

The Bell Ringer

Mental Health America of Greater Indianapolis

Phone: 317.251.0005
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March 2011
www.mhaindy.net

Letter from the CEO

Dear Friends of MHAGI,

The Board of Directors of Mental Health America of Indiana (of which MHAGI is a chapter) has approved the organization's Public Policy initiatives for the long 2011 legislative session. One of the issues that MHAGI proposed, which is near and dear to our hearts, is **Guardianship Services for Indigent Patients with Mental Incapacitation**.

Health and safety issues for persons with mental illness, intellectual or developmental disabilities and dementia often overlap; and individuals with one or more of these disorders are uniquely vulnerable to neglect, abuse, and exploitation. We know that the numbers of individuals likely to become mentally incapacitated is growing, particularly as the general population ages.

Historically, the State of Indiana has responded to this need under statutes that provide professional guardians to protect the interests of vulnerable individuals who are indigent and without the support of family or friends. Due to budget constraints, however, the state has either cut or is in the processing of eliminating funding for these programs.

In response to the declining role of the professional guardianship programs, the Indiana Adult Guardianship Services Project (IAGS) was created and initially received state funding with the idea of using trained volunteers to serve as guardians. However, the funding for IAGS has also been eliminated.

There are a few successful Volunteer Advocate Programs that have been created and funded by several healthcare systems in Indiana. Although these programs are a good solution to



increasing the number of guardians and quality of guardianship services, they cannot replace the need for professional guardianship programs. Volunteer advocate programs are not designed to act as permanent guardians, and in fact under state statute are awarded "temporary" guardianships.

For Central Indiana, there are no professional guardianship programs that are currently accepting referrals. The eradication of permanent, professional guardianship programs means that the volunteer advocate programs will have limited means of transferring temporary guardianships to other agencies, and still other vulnerable individuals will not receive the advocacy of a guardian at all.

This problem has been set as a priority one issue. Priority One issues are of a critical nature and involve intensive lobbying and presentation of testimony. Mental Health America of Indiana will support efforts and legislation to ensure that state funding is redirected to guardianship services, not only in an effort to fund and establish Volunteer Advocate Programs, but to help provide resources and funding to agencies that provide guardianship services to indigent patients in the state of Indiana.

"Many persons have a wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose"

--Helen Keller

Mental Health America of Greater Indianapolis Success Story

Adult Guardianship

Jimmy was first referred to Mental Health America of Greater Indianapolis' (MHAGI) Guardianship program in 2008 by an Indiana judge who was overseeing his criminal charges while he was in jail. The judge wanted to place him with a guardian who could place him in a nursing home while his court case was pending, rather than release him to homelessness. MHAGI became his guardian and placed him in a nursing facility in late 2008, where his care and health improved. Meanwhile, the judge ordered a psychiatric evaluation to determine his competency to stand trial on his criminal charges. Two different psychiatrists evaluated him and did find him incompetent to stand trial.

When a person is found incompetent to stand trial, then they are court ordered to go to a state operated facility to have their competency restored. However, due to the nature of his disabling condition, his competency could not be restored. Sending him to a state hospital would be a waste of state dollars and difficult for him, when he is getting good care in the nursing facility where he resides. His Court appointed attorney informed the MHAGI Guardian that if Jimmy were to go to the hospital to have competency restored, he could be required to stay there until the maximum sentence time has passed, and only then could he be released from the state operated facility.

For two years, Jimmy's judge continued the case because the prosecutor's office refused to drop the charges for time served. The prosecutor's office presented a motion complaining about the delays in continuing the hearing, but the judge refused to hear the motion and continued the hearings for many months. The public defender informed the guardian that there is a case similar to Jimmy's case that was being appealed to a higher court. The judge was waiting to hear the ruling of the higher court before making a decision in Jimmy's case.

Jimmy did not like living in a nursing home, and continually asked his Guardian to move him into an apartment. His Guardian explained that he needed continual supervision for his health and safety, and that she would consider a group home, but cannot move him until the judge makes a decision on his charges. The Guardian did not want to move Jimmy to a nice home in the community, and then have the court send him back to a state hospital.

