

The Mental Health of Our Veterans *Matters*

By Jessica Charbonneau, LCSW

With the recent growth in the number of combat veterans who have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan over the last eight years, a large percentage of whom have experienced combat stress (the constant threat of injury and death, the horrors of witnessing violent death and the moral ambiguity of killing others), the need for mental health services has grown tremendously. There are 1.1 million veterans presently living in New York State. It is hard to say exactly how many are living here in Onondaga County, but 41,000 presently receive services at the Syracuse VA Medical Center. Out of this 1.1 million it is even harder to estimate how many have been exposed to trauma or combat stress.

The RAND Corporation released a study in April 2008 showing that nearly 20% of all returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan “report symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression.” The number of returning veterans at the time of the RAND study was slightly higher than 300,000 individuals. The same report also stated that only slightly more than half of these returning veterans have sought treatment for their symptoms. Traumatic incidents can include but are not limited to: car accidents, plane



Veterans Services...Mental Health Matters!

The MHA's one-day conference for military personnel, their families, and professionals who work with them.

Friday, April 24, 2009

8:30 AM - 3:00 PM

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crashes, bombings, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, muggings, being kidnapped or held captive and rape. In fact, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is not just seen in returning service men and women, but the incidence seems to be growing in that population. In addition, RAND researchers found about 19% of returning service members report that they experienced a possible traumatic brain injury while deployed, with an addi-

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From the Desk of the Board President

After three and a half years as the Executive Director of the Mental Health Association of Onondaga County, Stephen Butler has left to take his many talents to the Cultural Resource Council of Syracuse and Onondaga County. During Steve's tenure with MHA he was responsible for an anti-stigma campaign that began in 2006 and raised public awareness of mental illness.



Anne Marie Mullin

In addition, Steve was a well-respected advocate for those living with mental illness and their families and caregivers. Children 1st! became the only certified program of its kind in a five-county area and has remained highly respected and admired throughout Steve's time with us. His considerable expertise with grant writing and oversight helped to keep the chapter financially sound and strong throughout his tenure.

Steve oversaw the installation of new software and an interactive website that enhances access to the Chapter's Information and Referral Services. In addition, under Steve's guidance the staff and our website are working diligently to meet the needs of our service men and women and their families.

Steve is a native of Central New York and in his new position he will be responsible for enhancing the arts and cultural environment of the region. Before returning to CNY, Steve was Executive Director of Creative Alternatives of New York, which used therapeutic theater groups for those with mental health issues. The theater and arts have long been interests of Steve and his new position will afford him the opportunity to return to one of his favorite interests.

On behalf of the staff and board of directors, our sincere thanks to Stephen Butler for all he did to help make this a fine organization and our best wishes to him for his continuing success in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Marie Mullin".

President, MHA Board of Directors

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tional 7% reporting both a probable brain injury and current PTSD or major depression. PTSD is slowly becoming a pandemic for our veterans.

Exposure to trauma is certainly not a new phenomenon. We can see examples of trauma-related distress documented throughout history in a variety of places in a variety of ways and yet it remains stigmatized. Psychological distress after trauma was reported as early in history as 1900 BC by Egyptian physicians who described hysterical reactions to trauma. Many literary heroes and heroines, including Shakespeare's Henry IV, seem to meet many of the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. In the early 1800s, military doctors were diagnosing soldiers with "exhaustion" following the stress of battle. This "exhaustion" was characterized by a mental shutdown due to individual or group trauma. During this time period, similar symptoms were observed and documented in other areas of the world. There was a syndrome in England called "railway spine" or "railway hysteria," which was found in people who had been involved in or witnessed catastrophic railway accidents.

During World War I and II the term "shell shock" and "combat fatigue" were terms used to describe veterans who exhibited stress and anxiety after being involved in combat. Although it was well known that the stresses of combat could produce long-lasting psychological effects, it was not until 1980 that the American Psychiatric Association added PTSD to the third edition of its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)* and today it remains classified as an anxiety disorder. A somewhat controversial diagnosis at first, PTSD has become important to psychiatric theory and concept because it is the first of its kind.

