Mental health group stresses family unity

Theresa Walls was within minutes of ending her life.
She had already swallowed a handful of pills and was beginning to feel the effects, but when she looked into the faces of her five young children—home and watching—she couldn't go through with it.

"I called 911," said Walls, whose battle with mental illness had come to a head. "I needed help."

It would be the start of a long and difficult journey of recovery for Walls.

Along the way she lost custody of her children and suffered other setbacks, but each time advocates from Mental Health America of Wisconsin were there to help her put the pieces of her life back together.

The nearly 30-year-old organization is one of the oldest mental health advocacy groups in the state and one of a few that focuses on the hidden victims of mental illness: the children.

"We help keep families together when one of the parents has a mental health issue," said Steve Simon, president and chief executive officer of the agency, which also has prevention and education components aimed at overcoming the stigma surrounding mental illness.

Simon estimates that nearly three-fourths of all parents with acute mental illness will lose custody of their children.

Theresa Walls (right) shares her family task schedule with mental health advocate Desiree Wright. Walls benefits from sessions with Mental Health America of Wisconsin, a United Way partner since 1999. United Way invests more than $1.7 million in Individual/Family Counseling programs, including the Mental Health Advancement and Access program.

MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA OF WISCONSIN

Mission: To promote mental health, prevent mental illness disorders and achieve victory over mental illness through advocacy, education, information and service.
Address: 734 N. 4th St., Suite 200, Milwaukee WI 53203
Phone: (414) 276-3122
Web site: www.mhawisconsin.org

Walls, who now volunteers as a peer specialist, is on the cusp of regaining custody of two of her five children.

"It was more about helping Theresa get to a place to realize how important she is and how important her children are," said Desiree Wright, a family advocate for the agency, who works directly with Walls. "We went through several therapists and a few psychiatrists to find the right fit for her. Now she has both and is doing well. She is now more able to focus."

The Wisconsin Warrior Summit, a comprehensive community response to the mental health needs of veterans and their families, Simon said.

The daylong summit, which starts at 8:30 a.m. Oct. 22 at the Milwaukee County War Memorial Center, 750 N. Lincoln Memorial Drive, will include keynote speakers and breakout sessions.

The sessions will include: Recognizing Changes: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Suicide and Pain; Military Families: Navigating the Road Home; Death of a Warrior: How a Family Copes; and Challenges Facing the Warrior: Homelessness, Financial, Housing and Employment.

The summit fee is $35, which covers the event, parking and lunch. The fee can be waived for veterans and veteran family members who are unable to pay.
Community

Community Information Line..............................................211
Community Advocates..............................................(414) 449-4777
Department of Health and Human Services..........................(414) 289-6123
HOPE Network for Single Mothers.....................................(262) 251-7335
Mental Health Crisis Line..............................................(414) 257-7222
Mobile Urgent Treatment Team (MUTT)..............................(414) 257-7621
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)........................(414) 344-0447
Parent Helpline.......................................................(414) 671-0566
SDC Energy Assistance..................................................(414) 906-2800
Social Security Administration......................................(800) 771-1213

A Way you Can Give This Holiday Season...

Each year, MHA provides holiday gift cards for the 25 families who participate in our ICP program. The gift cards are used to purchase the food items our families need to make their holiday pleasant. A donation of $35 will feed a family of 4 - 5. We are asking for gift certificates from Aldi or Pick n’ Save grocery stores OR a monetary gift so that our staff can purchase the gift cards.

In addition, we are in need of the following unused or gently used items: toddler car seats, $5 value door prize giveaways (candles, book, cologne, etc.); kitchen items such as plates, bowls, silverware, etc.; cleaning supplies; and liners and hygiene items.

Call Kristina at 414-276-3122 for more information.

"You must be the change you hope to see in others." -Unknown

What is the ICP?

Mental Health America of Wisconsin’s (MHA) Invisible Children’s Program (ICP) serves parents, as well as children, whose lives have been touched by mental illness. The program empowers parents to meet their children’s needs, improve the overall health of their family, and strengthen family relationships.

Parents are referred to the program by their therapist, doctor, or case worker. Once parents are in the program, ICP family advocates work closely with them to make sure their basic needs are being met.

Services that are available to participating families include:

- Family advocacy to help the family respond to some of the challenges they may face.
- Education for parents to help them improve their parenting skills, understand their illness, and develop coping strategies.
- Support groups, led by trained facilitators, for both adults and children.
- Family outings.

The ICP also offers educational programs that are open to the community (please see page 2 for their descriptions and times).

The Winter Blues

Does it ever seem like when winter comes you start feeling depressed? At some point during the winter do you experience changes in mood, lack of enjoyment, low energy, changes in sleep patterns, eating, or difficulty concentrating? If these symptoms sound familiar to you, you may be one of the 6% of Americans that suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

SAD is a form of depression that appears as winter approaches and daylight hours become shorter. The symptoms of seasonal depression can range from mild to severe. For some, a symptom may be an increase in appetite. For others, SAD causes them to feel overly irritable and unusually tired.

