In her early 20's Lucinda began hearing voices which led to a schizophrenia diagnosis and several weeks' stay at an out of state hospital. Upon discharge her life became a whirlwind of failed medications, intermittent hospitalizations and homelessness until she settled down in the seaside town of Rockland, Maine where she made connections that changed her life.

“For all those years the medicine and me just didn't click,” Lucinda quietly shared. “But now I’ve been seeing Dr. Van (Dr. Harold Van Lonkhuizen) for the past 15 years and I’ve been taking my medicine right straight through, so that’s helped.”

But Lucinda’s situation is much more complicated than that.

Her trips to Dr. Van were confined to twice a year as that was the only reason she would leave her apartment. In fact, she had not seen a primary care physician in ten years despite struggling with back problems, breathing issues due to smoking and undiagnosed thyroid disease. Lucinda’s physical conditions combined with psychiatry needs matched perfectly with the services offered through the Maine Behavioral Healthcare Behavioral Health Home program that helped to provide a bridge aligning all of Lucinda’s providers.

Peggy Fitzgerald is a nurse care manager who has worked with Lucinda for the past two years. “My job is to ask patients how I can help them,” Fitzgerald explained. “Lucinda said she wanted to lose weight and was very concerned that she hadn’t seen a physician. Together we discovered that the reason stemmed from her anxiety around the car ride itself, as she didn’t think it was safe.”

The perfect solution to Lucinda’s fear was to have the local police chief come out in a “fancy” unmarked car and drive her to her first doctor appointment (arranged by Fitzgerald). She now receives regular check-ups and treatment for her thyroid from Jennifer Dreher, APRN-ANP with Pen Bay Internal Medicine, along with the care she receives from Fitzgerald, Dr. Van and her Case Manager, Jessica Rackliff.

Continued on inside cover
Q&A with Stephen M. Merz, President

What do you find most rewarding in your role as president of Maine Behavioral Healthcare?

I enjoy the challenge of building an innovative behavioral health system that is grounded in the mental health vision to “make our communities the healthiest in America.” Having behavioral health care at the table is remarkable and not always observed in health systems in the country.

How is Maine Behavioral Healthcare unique in meeting the needs of individuals with mental illness?

We are working to integrate community mental health with the overall health system to deliver truly integrated care. For example, through our behavioral health integration program we have more than 70 clinicians providing services at nearly 100% of the primary care practices within the MaineHealth system. We have also taken a unique approach to treating individuals with intellectual disabilities. Our Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders in South Portland is the only facility north of Boston that offers a multi-disciplinary clinic and day treatment program. Many organizations state that they provide this service but are typically limited to assessments and evaluation services rather than MBH’s role which is in active treatment and working with families.

Another important distinction is MBH’s focus on the quality and timeliness of key transitions of care where we can have the most impact. When an individual is discharged from one of the 150 psychiatric beds we manage we have made it a priority to make sure they receive follow-up care in the community for psychiatry, case management or therapy services. We have tracked the amount of time it takes to make this transition and improved our rates significantly. Where three years ago it used to take more than 20 days for a referral, we have reduced it to five days or less this year and will continue to improve.

What is the best way our communities can support people living with mental illness?

We can help by staying vocal, visible and active in advocating for the needs of those who frequently do not have a voice in our community. Individuals in the recovery community often use the phrase, “nothing about us without us”. This sentiment signifies the importance of understanding that the individual receiving treatment needs to be included in the process. As a community we have a responsibility to make access to treatment easier and include the highest quality services possible.

Continued from front cover

Her care team all agree that Lucinda is a delight to work with and an inspiration. She has no issue leaving her apartment weekly for appointments and to visit the peer center at the Maine Behavioral Healthcare office on Union Street in Rockland where she can do crafts, like macramé. In her spare time she loves gardening and reads books on biology, anatomy, Victorian ghost stories and schizophrenia.

