



# MHA Matters

## NEWSLETTER



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Cover Photo: Laurel Hummel and daughter Kellie were two of MHA's busiest mask makers for the organization sewing hundreds of handmade masks for direct care staff

## Letter from Cheryl



**Dear Friends,**

Even as we face unprecedented challenges from a global pandemic, we are seeing kindness and compassion channeled in the right direction: to help one another. At the same time, we are witnessing troubling scenes across the country, fueled by emotions ranging from anger to resolve to hope.

Through it all, I am reminded that this organization, the Mental Health Association, was founded on three bedrock principles: respect, integrity and compassion. I embrace these principles in my role as the leader of MHA, and also in the way I live my life. In so doing, I am reminded that I possess the tools to make a positive difference. We all do.

Each of us has a set of eyes, allowing us to see others as they truly are. Each of us has ears, enabling us to listen to another's life experience, hopes and dreams. Each of us has a voice to use for transparent dialogue that can move us towards understanding, tolerance and consideration. Each of us has a brain, and we can educate ourselves and make smart decisions for positive impact on the world. Let us all apply these tools to guide us as we navigate a challenging time in our history.

Wishing you safety and health,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cheryl Fasano". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Cheryl Fasano**  
President & CEO

John Sullivan, owner of Nathan Bill's Bar & Restaurant, at the height of the COVID pandemic, supported MHA by delivering lunch, free of charge, to the agency's corporate office. **John, you matter!**

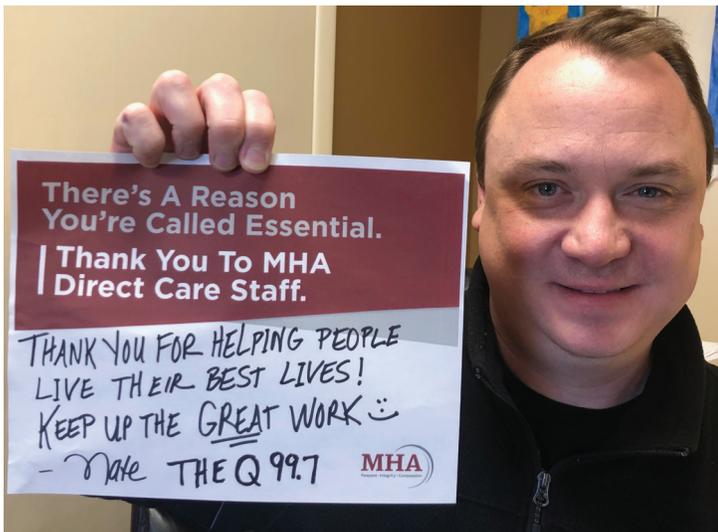
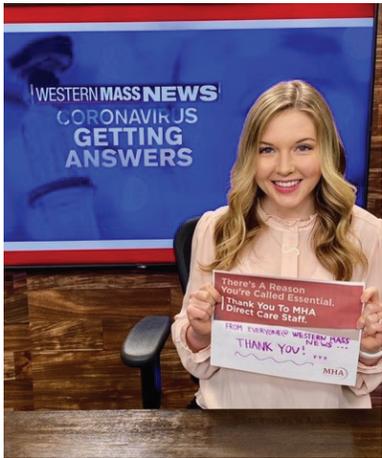


Two years  
in a row



Voted "Best Place to Work"  
and "Best Non-Profit"

The COVID-19 crisis created unprecedented challenges for MHA and the people we serve. It also revealed incredible acts of selflessness, caring and love, from friends old and new. The will to help others is strong in our community! Think about the car parades to celebrate birthdays and graduations when the COVID-19 crisis kept us socially distanced. MHA has been overcoming challenges, too, thanks to the generosity of good people: MHA has received donations for our Good to Go program, which provides clothing, personal care items, home goods and more to people who are intellectually or developmentally disabled, challenged by mental health problems, new in their recovery from addiction, or chronically homeless. Even a global pandemic didn't stop our staff from working 24/7 to care for our community's most vulnerable people, right where they live. Donations of personal protective equipment including masks and gowns continue to help our dedicated staff to serve.