The PTSD diagnosis stipulates that the etiological agent is outside the individual, rather than a personal weakness or flaw. This emphasis on an outside agent makes PTSD unique among other psychiatric diagnoses. In fact, PTSD cannot be diagnosed without the known presence of a traumatic event within the patient's history. Many individuals diagnosed with PTSD have no history of mental illness or previous mental health treatment. Unfortunately, many service members have limited insight into symptoms, remain wary of becoming stigmatized, and view seeking mental health treatment

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as a sign of personal weakness or a flaw. Service members interviewed for RAND's study reported they would not seek treatment for psychological illnesses because they feared it would harm their careers. Among service members who did seek help for PTSD or major depressive disorder, only about half received treatment that researchers consider "minimally adequate" for their illnesses. If PTSD and depression go untreated there is an array of possible consequences: drug/alcohol abuse, marital/family problems, unemployment and suicide to list a few. The USA Today recently reported "suicides among army troops soared again last year (2008) and are at a nearly three-decade high."

There are a lot of excellent providers in Onondaga County already doing good work with veterans and their families. Despite their efforts, there is still a real need to continue educating, expanding outreach efforts, providing affordable treatment options and de-stigmatizing treatment for service members. It's going to take a community-size response in order to see real change within our respected and esteemed veteran community.

One opportunity for our community to come together to become better educated about these issues and to assist veterans and their families will take place on **Friday, April 24th at Drumlins Country Club**, when the Mental Health Association of Onondaga County, through the generosity of Excellus BlueCross BlueShield and New York State Senator John DeFrancisco, will host a **full-day conference**, "Veterans Services...Mental Health Matters!" For more information about the event you can go to www.mha-oc.org or call (315) 445-5606.

About the Author: *Jessica Charbonneau, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker who lives and practices in Central New York. Ms. Charbonneau recently completed a one-year research position with the Mental Health Association of Onondaga County. In that position, Ms. Charbonneau updated information about Onondaga County area mental health service providers and identified providers who specifically offer services to local veterans and their families.*

MHA Anger Management Program

Acknowledging, Accepting & Alleviating Anger

This six-week educational program for adults meets on scheduled evenings throughout the year.

Call **445-5606, ext. 204** for fee information, start dates, and other details.

From the Desk of the Interim Executive Director

"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future." John F. Kennedy, June 25, 1963.



Mary Anne Corasaniti

As you all know by now, your much admired and gifted former Executive Director, Stephen Butler, has moved on to new adventures

after more than three years of accomplishments here at the Mental Health Association of Onondaga County. With Steve's departure the Board of Directors thought that it was time to look at what changes need to be made in the immediate future to insure the continuation of the Chapter's mission and our quality services. With that in mind, I have been asked to assist during this transition period.

Because of the commitment of our staff and the Board we are continuing to provide top quality Information and Referral Services, Children 1st!, Anger Management classes, and all of the services that people have come to expect from the Mental Health Association of Onondaga County.

What additional changes are we anticipating? At this point we are not completely sure but as soon as the final decisions are made regarding the future of the MHA we will get a special edition of this newsletter off to you informing you of where we are and what we will look like going forward.

Thank you to all of you for your ongoing support and commitment to the Mental Health Association. You make us a better organization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Anne Corasaniti". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Interim Executive Director

Children 1st! Assists Families Through Painful Life Changes

“I’m glad I came to Children 1st! It made me feel much better.”

Separation and divorce are tough on couples, and if children are involved, the difficulty increases exponentially. The Mental Health Association of Onondaga County is here to help make the process less painful with an informative program that addresses the many issues facing separating parents and the children they share.

Children 1st! is a six-hour class for parents in divorce, separation, or custody disputes. Certified, trained professionals cover topics including adult emotion/psychology, child emotion/psychology, and the legal process/alternatives. The program is certified by the New York State Parent Education and Awareness Program.

“The presenters were respectful, honest, helpful and caring.”

Since forming in 1995, the main goal of Children 1st! has been to make it easier for children as their parents go through separation and the court system. All concerned adults are welcome to attend the class.

Legal and mental health professionals with extensive experience in family matters team up to teach each class, with the belief that children are best helped when both parents understand how to guide and care for their children through the separation and divorce.

“Children 1st! emphasized we should let the children be kids, not grown-ups ...”

