

## MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO



Dear Friends,

As we transition into a new season, I want to take a moment to reflect on a critical theme that underpins all our work here at Mental Health America of Eastern MO: the importance of focusing on mental health early in life.

Mental health isn't something that begins in adulthood. It is shaped from the earliest moments of our lives, influenced by a complex interplay of genetics, environment, and experience. Research shows that half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, and three-quarters by age 24. This tells us something crucial: we must act early!

Addressing mental health concerns in children isn't just about responding to crises — it's about laying the foundation for a healthier future. When we invest in early intervention and prevention, we are doing more than addressing immediate needs. We are building resilience, teaching coping skills, and helping young people develop the emotional tools they need to navigate life's challenges.

At Mental Health America of Eastern MO, we see firsthand the profound difference that early support can make. Our PEACE clinical program for children and their parents, student wellness screenings, and educational initiatives are designed with one goal in mind: to provide the support and tools needed to foster mental wellness from an early age. We know that by reaching children and families early, we can help prevent the development of more serious mental health issues later in life.

But we cannot do this alone. It takes a community effort. It requires the commitment of parents, educators, healthcare professionals, and community leaders to recognize the signs of mental health challenges early and to act with compassion and urgency. It also requires the courage to talk openly about mental health, to challenge the stigma that still surrounds it, and to advocate for the resources and support that all children deserve.

This commitment to early intervention has also led us to make a difficult decision. After much thoughtful consideration, we have decided to close our Representative Payee program, which has provided invaluable support to adults with serious mental illness. While we are proud of the impact this program has made over the years, we believe our resources can be most effective when directed toward earlier interventions. By focusing on prevention and support for children and their families, we aim to create a better pathway for adults with mental illness in the future — one where fewer adults find themselves in crisis because they received the help they needed earlier in life.

We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who have supported our Rep Payee program. This decision is not a farewell to those we have served, but rather a recommitment to our mission of creating a healthier future for all. Thank you for being a part of this mission with us. Let's continue to work together to create a future where mental health is prioritized, and every child has the opportunity to thrive!

With gratitude,

Suzanne King  
President & CEO



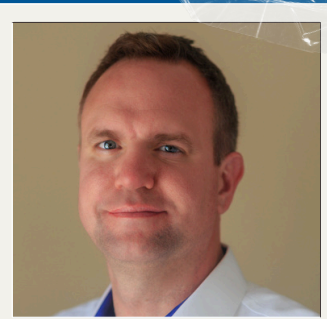
# MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS:

Welcoming Fresh Faces to the Team



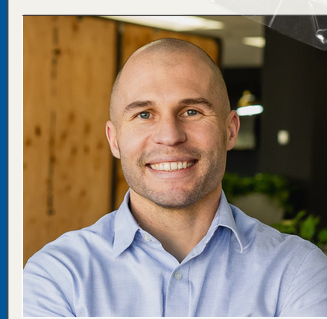
**DAN LESTER**  
VP OF FIELD CULTURE & INCLUSION, CLAYCO

“ I am honored to join the Executive Board of MHA-EM. I am excited to collaborate with such a dedicated team to advance mental health awareness, support, and advocacy in our community. Together, we can make a meaningful impact on the lives of those we serve, fostering a healthier and more inclusive society for all. ”



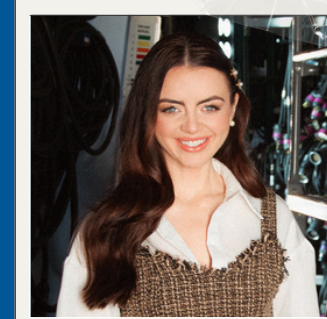
**BRIAN ZELLERS**  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, GENOA HEALTHCARE

“ I am very excited to become a member of the MHA-EM Board to help bring awareness and eliminate the stigma of mental health issues. I am proud and honored to have this opportunity to further serve the mental health community. ”



**JOSHUA ARANDA**  
CEO & CO-FOUNDER, MISSION MATTERS GROUP

“ I joined MHA-EM because I believe in the leadership, the vision, and the commitment to early intervention and prevention. Mental health is vital for us all, and if we don't combat stigma and prioritize resources before issues arise, the suffering we see in our families and our communities will continue to get worse. I'm honored and excited to be a part of the work ahead. ”



**SIERRA THOMPSON**  
VP OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, EVNTIV

“ I am deeply honored and grateful for the opportunity to join the MHA-EM board, where I am committed to contributing my skills and passion to foster positive change and support for mental health within our greater St. Louis community. ”



## MEET ALLI BULMAHN: Our Newest Occupational Therapist & ABC Coach

Our new pediatric mental health occupational therapist is dedicated to providing trauma-informed and neurodiversity-affirming care. With a deep commitment to supporting children and adolescents through their unique challenges, she strives to create a nurturing therapeutic environment where each young person can thrive.

Holding a master's degree in occupational therapy from Washington University School of Medicine and specializing in addressing the intersection of mental health, trauma, and neurodevelopmental differences. Before arriving at MHA-EM, Alli worked at an acute behavioral hospital as well as various schools throughout Illinois and California. Through those experiences, she molded a therapeutic approach that recognizes the impact of adverse experiences and celebrates the diversity of neurological experiences.

Alli integrates evidence-based strategies to promote emotional regulation, sensory processing, and daily life skill development. She collaborates closely with families and caregivers to create personalized treatment plans that honor each child's strengths and foster resilience.

Outside of her clinical work, she is dedicated to ongoing professional development and advocacy for trauma-informed practices in pediatric occupational therapy. A Certified Autism Specialist and currently in the process of becoming an ADHD-Certified Clinical Support Specialist to enhance her ability to promote inclusivity, advocate for individual needs and differences, and foster a supportive environment that empowers neurodiverse individuals to thrive and achieve their full potential.

## EMBRACING NEW HORIZONS: The Positive Transition from the Representative Payee Program

For decades, our Representative Payee program has provided crucial financial management services to adults with serious mental illness. It was a lifeline for many, ensuring stability and a measure of security. However, as we looked at the larger picture, we recognized that we needed to focus our efforts further upstream to address the root causes of mental illness.

We made the difficult decision to close the Rep Payee program to concentrate our resources on preventing mental health challenges from taking root in the first place. Research shows that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) significantly impact the likelihood of developing mental health issues in adulthood. By shifting our focus to early intervention and prevention, we aim to reduce the number of children who experience trauma, abuse, or neglect — factors that are often at the core of mental health struggles later in life.

This change reflects our commitment to fostering resilience, mental wellness, and healthy development in young people. We believe that by working with children and families today, we can help build a future where fewer people need intensive services tomorrow.

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported the Representative Payee program over the years. Your dedication made a real difference in the lives of so many. As we move forward with this new focus, we hope you will continue to stand with us in creating a brighter, healthier future for all.



# Ring Out Hope

2024

*presented by*



*join chairs*  
Jason and Melanie Henderson

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2024

THE ROYAL SONESTA CHASE PARK PLAZA  
ST. LOUIS

TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW AT  
[MHA-EM.ORG/RINGOUTHOPE](http://MHA-EM.ORG/RINGOUTHOPE)

If you were inspired reading our newsletter, please consider making a donation to help us continue to provide these life-changing services.



5501 Delmar Blvd.  
Suite A500  
St. Louis, MO 63112

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