 will be a sad day at the MHA as we say goodbye to two of our long-time employees, our Community Education Director, Rhiannon O'Shea, and our Peer Services Director, Crys Hites.

Since stepping into her role as the Community Education Director, Rhiannon has increased the MHA's attendance at community events, has conducted dozens of presentations on mental health related topics at schools and businesses in the area, and has increased our presence and followers on social media. Rhiannon will be moving on to another opportunity out of state.

As our Peer Services Director, Crys has facilitated our support groups and Consumer Planning Advisory Committee, provided guidance and support to our peer staff at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, Shaw Building, Trott Access Center, and most recently, at the Niagara Falls Housing Authority, and provided mental health-related trainings to law enforcement agencies in Niagara County.

Crys will be moving on to another opportunity in Central New York.

What I will miss most about Rhiannon and Crys is their commitment to the mission of the MHA. They are both passionate about their work in the mental health field. While it is difficult to see them leave the agency, they are bound to do great things for those living with a mental health diagnosis in their new respective communities. They also leave their respective departments in good shape for their successors to continue to serve those individuals and families of Niagara County living with a mental health diagnosis.

I look forward to following their careers...their successes...their accomplishments...and professional growth.

**Daniel Colpoys
Executive Director**

The Mission of The Mental Health Association in Niagara County, Inc. is to promote mental wellness by sponsoring and implementing advocacy, education and community service programs.

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The Mental Health Association in Niagara County, Inc. is funded by the New York State Office of Mental Health, the Niagara County Department of Mental Health, the United Way of Greater Niagara, the Grigg Lewis Foundation, grants, and voluntary contributions.



Friendship and Fun is what Compeer Niagara is all about and what we've been up to all year long! We have had a blast all over Niagara County doing everything from Stooze Fest to traveling down the Erie Canal. In between, we've gone to a play, film festival, had our annual picnic on the lake, watched acrobats swing from trees and explored the Niagara County Celtic Festival. We will be finishing the year with a ghost tour, sharing a delicious Thanksgiving meal, and celebrating with White Elephant Bingo. Maybe you've seen us in our blue t-shirts and have wondered what we are all about. Wonder no further! Come join the fun!



← Compeer Niagara Adults cruising the Erie Canal in August at our large monthly event. Yeah that's right! Each month we host a large group activity in our community. This allows us the chance to come together, feel part of a group, be part of the community, explore new places, hobbies, and interests, make friends, and have fun! If you'd like to join as a participant, please call the office for more information, ask for Compeer Niagara.



← Aneishia enjoying the amazing view during our Annual Compeer Niagara picnic at Wilson-Tuscarora state Park in June. This is one of many places that most participants would not have the chance to experience if not for being part of Compeer!



← Cindy and volunteer Nancy have been matched since 2014 and are a great example of the fun and meaningful friendships in Compeer. Check out Compeer on our website www.mhanc.com to learn about volunteering.

Jenny and Rebecca, along with Director, Tara Porter, enjoyed talking over ice cream. Another great feature of Compeer Niagara is the opportunity to get together in small groups and even 1:1. This gives members the chance to form and strengthen relationships that can carry on outside of the program and experience the community with a bit of extra support, guidance, and cheer. →



Community Education

By: Rhiannon O'Shea

I've been working hard to bring our community the BEST mental health and wellness presentations possible. Though schools are our primary audience, we've done presentations for tons of other groups in the county. I also try hard to bring up-to-date and relevant information out to community events.

For example, I presented to the Rotary Club of Lockport on our programs and services, the First Presbyterian Church of Youngstown's Red Sweater Youth Program on Anxiety and Stress Management, and the Behind Blue Eyes Team for the Out of the Darkness Suicide Prevention Walk. I also attended events all over the county: a very diverse National Health Center event behind Heritage Square in early August; the incredibly successful Summer Stampede through Community Health Alliance of North Tonawanda (CHANT); the annual and heartwarming Pass the Rocc Basketball Tournament and Basket Raffle for the benefit of the Shaun Rocco Foundation; the moving Lockport Overdose Awareness Rally at the end of August; the Peach Festival Run/Walk whose proceeds benefited our agency; Lockport New Beginnings Walk-a-Thon and Basket Raffle in early September; a Health Fair at the Lockport Housing Authority's Spires Building; and the Anchoring Hope of NY Walk and Basket Raffle Fundraising event at the end of September that had more baskets in than I've ever seen in my life!