Children 1st! covers all varieties of topics relating to families in separation and divorce situations, answering questions that many parents reported they didn’t realize they had. These topics include:

- How divorce affects your children, and what children need at the time of separation to lower their stress and fears.
- How to talk to your children about the changes happening in their family.
- Parenting plans that help and protect children.
- How your own anger and pain may affect you as a parent.

- How parents, working separately or together, can work for the good of their children.
- Parenting options for divorced or separated parents, from co-parenting to parallel parenting.
- New family shapes, healthy stepfamilies, relating to biological parents and new partners.
- How the law and courts work in custody, visitation and support cases.
- Alternatives to court proceedings.
- Violations of court orders, domestic violence, and child abuse.
- Places to get more help for you and your children.

“I now know how to be a better dad.”

“Children 1st! helped me understand... that there is no way to control the other parent but there is a way for me to be the best parent possible.”

More About Children 1st!

Children 1st! takes place in Syracuse, at a location accessible by bus. Free parking is also available. The class includes a lunch break and parents may bring a bag lunch or purchase lunch in the area. Policy requires that parents attend separate classes.

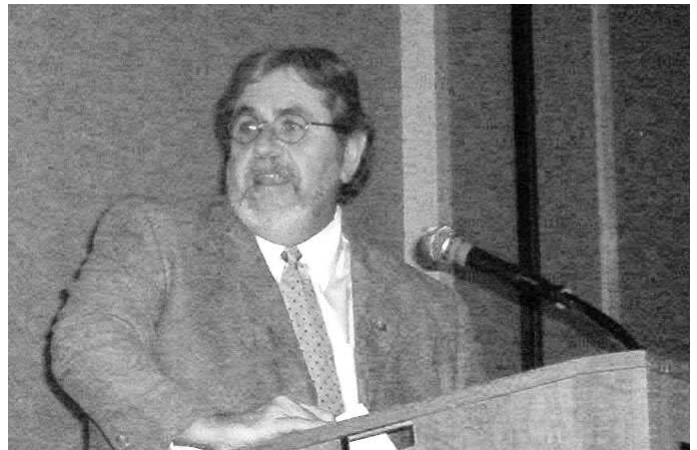
Schedule

Children 1st! is offered on Saturdays from 9:00 AM to 3:30 PM once a month. In addition, evening classes are offered periodically from 6:00-9:00 PM (*in these cases, participants must attend two classes*). The 2009 schedule is as follows:

Saturday Classes: April 4; May 16; June 13; July 18; August 22; September 12; October 17; November 14; and December 5.

Evening Classes: May 5 and 12; September 15 and 22; and November 3 and 10.

Registration for Children 1st! must be done by phone. More information, including class dates, times and site directions, is provided to parents after registration is processed and payment is received. Participants who miss assigned classes may take another class, but the program is unable to give refunds. For more information, including payment options and eligibility guidelines, call the MHA at 315-445-5606.



The MHA honored two longtime community leaders with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Community Service Awards Holiday Luncheon on December 5, 2008. In the photo at left, former MHA Executive Director Stephen Butler, right, presents the Lifetime Achievement Award to David Brownell, retired Commissioner of the Onondaga County Department of Mental Health. At right, Dick Pratt, who recently retired as Executive Director of Transitional Living Services, speaks after accepting his Lifetime Achievement Award.

MHA Honors 11 at Community Service Awards Luncheon

The Mental Health Association of Onondaga County honored two pioneering leaders of the local mental health community with **Lifetime Achievement Awards** during its 2008 Community Service Awards celebration. The awards were presented at the agency's Community Service Awards Holiday Luncheon on Friday, December 5, at the Sheraton University Hotel. The following individuals and organizations were honored:

David Brownell was Commissioner of the Onondaga County Department of Mental Health from 1989 to 2007. After graduating from Syracuse University, Brownell earned his Master of Social Work from Florida State University and began his career as a Psychiatric Social Worker at Utica State Hospital. Next he was an agency operations and planning associate for United Way of Central New York in Syracuse. In 1974, he became Assistant Executive Director of Catholic Charities and joined the Onondaga County Department of Mental Health in 1976 as Program Manager. He was promoted to Deputy Commissioner in 1983, and named Commissioner just six years later.

As commissioner, Brownell led the county in a campaign for behavioral health care transformation. His primary focus was to advocate for improving the quality of mental health services in our county, and providing access to care for the underserved. He created the Central New York Behavioral Health Care Consortium, which led to development of the Western New York Coordinated Care Project. He championed coordination of internal and inter-system planning and decision-making at the county level.