“I’m trying to get insight into my own illness. I wonder what it’s going to do next… and when will symptoms pop up?”

As the days progress she continues to learn and grow, looking forward to her walks with Fitzgerald when weather permits. When asked what others could do in a similar situation she stated simply, “accept the help.”

We appreciate your support!

Gifts of all sizes help make Maine Behavioral Healthcare stronger and every dollar truly makes a difference. Your contribution will help bring life-saving programs to people just like Lucinda (story in this publication) and others in need of behavioral healthcare services.

To donate, please visit:
MaineBehavioralHealthcare.org/giving
Battling opioid use disorder (OUD) is hard enough but it is even more challenging for inmates at the York County Jail (YCJ) in Alfred, Maine. That’s why, in addition to her other duties, Jessica DiSanto, LCPC visits the facility several days of the week to facilitate a substance use group for women.

DiSanto is a specialist in addiction counseling working at our Integrated Medication Assisted Treatment (IMAT) program in Springvale. Through a collaborative effort with the YCJ, the groups are made available to any woman with a substance use issue who has been incarcerated. The group sessions offer support with topics that include coping skills, relapse prevention, reducing destructive patterns/thinking and identifying and focusing on strengths.

“Jessica establishes a critical therapeutic alignment and builds relationships while the women are incarcerated,” said Deb Poulin, Director, Substance Use Treatment and Prevention Program. “It is not uncommon for the women to continue treatment with her once they are released, so the fact that they have already had an opportunity to meet with her is a great benefit. In fact, many will already have an appointment set up at our IMAT clinic before leaving.”

The connections DiSanto makes mean the women are far more likely to keep those appointments and better facilitates their ongoing recovery upon release.

“Jessica establishes a critical therapeutic alignment and builds relationships while the women are incarcerated,” said Deb Poulin, Director, Substance Use Treatment and Prevention Program. “It is not uncommon for the women to continue treatment with her once they are released, so the fact that they have already had an opportunity to meet with her is a great benefit. In fact, many will already have an appointment set up at our IMAT clinic before leaving.”

“Jessica is a great team player,” Parker said. “I appreciate the important role Jess has in not only providing treatment to the women incarcerated at the York County Jail, but she is also a tremendous help in updating me on who is actively interested in continuing treatment in the community and assists in creating a transition plan. She is a pleasure to work with.”

DiSanto’s actions are also appreciated by the women in her groups. Recently, after working with one woman for several weeks she received a note and coloring page that said it all, “If I didn’t have your help and your voice to speak for me I don’t know where’d I’d be in the process.”

We are fortunate to have such a caring person providing support for these women as they seek to build healthier lives.
Steven P. Stout, MD  
*Medical Director of Ambulatory Services*

“I’m excited to work for an organization in which there is a vision to move toward a system in which the behavioral health and physical health needs of our communities are considered together. We are entering a new era in which primary care integration is moving from being just a good idea to an idea that is being put into practice. Maine Behavioral Healthcare and MaineHealth are really quite innovative in this regard, compared with many other regions of the country. Our efforts are allowing us to deliver behavioral health care in what for many patients is the most familiar, least stigmatizing setting—the primary care clinic. When these integration efforts are combined with ongoing efforts to provide specialized and more intensive services within our behavioral health clinics, we are able to provide a comprehensive package of services that are responsive to the triple aim of providing quality in each patient’s experience, while considering the needs of the population, and being considerate of the cost.”

Cathleen J. Small, PhD  
*Director of Behavioral Services and Spring Harbor Academy*

“I am thrilled to be working within Maine Behavioral Healthcare’s Developmental Disorders Program, under Dr. Siegel’s* leadership and vision. I value the program’s focus on innovative, comprehensive, evidence-based, and collaborative care. It’s truly inspiring to be a part of this multidisciplinary team of experts and dedicated professionals who work together to promote meaningful outcomes for the patients and families we are fortunate enough to serve.”