Along with this, we've definitely still been providing services in schools for both students and staff. I've attended countless school open houses from Lockport to Niagara Falls to share information about our programs and services. I did a staff presentation at Niagara Charter School in Niagara Falls, and also really enjoyed presenting to Niagara University's Resident Life group. I've been able to get back into the various schools throughout the Lockport School District, from Aaron Mossell (AMJH) to Lockport High School and Lockport West High School. We also have presentations scheduled with Roy B. Kelley in Lockport, LaSalle Prep in Niagara Falls, Royalton-Hartland Middle School, and the Niagara Wheatfield School District this school year.

Unfortunately, I will be (amicably I must add) leaving the MHANC at the end of this month to explore new opportunities in a very new place! With that being said, we're already scheduling beyond my end date to continue providing these crucial services once the new Community Education and Information Referral Program Director is ready to go.



Pictured in front are two students. Pictured in back, from left to right, are Aaron Mossell Junior High Principal Dr. Smith, Community Education and Information Referral Program Director Rhiannon O'Shea, Mental Health Advocates of Western New York's Youth Peer Advocate Renata P., & AMJH 7th Grade Health Teacher Ms. Swanson.

Hello Everyone- and Goodbye. Having finally gotten my Masters degree, I am leaving the MHA on October 27th to be a Relationship and Trauma Therapist at Ott Counseling, LCSW, PLLC. I really struggled writing this because there is so much I want to say.

First, though, I want to say thank you. You may say I'm in the business of helping others, but really, I am grateful to every single person who has given me the honor of being let into their world for a minute as I help them. I have learned from you, grown from the challenges you've thrown me, and above all else, been inspired by you. I have seen so much awe-inspiring strength in people in the worst of situations, and this reminds me to keep on trying for myself. Please know how amazing and beautiful you are!

I also want to say don't give up. I have struggled through mental health diagnoses and past trauma, through drug addiction and financial problems, and have now found myself with a life I love. I'm 41 and have just gotten my Masters- it's never too late to pursue a dream. Do it.

Lessons I've learned: Be true to yourself and invest in yourself. Strange turns of events can end a career, a relationship, or your happy seat as a homeowner- but nothing can take away those hours invested in learning, growing, healing in therapy, and helping others. In the end, what you have is yourself.

Hurting people hurt people, and healed people heal people. I've never seen a person, be it a boss, coworker, cashier, or landlord, or anyone really, who hurts others be someone who is actually truly happy and at peace in their soul. These people who are difficult to us are the ones who most need our healing kindness. And unless we ourselves get healing, we inevitably hurt others. The best helper is the one who was hurt and now is healed.

There's an inspiring quote for every day, and a flower or sunset or song that will uplift you in every moment, if you go looking for it. So go look for it.

Mental illness has lied to me all my life. It has told me I can't get out of bed, that I can't hold a job, that I can't make friends, that I can't...I can't...I can't. Well, I'm moving on now because I can. I've achieved a dream. And I hope, if anything, that will inspire you to put aside the lies of trauma and mental health diagnoses and substance abuse, and believe that you too can.

Best wishes everyone!

Namaste,

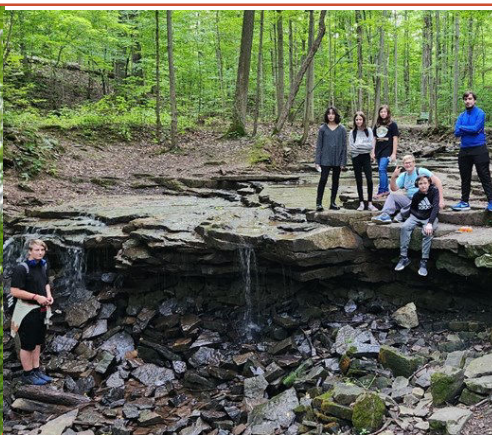
Crystal River-Aaerin Hites, MAMFT

Peer Activities Director



We've had a ton of indoor fun too! Compeer Niagara youth continue to participate in weekly sessions of The Couch, all year long. The Couch is a free, safe, and fun space for Niagara County tweens and teens to spend time with & make friends, hang out, watch movies, play video and board games, etc. Give us a call for more information. Along with The Couch- there's more fun to have indoors, like other monthly event opportunities such as Stooze Fest. Compeer Niagara Youth participant, Tommy, attended along with over 20 other participants. They had a bunch of laughs and "yuck, yucks"!