## MHA Introduces TeleWell

MHA introduces TeleWell...and the timing couldn't have been better. TeleWell is MHA's telehealth app. TeleWell enables you, your child and family, or your aging parents to connect with a BestLife counselor using a smartphone, landline, tablet or computer. MHA introduced TeleWell early this year just as the COVID-19 crisis began hitting hard. The ability to connect folks remotely with a BestLife counselor has proven extremely valuable for people who are experiencing heightened anxiety, working through recovery, facing limited options for transportation, and more.

Especially during these uncertain times, it helps to start talking.

MassLive's Anne-Gerard Flynn interviewed MHA's Sara Kendall, MSW, LICSW, Vice President of Clinical Operations, about the importance of MHA's TeleWell telehealth app.

Read the feature story here:  
[www.masslive.com/living/2020/04/coronavirus-telephone-therapy-helps-expand-remote-access-mental-health-association-finds.html](http://www.masslive.com/living/2020/04/coronavirus-telephone-therapy-helps-expand-remote-access-mental-health-association-finds.html)

## MHA Opening New GRIT Homes

MHA is opening two new GRIT residential recovery programs in Springfield and Holyoke, joining the first GRIT location in Springfield which opened last year. GRIT is for adults who have both a substance use disorder and a moderate to severe mental health diagnosis. The first home in Springfield is for adult men, the new Springfield home works with transition-aged young men ages 18 to 26, and the new Holyoke home focuses on the LGBTQ+ population.

"In each GRIT residence, we have intentionally created an environment to serve the unique needs of a specific population," said Christine Palmieri, Vice President, Division of Recovery and Housing for MHA. "For example, the path in life that leads someone to need the level of support provided in the Holyoke home has been influenced by their experiences as a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

We created an environment to address and honor that path and those experiences, to offer support and services that are not only trauma informed, but culturally relevant and empowering.

When folks complete the program in Holyoke, they'll have the skills to thrive both as members of the LGBTQ+ community and the larger community, and they'll be prepared to face the challenges that may bring, without using drugs or alcohol. In similar but distinct ways, the GRIT homes in Springfield each address the unique needs of a specific population, either adult men or transition-aged young men."



REFERRALS TO GRIT CAN BE MADE  
BY CALLING 844-MHA-WELL.

# Café Creations Learning Program

With financial support from the Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism, MHA introduced an interactive, learning program to foster friendships for young adults with Autism and/or Developmental Disabilities. Café Creations ran free-of-charge for young adults ages 18-22, for three consecutive Wednesdays in July. MHA leveraged the interactive Zoom platform to enable a “face-to-face” experience for those served via an internet-enabled computer or tablet.

Read the feature story here:  
[mhainc.org/cafe-creations/](http://mhainc.org/cafe-creations/)



## Accessible Gardening...Thanks to the Beavers!

Last summer, members of the Beavers Club of Western Mass delivered and filled with soil 20 garden boxes to MHA. Constructed from recycled plastic boards and built and donated by the Beavers, these boxes are giving persons served by MHA who use wheelchairs access to gardening. **Now our gardeners are seeing the fruits (and vegetables!) of their efforts.**

“Gardening involves mental wellness aspects of doing something productive outdoors,” said Sara Kyser, Vice President of Acquired Brain Injury Programs for MHA. “After an accident or illness, people can suffer from depression, so having a reason to go outside can be both enjoyable and therapeutic. Gardening provides a welcome distraction and sense of purpose that makes for a richer life experience. Thanks again to the Beavers for their wonderfully thoughtful donation.”



Learn more about the Beavers Club here:  
[www.facebook.com/BeaversClub/](https://www.facebook.com/BeaversClub/)

## Volunteers Sew Masks for MHA's Essential Workers

When the COVID-19 pandemic made wearing masks a public health concern, masks suddenly became hard to find. Yet, rather than sit idly by, Lauren Hummel and Donna Fournier sprang into action.