Karen Rumo, Psychiatric Technician at Spring Harbor Hospital  
*Winner of the 2019 Maine Hospital Association Caregiver of the Year*

“I believe every day that I can make a difference in someone’s life. I can’t always fix them or fix the situation, but if I just listen and meet them where they’re at, patients feel seen and heard and it makes all the difference. The stigma of mental illness makes so many people feel invisible and our job is to show them they are a person first and are way more than their illness. When a patient arrives in crisis, we are the family and the support they need. Sometimes, this is the second or third time we are seeing a patient. No matter what, my first thought is always, ‘If this person was my family member, how would I want them to be treated?’ And that’s how you treat people.”

* Dr. Matthew Siegel serves as Vice President of Medical Affairs, Autism and Development Disorders at Maine Behavioral Healthcare.
Community Corner

14th Annual Heroes with Heart Success

The Annual Heroes with Heart fundraiser was a great success this year, raising more than $33,000 to benefit the Trauma Intervention Program (TIP) of Greater Portland. The event honored eleven community heroes from local fire and police departments, and hospital partnerships for their service to survivors of tragic events. The evening’s highest honor, the Heart of Gold, was presented to Michael Norton and his mother Suzan, for their tireless effort to break down the stigma associated with mental illness and suicide. The Nortons created a documentary movie called “Brothers” about their beloved brother and son J.T.’s journey living with schizophrenia.

Making Spirits Bright Gift Drive

Old friends and new gathered at the first ever Making Spirits Bright Gift Drive and Fundraiser on Giving Tuesday, November 27th. Shipyard Brewery hosted the event which raised over $3,000, to benefit clients by helping MBH meet the year-round needs of those we serve by providing things like seasonally-appropriate clothing and shoes, prescription eyeglasses, or gas station gift cards so clients can afford to travel to critical mental healthcare appointments. Save the Date for the Second Annual Making Spirits Bright Gift Drive on December 3rd from 5-7 pm.

Sanford Peer Center Celebrates Expansion

On March 29th, the Sanford Peer Support Center celebrated their grand re-opening and expansion. The center doubled in size, allowing for more peer support group rooms, a bigger kitchen area and a pool table. Director of Peer Services Randy Morrison and Center Manager Elizabeth Stoothoff said attendance has grown significantly and with the additional space for groups and trainings, they expect attendance to continue to increase. “We’ve created a comfortable, welcoming, safe space for the community and we look forward to serving them for years to come.”

Community Forum Series

More than 1,200 community members in Maine and New Hampshire participated in a series of free screenings of the Netflix original documentary, Recovery Boys. The film chronicles the journey of four young men attempting to rebuild their lives after years of drug misuse and was followed by community discussions with local experts including physicians, local law enforcement and community leaders, and a patient in recovery. The programs, sponsored by MaineHealth and Maine Behavioral Healthcare, were replicated in the communities of Belfast, Biddeford, Boothbay, Brunswick, Camden, Damariscotta, Farmington, Islesboro, Portland, Rockland, Springvale, Vinalhaven, Waterville and North Conway, NH.
2nd Annual Making Spirits Bright
Tuesday, December 3, 2019
5 – 7 p.m.
Shipyard Tasting Room
86 Newbury Street, Portland, ME
Join us on Giving Tuesday for an evening of fun, friends and light fare as we kick off our annual Holiday Partners gift drive.
Admission is $10 or a new, unwrapped gift.
Gifts for children and adults are needed to ensure that each patient spending the holidays at Spring Harbor Hospital receives a meaningful present.
Learn more at: MaineBehavioralHealthcare.org/Giving

Our Mission
Maine Behavioral Healthcare will provide a seamless and compassionate continuum of care through a community of providers collaborating to promote recovery and the overall mental and physical well-being of those we are privileged to serve.

Subscribe to Mind & Body Connection by email at info@MaineBehavioralHealthcare.org

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