Enjoying a fire and s'mores was extra sweet gathered around the fire pit purchased with the generous donations in memorial of our dear friend and volunteer Eric Arendas. It embodies important aspects of Compeer Niagara: fellowship, friendship, and firsts! Participant Keith had his first s'more at the age of 53. This gesture allowed all of us to experience another avenue of the ever-lasting power of friendship.



Our Compeer Niagara Youth program has had a fun year both indoors and out! Youth participants are pictured at their September event, a hike at the John B. Nature trail. The kids had a picnic dinner followed by a hike and geocaching. This wasn't the only outdoor fun we've had- each Tuesday over summer break Compeer Niagara staff were on site at Rogers Ave Park with sports equipment, crafts, games and snacks.

SUPPORT THE MHA THROUGH AMAZON SMILE

The MHA is now a registered charity on the Amazon Smile program. The MHA will get .5% of the purchase price whenever someone designates us as the recipient when they buy something on Amazon. Here is the link to use for future reference if you do any shopping on Amazon and wish to support the MHA:

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/16-0951541>



Thanks for your support!

The New Way to Celebrate: The Self-Care Christmas!

By: Crys Hites

This idea isn't for everyone. Some people love to give and receive gifts, and that's awesome. Gifts are a love language for some!

But for those loved ones that don't like to do Christmas shopping, share this idea with them:

Instead of spending a ton of money on each other and both getting gifts that we don't really need or want, let's do a self-care Christmas!

The point of it is to see your loved ones truly happy by having them spend the money they would have spent on you on themselves instead. Then they don't have to worry about what to buy for you, or have shopping stress, or pay high prices. Much less stress for them!

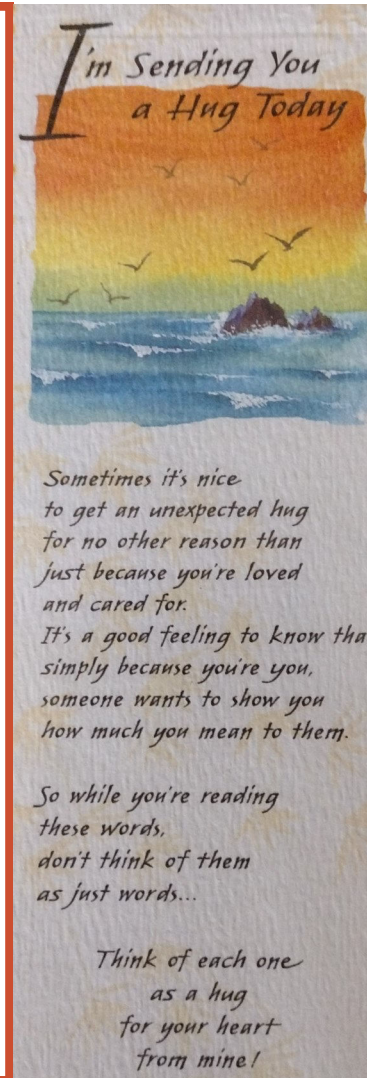
Instead, tell them to go get exactly what they want for themselves, and then show off their new stuff to you and tell you how it made them feel to be able to treat themselves for once. And you do the same! Buy yourself gifts with the money you would have spent on them, then share with them how it made you feel to take care of yourself a little. Celebrate spoiling YOURSELVES!

Also, tell them to take a day of total relaxation instead of going out and fighting the Christmas season crowds for you. Tell them to take care of themselves for once, and do whatever they need to do to feel good. Have them tell you later how much they enjoyed their day of rest. And you do the same thing, and tell them how nice it was to take a day off from Christmas chaos, too.

This way you and your loved one will get to see each other truly happy and relaxed, and taking good care of yourselves the way you should be. That is what holiday love should be about!

To the right, you will find a quote card that we've included in memory of our Community Education and Information Referral Program Assistant, Gloria's, mother-in-law.

We know loss can be very difficult for anybody, which is why we facilitate a grief support group at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Niagara Falls. Call our office at 716-433-3780 to learn more.



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Hope House Director
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MHA Main Desk
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Poinsettia & Wreath Sale to benefit the MHA 2022



Orders due November 17th, 2022

Pick-up from MHA office on 11/29 from 9am-6pm or 11/30 from 9am-4pm

Payment: Checks payable to Mental Health Association

Order form can be found in the middle of the newsletter