Lauren, a resident of Wilbraham, MA, has some health concerns that could put her at elevated risk if she were to contract the novel coronavirus, so a mask made sense for her. "My mom taught me to sew when I was 10 or so," Lauren explained. "I'm not skilled enough to do tailoring, but I know my way around enough to sew a mask."

Donna, who lives in Windsor, CT, recalled watching TV and seeing a story about the importance of masks. "I said to my husband, 'I'm going to make us some masks for when we go to the grocery store.'" Donna's mother taught her to sew long ago, and she had a lot of fabric on hand, so all she needed was a pattern.

Read the feature story here:  
[mhainc.org/sew-special-volunteers/](http://mhainc.org/sew-special-volunteers/)

"I looked online and found a few different designs. I picked the simplest one that included a pocket so you can slide in a piece of filter fabric. I'm recently retired and am always looking for hobbies and the masks are fairly easy to make, so I got started. I made about 50, initially for my family, and now to help MHA."

Donna's future daughter-in-law, Emily Gracewski, is Day Programs Coordinator at MHA's Resource Center.



## Supporting LGBTQ+ Wellness

**bestlife**  
Emotional Health & Wellness

Bestlife LGBTQ+ Support Groups are helping members build a healthy, positive lifestyle through participating and understanding. Talking with others who "get it" can be a gateway to a greater sense of wellness:

- Feeling less lonely, isolated or judged
- Gaining a sense of empowerment and control
- Improving coping skills and sense of adjustment
- Talking openly and honestly about feelings
- Reducing distress, depression or anxiety

Two groups are offered: for LGBTQ+ individuals ages 18 to 26 and for ages 12 to 17.



To learn more, get help or start a conversation, call BestLife at 844-MHA-WELL.

# MHA's Alane Burgess Featured in the News

## MHA's Alane Burgess Featured on TV-57 Connecting Point and in HealthCare News.

The constant updates about the Coronavirus can cause anxiety among those doing their best to maintain social distance. In addition to anxiety, some may feel isolated and depressed. MHA is a valued resource on topics related to mental health and the COVID-19 crisis has created more opportunities for us to share helpful and accurate information with the general public and those in health care.

Carolee McGrath of WBGY-57 spoke with MHA's Alane Burgess, MA, LMHC, Clinic Director at Best Life Emotional Health and Wellness Center, to find out more about the potential mental health risks during the pandemic.

[connectingpoint.wgby.org/mental-health-risks-during-covid-19/](http://connectingpoint.wgby.org/mental-health-risks-during-covid-19/)

HealthCare News also reached out to MHA for help with their story on mental health and COVID:

"Unfortunately, we've seen an increase in mental health concerns with the impact of COVID. Businesses have closed, people are facing the crisis of being furloughed or laid off, so it's natural we'd see an increase in anxiety, and with that comes a lot of depression, in terms of fear and loss."



[healthcarenews.com/pandemic-sparks-wave-of-mental-health-concerns/](http://healthcarenews.com/pandemic-sparks-wave-of-mental-health-concerns/)

## Baystate Health Noble Grant: \$13,333

**Well Aware**, MHA's telehealth substance use treatment information and education initiative for greater Westfield, moved forward with \$13,333 in grant funding provided by Baystate Noble Hospital.

**Well Aware** leverages public information and education resources developed in conjunction with Darby O'Brien Advertising of South Hadley.

These resources emphasize the availability of treatment through TeleWell, MHA's telehealth platform. This can be critically important for people who cannot partake of services in person due to the COVID-19 crisis, a lack of transportation, or concern about the stigma often associated with seeking help.

# LIVE FREE.

## TeleWell Opioid Recovery Services

If you or someone you care about is struggling with opioid addiction, the Mental Health Association is offering a TeleWell service that allows individuals to get help from the safety, comfort and privacy of home. Connect directly with dedicated, experienced recovery professionals via phone, computer or tablet. The road to recovery can be tough, but it's never been easier to take the first step.



M H A I N C . O R G | 8 4 4 - M H A - W E L L

## Community Foundation COVID-19 Grants

The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts (CFWM) recently announced two new rounds of grants totaling over \$1 million from the organization's COVID-19 Response Fund for the Pioneer Valley. Funds were awarded to local nonprofits, including MHA.

