



Mental Health Association

in Orange County, Inc.

NADIA ALLEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For Immediate Release:

Date: April 6, 2016

**Contact: Amber Orr, Community Relations Manager
(845)342-2400 x236**

MHA in Orange County Raises Awareness during May is Mental Health Month



When mental illnesses or disorders are talked about, the language typically used to describe them tends to be clinical and impersonal. These words, while useful for doctors or clinicians, often don't do justice to what life with a mental illness feels like.

That is why this year's theme for May is Mental Health Month—*Life With a Mental Illness*—is a call to action to share what life with a mental illness feels like to someone going through it.

May is Mental Health Month was started 67 years ago by Mental Health America to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the importance of good mental health for everyone.

Last year, Mental Health Month materials were seen and used by 19 million people, with more than 5,500 entities downloading MHA's tool kits. The 2015 theme -- based off of our *B4Stage4* initiative -- helped individuals understand that when you address mental health symptoms before Stage 4, people can often recover quickly, and live full and productive lives.

This year, we are building off of the *B4Stage4* message and encouraging individuals to give voice to what it really means to live at stages 1, 2, 3, and 4 of mental illness. *Life with a Mental Illness* is meant to help remove the shame and stigma of speaking out, so

that more people can be comfortable coming out of the shadows and seeking the help they need.

“Mental illnesses are common and treatable, and help is available. We need to speak up early—before Stage 4—and in real, relatable terms so that people do not feel isolated and alone,” said Nadia Allen, Mental Health Association in Orange County, Inc. Executive Director. “Sharing is the key to breaking down the stigma surrounding mental illnesses and to showing others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms.”

This Mental Health Month, we are encouraging people to speak up about how it feels to live with a mental illness by tagging social media posts with *#mentalillnessfeelslike*. Posting with our hashtag is a way to speak up, to share your point of view with people who may be struggling to explain what they are going through—and help others figure out if they too are showing signs of a mental illness.

MHA has also developed a series of fact sheets available on its website (www.mhaorangeny.com) on realizing the critical importance of addressing mental health early, recognizing the risk factors and signs of mental illness, understanding what mental illness is and isn't, and how and where to get help when needed.

Research shows that by ignoring symptoms, we lose ten years in which we could intervene in order to change people's lives for the better. Speaking out about what mental illness feels like can encourage others to recognize symptoms early on in the disease process, and empower individuals to be agents in their own recovery.

Below are some of the events that are happening at MHA and throughout Orange County in honor of Mental Health Month:

- MHA in Orange County Inc. in collaboration with SUNY Orange will be sponsoring a presentation on Eating Disorder awareness presented by the Renfrew Center, titled “Social Media vs. Body Acceptance : Friend or Foe”. Now, more than ever, we are bombarded with body image messages on social media. This presentation will identify the most popular social media platforms and will discuss the impact on those suffering with eating disorders. Case examples will be presented as well as an opportunity to brainstorm solutions.
- MHA in Orange County, Inc. will be conducting its Annual Recognition of MHA's Members, Supporters and Volunteers and Annual Meeting on Thursday May 21st from 4:00pm-6:00pm at Middletown Elks Lodge, 48-62 Prospect Street, Middletown, N.Y.

- Family Ties Support Group is a group for parents and families with children/adolescents who have emotional, behavioral or social difficulties (including Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders.) It meets the second Wednesday of each month from 7:00pm– 9:00pm at Mental Health Association, 73 James P Kelly Way, Middletown. Please call Mary at 845-342-2400 Ext. 246 for more information.
- Family and Friends Together Support Group is a group for families or caregivers of adults with severe and persistent mental illness. It meets the Third Thursday of each month at 7pm at the Mental Health Association, 73 James P Kelly Way, Middletown NY. Please call Peggy for more information at 845-342-2400 x238.
- Family and Friends Social Group is for networking and making new friends and contacts in an informal and fun setting with different topics of interest such as music and martial arts. This newly formed group meets the last Wednesday of each month from 6:30-8:30pm. For more information call Peggy Spagnola, Family Support Coordinator at 845-342-2400 ext. 238.
- Friends Group is a free social skills group for youth ages 9 to 17 with social, behavioral or emotional difficulties. Groups currently meet in Middletown. There are two groups, a younger group for children ages 9-13 and an older group for children ages 13-17. For more information or to submit an application please contact Stephanie Bolanos, Friends Group Coordinator at 845-342-2400 x306.
- **Vet2Vet Peer** Networking groups are led by veterans for all members of the Armed Forces and veterans. **Vet2Vet** provides members with the opportunity to network with one another to discuss challenges and solutions regarding subjects such as: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), addiction, life, employment and academic challenges among other topics. **Vet2Vet** Peer Networking groups are held every Monday at 6pm at Middletown Thrall Library, Tuesday at 2:30pm at Hudson House 245 Broadway, Newburgh and Wednesday at 12:30pm at the Port Jervis Public Library, 138 Pike Street, Port Jervis. To talk to a veteran and learn more about **Vet2Vet** please call Larry Neumann at (845) 342-2400 ext. 237.

-end-