

MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO



At **Mental Health America of Eastern Missouri (MHA-EM)**, advocacy has always been at the heart of what we do. As we enter our **80th year**, we reflect on the countless individuals and families we've supported—and the systemic changes we've fought for—to ensure mental health is recognized as a fundamental part of overall well-being. We know that mental health isn't just about individual care; it's about the **systems, policies, and resources** that determine whether people can access the support they need. Right now, those systems are under threat.

Proposed cuts to **Medicaid and Social Security Disability benefits** would be devastating for countless adults who rely on them to cover the cost of **psychiatric care, medications, and even basic necessities like housing**. For many, these programs are not just a safety net—they are a lifeline. These are some of the most vulnerable members of our community, and without these essential benefits, their ability to live with dignity and stability is at risk.

We cannot afford to be silent. **Advocacy is how we protect and uplift one another**, and right now, it is more critical than ever. When systems fail, it is our voices—united, unwavering, and determined—that create change. This is why we must continue to stand together, speak out, and demand that mental health remains a priority, not an afterthought.

As we celebrate **80 years of service and impact**, we are reminded that our strength has always come from our **community**. The challenges ahead are real, but so is the power we have when we **come together in support of one another**. Whether through **advocacy, education, or simply showing up for those in need**, every action matters. Let's make sure that no one is left behind.

Thank you for being part of this movement and for standing with us as we continue this vital work into our next chapter.

Sincerely,

Suzanne King, President & CEO

CELEBRATING
80
YEARS OF IMPACT



Staff Holiday Party



WWT Fireside Chat



Staff at Ring Out Hope



RING OUT HOPE GALA: A NIGHT OF IMPACT AND INSPIRATION

Our **annual Ring Out Hope Gala**, held on **Friday, November 22nd, at Chase Park Plaza**, was an unforgettable evening filled with inspiration, generosity, and hope. Thanks to the unwavering support of our community, we had our **largest attendance ever** and raised **over half a million dollars**—a record-breaking amount that will directly support mental health screenings and therapy services for children in the St. Louis area.

The night was expertly emceed by **Board Member Sierra Thompson** and former **ABC's The Bachelor, Clayton Echard**, who brought warmth and energy to the evening. Our **auctioneer, Shannon Eason**, and her dynamic team ignited excitement in the room, helping us raise critical funds to further our mission.

Guests were moved by a powerful speech from **Board Member and Gala Co-Chair Jason Henderson**, who shared his personal experience growing up with a mother facing mental health struggles and how the presence of **buffering adults** in his life shaped him into the man he is today. We also heard the touching story of **Makai**, a young client who was identified through our **Student Wellness Program** and later connected with our PEACE Clinical Program for therapy. His journey of

healing, supported by his therapist and his mother, is a testament to the life-changing impact of early intervention.

During the evening, our **CEO, Sue King**, delivered a **heartfelt speech**, emphasizing the profound role of supportive adults in a child's life. She reminded us that:

“ **When a child knows they have someone in their corner, their brain and body can handle challenges in ways that protect their mental health in both the short and long term.** ”

This gala was not just a fundraiser—it was a celebration of resilience, community, and the collective effort to ensure that every child has the support they need to thrive. **Thank you to everyone who attended, donated, and helped make this night one to remember.** Your generosity allows us to continue **changing lives, one child at a time.**

Mark your calendars! We look forward to seeing you for **Ring Out Hope 2025 on Friday, November 21st!** Stay tuned for more details on how you can be part of another unforgettable evening.

OUR 2024 BELL OF HOPE AWARD RECIPIENT: DR. JOAN LUBY



We had the privilege of honoring Dr. Joan Luby as the recipient of the 2024 Bell of Hope Award at our annual gala. Dr. Luby, the Samuel and Mae S. Ludwig Professor of Psychiatry (Child) at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, has devoted her career to transforming the field of children's mental health.

As the founder and director of the Early Emotional Development Program (EEDP), Dr. Luby has led groundbreaking research on early childhood psychopathology, identifying behavioral and biological markers of risk and exploring the lasting impact of early experiences on brain development. Her pioneering work in preschool depression has reshaped early intervention strategies, emphasizing the importance of parental nurturance and addressing the effects of poverty on mental health outcomes.

At the gala, Dr. Luby delivered a moving and inspiring speech, reflecting on her life's work and the urgent need to support children's mental health from the earliest years. Her dedication has left an indelible mark on the field, shaping the future of early intervention and treatment.

We are grateful for Dr. Luby's incredible contributions and proud to have recognized her with this award. Her work continues to inspire us all in the fight for better mental health care for children and families.