**Initially, CFWM donated \$25,000 to MHA to address immediate needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.** MHA is using this generous grant to serve individuals in early recovery who are at higher risk of relapse due to isolation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the \$25,000 grant enables MHA Guides, who are certified recovery coaches, to serve up to 20 individuals in early recovery for 3 months. Guides utilize MHA's TeleWell telehealth app, which enables virtual interaction via smartphone, tablet or computer. Guides also provide group support recovery meetings for those living at GRIT residences, and MHA's goal is to also offer access to these meetings to members of the recovery community as the state's phased opening protocols allow.

**Subsequently, CFWM donated an additional \$15,000 for MHA's Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP), enabling us to prevent evictions and homelessness.** Through TPP, MHA provides intensive case management, in consultation with the Housing Courts, to assess reasons for eviction, identify service needs, develop plans to maintain tenancy, and monitor caseloads as long as needed to preserve housing and avoid homelessness. If tenancy cannot be preserved, we coordinate the transition to more appropriate housing, preventing homelessness whenever possible. **Thank you Community Foundation of Western Mass!**



## Games Donation Helping MHA Residents

Meyers Brothers Kalicka, P.C., Certified Public Accountants based in Holyoke, MA, has made a generous donation of board games to MHA. Why games? Folks with a wide range of needs call their MHA group residence home. But the COVID-19 crisis has had our residents unable to leave their homes for the jobs, day programs, volunteer activities and community visits they're accustomed to. It's been a challenge to find activities to keep our clients interested, stimulated and entertained, day after day, but one thing many of our residents really enjoy is playing games. The good folks of Meyers Brothers Kalicka answered our call for games by giving MHA a great assortment. **On behalf of everyone we serve, MHA says THANK YOU...and game on!**

# THANK YOU



MeyersBrothersKalicka, P.C.  
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS



# MHA's 23rd Golf Tournament CANCELLED



## THANK YOU SPONSORS!

### IRON - \$5,000

MBK  
PVFG  
HUB  
USI  
Springfield Pharmacy

### WEDGE - \$2,500

Allied Flooring & Paint  
Liberty Mutual  
People's United Bank  
Mobility Works  
Florence Bank  
Health Care News

### KNICKERBOCKER - \$1,500

Salemi Appliance  
Monson Savings Bank  
Comcast Business  
CBS/Xerox  
Merrill Lynch  
Health Care News  
Arbor Staffing

### LUNCHEON - \$1,000

Hanover Insurance  
UTCA  
Scott Williams & Paul Stallman  
Republic  
Paylocity  
Janssen Neuroscience  
Tufts Health Foundation  
Florence Bank

### HOLE-IN-ONE - \$500

People's Bank  
Mestek  
Studio One  
River Mills Assisted Living  
Hillside Builders  
RJ Greeley  
Mancuso Tree Services  
Bluehouse Property Management  
Angell Pension Group  
Easthampton Savings Bank  
The Mazers  
Felicity Hardee Law

### TEE - \$200

Exterior Home Services  
La Mode Men's  
NEPM  
Bulk Disposal  
SNAP Fitness  
McCormick-Allum  
Noonan Energy  
Serv-U of W. Mass  
RBN Construction  
Associated Building Wreckers  
Standard Insurance  
Century Investment  
CTL Realty  
Safety Equipped  
UBS  
Country Homes Furniture  
JRB Movers  
Taxi Colectivo  
Andrezej Lipior Electrician  
NL Construction  
Republic Services  
Crossfit Ardor  
ProCare Medical  
Jim Rich  
Mayo Mowing



MeyersBrothersKalicka  
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS



It is with a heavy heart that I write to tell you MHA must cancel this year's Wellness Classic golf event. It was an incredibly difficult decision, but given restrictions placed on the size of our event, it is one we had to make. Further—and more importantly—the health risks we had hoped would be on the decline by September are in resurgence in many parts of the country, now including Massachusetts.