Another important legacy is The Brownell Center for Behavioral Health, the largest outpatient mental health provider in Onondaga County, which serves children, adults, and families. The center evolved from the services originally provided by the Onondaga Pastoral Counseling Center (OPCC), which were later transferred to Liberty Resources. It was renamed the Brownell Center for Behavioral Health to honor David's advocacy for the underserved in our community.

Dick Pratt retired last year as Executive Director after 13 years with Transitional Living Services of Onondaga County. He led the agency since 2000, after serving as Director of Mental Health Outreach Services and Continuous Quality Improvement Administrator. He previously worked at TLS from 1975 to 1982 as Program Director and Assistant to the Executive Director.

Before re-joining TLS in 1995, Mr. Pratt was Executive Director for Family Services of Mohawk Valley, Inc. in Utica, and from 1983 to 1991 was Executive Director of Enable in Syracuse. Earlier in his career, he was a Case-worker for Catholic Charities and held several positions with Movement for a Better World, an international organization dedicated to personal and communal psych-religious development.

Through the years, Mr. Pratt has been involved with several other community organizations, including the Association of Community Living Administrators in Mental Health; the International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services (IASPRS); the Onondaga County Executive's Task Force on Alternatives to Incarceration; the Syracuse Area Human Development Advi-

MHA Honors 11 at Community Service Awards Luncheon

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sory Board for the Diocese of Syracuse; and St. James, St. Ann and St. Charles Borromeo churches in Syracuse.

The other Community Service Award winners were:

Dr. Jerome Wayne Award – **Barbara Kohberger**, P.E.A.C.E., Inc. County South Family Resource Coordinator.

Mental Health Professional of the Year – **Laura Leso, M.D.**, Medical Director of CPEP at St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center.

Corporate Angel of the Year – **Wegmans**, a family-owned 72-store supermarket chain founded in 1916 with stores in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia and Maryland.

Individual Advocate of the Year – **William M. Cross, Ph.D.**, a founder of Support Troops, a free support

group and counseling service for military personnel and veterans.

MHA Board President's Award – **Sheila LeGacy**, director of The Family Support and Education Center at Transitional Living Services and a member of the Board of Directors of NAMI Syracuse, Inc.

Volunteer of the Year Award – **Monica Gullotta, BS, MS**, founder and group facilitator for the Upstate Groups for Panic, Anxiety and Depression support groups, and **Sue Ellen Harris, LCSW-R, MA**, Manager of Outpatient Mental Health Services for St. Joseph's Hospital.

Youth Community Service Awards – **Kayla McIntosh**, a graduate of Tully High School and a freshman at LeMoyne College who has volunteered at St. Joseph's Hospital, and **Shawn Verma**, a Fayetteville-Manlius High School senior who is active with many community organizations, including the Community Learning and Information Center (CLIC).

Advocacy and Related Issues

OMH Earns "B" in NAMI's Grade the States Survey

The New York State Office of Mental Health has announced that New York's mental health services system for adults was one of only six in the country awarded the highest ("B") grade in a survey released March 11 by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). In contrast, the average grade nationally was a "D."

The survey scored states on 65 factors related to good mental health care for adults, and New York scored above the average on 50 of these factors, with saluted accomplishments including OMH's emphasis on support for evidence-based practices, the state's innovation and investment in mental health housing, and "Timothy's Law" requiring health insurers to offer care for selected mental health conditions on a par with care for other health problems.

Timothy's Law to Expire in 2009; MHANYS Encourages Constituent Support

Timothy's Law, New York's landmark statute mandating comparable coverage for mental health treatment expires this year. The Mental Health Association of New York State has encouraged constituents to support permanent passage of Timothy's Law, which they report has increased access to treatment for thousands of New Yorkers with psychiatric disabilities. In the absence of swift legislative action, MHANYS predicts that the landmark victory that people with psychiatric disabilities and their families won in 2006 will come to an end!

With that in mind, MHANYS urges supporters to call their legislative leaders and urge them to pass **S.1646/A.5659 AND S.185/A.4572**, acts to make Timothy's Law permanent and to add PTSD as a disorder.

How You Can Help!