Rewriting Their Story: How One Mother and Son Found Healing Together

A Journey of Healing Through Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP)

When **Emily** and her six-year-old son, **Noah**, first joined our **PEACE Clinical Program**, communication between them was strained. Noah often asked about his father and why they had moved away, but **Emily, overwhelmed by her own emotions, would shut down and change the subject.** This **avoidance left Noah confused and struggling with his feelings**, which surfaced as anger, sadness, and behavioral challenges at home and school.

Over the past year, **Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP)** has transformed their relationship. **Noah has learned to regulate his emotions, express himself in healthier ways, and seek support from his mom** rather than acting out. His school behavior has drastically improved since switching to a more supportive environment—where he's no longer labeled the "bad kid"—and he now sees himself as **capable, resilient, and kind.**

But the journey wasn't just about Noah. Through therapy, **Emily began processing her own past traumas** that had unknowingly shaped her parenting. She's now more confident as a single mother, **recognizing her strengths rather than focusing on her struggles.** She no longer avoids difficult conversations but instead provides age-appropriate, honest answers, reassuring Noah that he did nothing wrong.

One of their most powerful new rituals is their nightly **"Rose, Bud, and Thorn"** check-in—a practice that encourages reflection and open communication. Each night, they share:



A rose—something positive from the day



A bud—something they're looking forward to



A thorn—a challenge they faced



“**Today, Noah thrives in a home filled with understanding and encouragement, and Emily has stepped fully into her role as his strongest advocate and ‘buffering’ adult.**”

This simple exercise has **strengthened their bond**, giving Noah a safe space to share his feelings and Emily an opportunity to support him in ways she never could before. They now **celebrate the little wins together, set goals, and reinforce positive behaviors.**

Today, **Noah thrives in a home filled with understanding and encouragement**, and Emily has stepped fully into her role as his strongest advocate and “buffering” adult. Their story is a testament to the power of healing—not just for children, but for parents too.

Thanks to the support of programs like **PEACE** and **generous donors like you**, families like Emily and Noah can rewrite their stories with hope, strength, and connection. ❤️

Nathaniel Walsh Steps Down as Board Chairman; Joshua Aranda to Take the Helm



After six years of dedicated leadership, **Nat Walsh is stepping down as Chairman of the Board of Directors** for Mental Health America of Eastern Missouri (MHA-EM). His tenure has been transformative, guiding the agency toward a renewed focus on the B4Stage4 philosophy of early intervention and prevention. Under his leadership, MHA-EM made bold decisions to refine its programs, ensuring alignment with this vision while launching pivotal initiatives such as the **PEACE (Preventing the Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences) Clinical Program** and the **Student Wellness Program**.



Nat's impact on the agency is immeasurable. Having first joined the board as a young lawyer, he became an instrumental force in shaping its direction. Though stepping down as Chairman, Nat will continue to serve on the board as he enjoys a well-earned retirement from his law career. Reflecting on his time in the role, he shared, *"**Serving as Board Chair for Mental Health America of Eastern Missouri has been an incredible journey. From a young volunteer to three decades of advocacy, I have been honored to work alongside passionate leaders, dedicated staff, and community volunteers—all striving to make a difference for those who need it most.**"*

Stepping into the role of Chairman is Joshua Aranda, a dynamic leader who has already proven to be an invaluable member of the Board since joining in early 2024. As CEO and Co-Founder of Mission Matters Group, Joshua brings a unique blend of strategic vision, technological expertise, and a deep

understanding of the human element necessary for building high-impact organizations. His commitment to MHA-EM's mission is both professional and personal, as he explains:

*"**Stepping into the role of Board Chair at MHA-EM is not something I take lightly. Nat dedicated over three decades of his life to this work, and I have deep respect for the legacy he leaves behind. I see it as both an honor and a serious responsibility to carry that forward.**"*

For me, this isn't just about board leadership—it's personal. My family has directly benefited from the types of support MHA-EM provides. The tools and insight I've gained from this organization have changed the way I parent, and they've changed the trajectory of my family. I feel indebted to the people who make this work possible, especially Sue and Brittany, who are on the front lines every day.

But I also know the challenges we face. The need is greater than ever, and the weight can't fall solely on the shoulders of a small staff. It's going to take all of us—our board, our donors, our partners, and this entire community—leaning in, contributing time, resources, and energy to ensure MHA-EM thrives.

I'm committed to helping MHA-EM continue breaking down barriers to care, providing early intervention, and delivering hope to children and families who need it most. There's no more important work than helping people heal, and I'm grateful to be part of an organization that does that every single day."

As MHA-EM moves forward under Joshua's leadership, the agency remains deeply grateful for Nat's years of service and unwavering dedication. His influence will continue to shape the organization, even as a new chapter begins with Joshua at the helm. With Joshua's expertise and passion, **MHA-EM is well-positioned to continue its critical mission, ensuring that mental health care remains accessible and transformative for the communities it serves.**

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



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

CONNECT WITH US:



mha_stl



Mental Health America
of Eastern Missouri



www.mha-em.org