We are hopeful you will understand our need to make such a difficult decision. You truly matter to MHA. So, too, does your health and well-being.

**Kimberley A. Lee, Vice President**  
Resource Development and Branding

# Vice President of Quality & Organizational Impact

Amanda Sawyer, LMSW, has joined the leadership team at MHA as Vice President of Quality and Organizational Impact.

This position will weave continuous quality improvement through every fiber of MHA, and Amanda will provide leadership to ensure that goals and standards are consistently achieved every day, across the organization.

“I want the people we serve to be satisfied with their experience with MHA,” Amanda says. “I have joined a wonderful team and am pleased with all the hard work I’ve seen, particularly during this very difficult time we’re in. I’m excited about this opportunity.”

**“I have joined a wonderful team and am pleased with all the hard work I’ve seen...I’m excited about this opportunity.”**



## Thoughts on Independence

When you think about “independence,” you probably think about the 4th of July. But for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, the opportunity to live on their own, in the community, provides a reason to celebrate independence every day of the year.

MHA’s Outreach Team works with folks so they can maintain their independence with minimal support. This story shares some of the inspiring outcomes that our Outreach Team helps these folks to realize, every day.



Read the feature story here:  
[mhainc.org/thoughts-on-independence-from-mha/](http://mhainc.org/thoughts-on-independence-from-mha/)

## When Milestones Go Missing

Here in Massachusetts, we are taking measured steps forward toward a more open society and economy. But things aren't back to "normal" in any traditional way and it continues to have an impact on how we observe key rites of passage. Young people in particular are seeing their rites of passage cancelled. Being isolated from their friends, they may feel emotionally drained.

Parents, teachers, coaches or other influential adults may themselves be struggling with how to respond to the heartbreak so many young people in their lives may be feeling. These adults may be wondering how young people are coping in the face of so many unknowns.

MHA's Sara Kendall, MSW, LICSW, Vice President of Clinical Operations, discussed ways of helping young people cope with feelings of loss in a COVID-19 world.



Read the feature story here:  
[mhainc.org/when-milestones-go-missing/](https://mhainc.org/when-milestones-go-missing/)

## Are YOU the Glue?

As COVID-19 has enveloped our lives, more than a few public pronouncements have been made about the role of women during a crisis. To summarize these remarks, the idea is that "women are the glue that holds families together." And while there's a strong argument to be made for this view, so can the argument be made that it's always been that way. Whether the crisis is global or under your own roof, women are the glue of the family.

**But if you are that glue, what keeps YOU together?** To explore this question, MHA's Kim Lee, Vice President of Resource Development and Branding, and Sara Kendall, MSW, LICSW, Vice President of Clinical Operations, teamed up with Baypath University to lead a dynamic conference "How Not to Get Stuck in Your Own Glue!"



"When times are tough, it is typically women who make sure that children and elderly family members receive the care they need," Sara explained. "We know from our years in social services that it is usually a woman—whether she's a mother, a grandmother or a daughter—who is the first point of contact when a family needs supports. And when you can reach a woman, you can usually help not only her, but the other people in her life as well. Is that because she's the glue? What other factors may be at play? And how is the COVID-19 pandemic figuring in?"

**Like so many events taking place in 2020, Kim, Sara and the dozens of attendees engaged in conversation virtually.**

**GET TO KNOW US AT WWW.MHAINC.ORG**



We continue to hear inspiring stories—and rightly so—about people at work on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis, such as doctors, nurses and first responders. Occasionally we also hear stories about folks stocking grocery shelves, making deliveries, prepping take-out orders or manning the pharmacy counter. All these people working to help others are community heroes.

**Unsung Community Heroes**

There are certain devoted, hard-working folks whose heroism has not been so widely recognized. They continue to go quietly about their crucial work supporting vulnerable individuals day after day, around the clock. They help folks with disabilities living in the community by providing outreach and support. MHA is proud to share a story about two such unsung heroes, Alizamari Diaz and Robert Lavolette.

Read the feature story here:  
[mhainc.org/unsung-community-heroes/](http://mhainc.org/unsung-community-heroes/)