After the fall 2010 election was held, a new prosecutor took office in January of 2011, and he decided to drop all of the charges against Jimmy, giving him credit for time already served. Now Jimmy is free from the threat of going into a state hospital. The Guardian has now applied for him to be served on the state program called the Money Follows the Person, which, if Jimmy is accepted, will allow him to move out of the nursing home into a group home in the community.

Jimmy will be able to live in a less restricted environment with others who are as active as himself. Jimmy is thrilled that he will now be able to live a life in the community that will allow him more opportunities and social activities. Because he had a Guardian, Jimmy was able to live in a nursing home where he could get good care and be safe while the courts determined his status. Without a Guardian, the state program would not be willing to accept him to move from the nursing home to live in a less restrictive setting in the community. Having a Guardian has improved Jimmy's care, well being and quality of life.

Clothing Items and Gift Cards Needed for Adult Guardianship Program

The MHAGI Adult Guardianship program serves those persons who are not able to make sound decisions of their own. MHAGI becomes guardian of the PERSON only (not the property). Our Guardians are on call 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to make emergency decisions on behalf of the protected person. The Guardian also makes monthly visits in order to ensure appropriate care. Because these individuals are indigent, they have little to no money for clothing, toiletries etc.

We need your help! Next time you anywhere that sells daily items, pick up an extra gift card (any amount appreciated). We will purchase socks, t-shirts, sweatshirts, shampoo, lotion, hats, gloves and pajamas for those who are in desperate need for these items. Your gift will be much appreciated. You can mail the gift cards to Mental Health America of Greater Indianapolis, Attn: AGS, 301 38th St., Indianapolis, IN 46205.

Support MHAGI and the 8th Annual Walking for Dreams 5K Family and Pet Walk
May 22nd 2pm; Downtown Canal
www.walkingfordreams.org

Mental Health America of Greater Indianapolis Training Opportunities

Pediatric and Adult Bipolar Disorder

Dr. Leslie A. Hulvershorn, Chief, Pediatric Mood Disorders Adolescent Dual Diagnosis Clinic, IU
Tuesday, March 8th; 1:30 to 4:30 pm

Intellectual Disability & Mental Illness Dual Diagnosis

Dr. Jeffrey J. Kellams, Medical Director, Midtown Community Mental Health Center
Meg Kovacs, MSW, LCSW, Midtown Community Mental Health Center
Thursday, March 10th; 9:00 am to Noon

****ASIST – Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training**

Elizabeth Boyle and Mike Dunn; Mental Health America of Greater Indianapolis
Thursday and Friday March 17th and 18th; 8:30 am to 4:30 pm
\$150; 14 CEUs

Overview, Treatment, and Evidence Based Practices for Substance Use Disorders

George Brenner, Director of Addictions Services for Community Health Network: Behavioral Health
Services
Tuesday, April 12th; 1:30 to 4:30 pm

Yoga, Breath and Body Awareness

Dr. Sandra Brown Bassett, Peace Through Yoga
Thursday, May 5th; 1:30 to 4:30 pm
**Peace Learning Center, 6040 DeLong Rd, Indianapolis, IN 46254

"It's Not Just About Crying"

Postpartum Depression and Perinatal Mood Disorders

Featuring Birdie Meyer, RN, MA, IU Health Women's Service and
Immediate Past President, Postpartum Support International
Wednesday, May 11; 1:30 to 4:30 pm

Treating Eating Disorders: Therapeutic Issues and Approaches

Featuring Dr. Mary Rouse and Dr. Natalie Cumberland of the
Charis Center, IU Health
Tuesday, May 17th; 9 am to Noon

**ALL TRAININGS COST \$40/3 CEUS AND ARE LOCATED AT 1441 N. DELAWARE ST.
INDIANAPOLIS, IN UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED****

To Register: Email atobias@mhaindy.net and include your name, address,
phone. Please send check payable to MHA of Greater Indianapolis to 301 E. 38th
St., Indianapolis, IN 46205

Visit www.mhaindy.net to Donate to Mental Health America of Greater Indianapolis.
Or send donation to 301 E. 38th St., Indianapolis, IN 46205.



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