All donors are considered Mental Health Association members! Members provide funding that fuels the growth of our agency to help those we serve. We know you have a wide variety of talent and experience! If you have a skill that may contribute to the MHA's goals, and some time to donate, please contact us at (315) 445-5606. We would love your input in any area, like programming, needs identification, outreach, technology, research, advocacy, or fundraising projects.

To join the MHA or renew your membership, please complete the form on the back cover of this newsletter.

We thank our members who have joined or renewed since September 1, 2008:

Sheila M. Austin	Gloria MacCallum
R. Jonathan Ball	Tom McKeown
John & Margaret Bardenett	Connie Marion
Phyllis Berman, Ph.D.	James & Elizabeth Megna
Minna Buck	Eileen Miller
Betty Carlisle	NAMI Syracuse, Inc.
Wendy Carman, CSW	Richard O'Neill
Cathy Comer	Janet Petrou
Mary Anne Corasaniti	Susan Pietrantonio
Janice C. Creamer	Rev. Cheryl Piper
William Cross, Ph.D.	Janice Pope
Sarah & James Dam	Joel Potash
Paul deLima	Pemala S. Pradhan, M.D.
Thomas H. Dennison, Ph.D.	Richard & MaryAnne Pratt
Rebecca Domroe, CSW	Professional Counseling Services
Barbara Duttweiler	Maudie Ritchie
Sue Eiholzer	Margaret Rivito
Mark Fohs	Doris Rudolph
Susan Hartman Brenizer, MA, LMFT	Karen Schwartz
Timothy Hayes, Ph.D.	Robert P. Sprafkin, Ph.D.
Jane & Edgar Herzog	Kimberly Staab
Fumiyo Hirano	Jud Staller, M.D.
Alice Honig	Dorothy Wehmann
Charlene Hughes	Maryann Winters, MS, CPA, CVA
Aileen Jackowsky	Mary Ann Zeppetello, LCSW
Mitchell Jaffe	
Andrea Latchem	

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

April 22

Enable will present its **Shining Stars Awards Celebration** at 5:30 PM at Traditions on the Links in East Syracuse. Tickets are \$50 for the general public and \$25 for Enable employees. For registration and information about award winners, visit www.enablecny.org.

April 24

"Veterans Services... Mental Health Matters!" MHA's conference for families of and professionals who work with military personnel, 8:30 AM to 3 PM, Drumlins, 800 Nottingham Road, Syracuse. Sponsored by Excellus BlueCross BlueShield and Sen. John DeFrancisco. Call (315) 445-5606.

May 8

NAMI Syracuse Inc. will hold the **Wellness Walk for Mental Health** to support recovery and prevent stigma at noon at the Everson Museum of Art. Call (315) 487-2154 for more information.

June 7

AIDS Community Resources will present the 17th Annual **AIDS Walk/Run 5K** Fundraiser at Beaver Lake Nature Center. For more information visit www.AIDSwalkCNY.com or call (315) 475-2430.

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MHA Insights is a publication of the Mental Health Association of Onondaga County, Inc.
Phone: (315) 445-5606 / Fax: (315) 445-1828 / Web: cnymentalhealth.org / Email: requests@mha-oc.org

MHA Mission: to promote mental health in the community through advocacy, education, and access to mental health services.

MHA Membership/Renewal Form

- Yes, please add me to the Membership List.
- Please renew my membership.
- Yes, please send me MHA Insights and other advocacy alerts by email:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

(Optional) Please designate my gift to the following MHA program:

- Information & Referral Services
- Parent Partner Program (Eating Disorders)
- Anger Management
- Children 1st!
- Community Companions
- Where the greatest need exists

Payment Enclosed (Please make check/money order payable to the Mental Health Association of Onondaga County)

Charge my (circle one): **VISA** **MC**

Credit Card #: _____ Expiration Date: _____

Signature (required): _____ **Total Charged or Enclosed: \$** _____

Membership Levels

\$15..... Student
 \$15..... Senior Citizen
 \$15..... Active Military/Veteran
 \$25..... Individual
 \$40..... Family
 \$80..... Professional

Please mail this form with your check or money order to MHA, 6493 Ridings Road, Suite 112, Syracuse, NY 13206, or fax with credit card information to (315) 445-1828.

Your contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law.

Thank you for your support!