Although doctors aren’t sure what exactly causes SAD, it is thought that this type of depression is brought on by a lack of exposure to sunlight.

So what can we do to combat SAD? There are a range of treatments that are thought to help. Once someone has seen their doctor and has been diagnosed with SAD, their doctor will probably suggest one of the following treatments: increased light exposure (which means just getting outside more during the day i.e. walks, exercise); light therapy (includes use of special lights that simulate daylight); talk therapy (speaking with a professional therapist about negative feelings associated with SAD); and medication (depending on the severity of your symptoms).

Here are a few more tips that may help:

1.) Follow your doctor’s recommendations.
2.) Get plenty of exercise, especially outdoors.
3.) Be patient. Don’t expect your symptoms to go away immediately.
4.) Eat right. It may be hard, but avoiding simple carbohydrates and sugary snacks, and concentrating on plenty of whole grains, vegetables, and fruits can help you feel better in the long run.
5.) Spend time with friends and loved ones who understand what you’re going through.
6.) Ask for help if you need it!

(From the American Academy of Family Physicians)

6% of Americans suffer annually from SAD
Parent Spotlight - Melanie D.
Voted Most Inspirational Parent

Melanie D. is a proud parent to four boys and has been a participant in our program since March of 2007. Melanie and her husband are both active participants in the ICP and often go above and beyond to surprise them. In addition to programing, Melanie spends much of her time volunteering in our Specialized Family Resource Center. Melanie is the honorary recipient of the “Most Inspirational Parent” award. The ICP program participants voted on this prestigious award and Melanie won the majority vote.

Congratulations to...

Day Programming OPENINGS!

Parenting Skills for Persons with Mental Health Concerns

This twelve-week class focuses on increasing the parent’s understanding of their mental illness and the effects the illness can have on parenting.

This class meets every Thurs, from 12-2pm at our office.**

Wellness Recovery

This eight-week course focuses on recovery from mental illness. By the end of this course, each client will have created an individual crisis plan for their family.

This class meets every Wed. from 12-2pm at our office.**

Freedom/Self-Advocacy Class

This six-week class teaches participants how to become a better self-advocate in their communities for both their children and themselves.

This class meets every Tues. from 12-2pm at our office.**

Energy Assistance is Available

Do you need help with the high cost of heating your home? If so, you may be eligible for Wisconsin Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP). If your gross income is at or below 150% of poverty guidelines, energy assistance. The following are Energy Assistance Site Locations and six of them (see please text below) offer Crisis Energy Service.

- SDC Richards St (53212)
  4041 N. Richards St.
  Contact: (414) 908-2000
  Mon.-Fri., 8:30 am - 4:30 pm, Sat.
  8:30am -2:00pm
  Appointment Only
  Case Management Services

- SDC Southside Center (53204)
  931 W. Madison St.
  Contact: (414) 643-8444
  Mon.-Fri., 8:30 am - 4:30 pm, Sat.
  8:30 am - 2:00 pm, Appx. Only
  Case Management Services

- SDC Touitonia Site (53207)
  6868 N. Touitonia Ave.
  Contact: (414) 906-4602
  Mon.-Fri., 8:30 am - 4:30 pm
  Sat., 8:30 am - 2 pm - Appx Only
  Case Management Services

- Marcia P. Coggs Human Service Center (53205)
  1220 Vliet St
  Contact: (414) 289-6146
  Mon.-Fri., 7:30am-3:30pm
  Case Management Services Available

- Maximum - Northwest (53218)
  6550 N. 76th St
  Contact: (414) 760-6090
  Case Management Services Available

- Maximum - Southside (53214)
  1306 S. 70th St. West Allis
  Contact: (414) 607-7449
  Mon.-Fri., 8:00 - 4:30 pm
  Bay View Comm. Center (53207)
  1520 E Oklahoma Ave.
  Mon. & Thurs., 8:30am-4:00pm

Fun Family Recipes

Cheesy Kielbasa or Chicken Pasta Dinner

Ingredients:
- 2 / Cup Pasta (any kind will do)
- 1 Bag of Frozen Broccoli/Cauliflower/Carrots
- (You can add or subtract any other veggies that you like (just limit it to 1 bag))
- 1 can (10 oz ¾ oz) condensed Cheddar cheese soup
- ½ cup milk
- ½ pound of kielbasa or chicken breast (fully cooked)

Directions:
- (To prepare chicken, either fry in pan with a little bit of oil and butter/bake in oven for 1 hour until meat is white and no longer pink).
- Slice the chicken or Kielbasa after it is cooked.
- In a large pan cook the pasta as directed on the box of pasta.
- Add Broccoli/Carrots/Cauliflower during the last 6-7 minutes of the pasta cooking time.
- Drain and return to large pan.
- Stir in soup, milk, and cooked kielbasa/chicken.
- Cook over medium heat for 3-5 minutes until heated through.

Speedy Baked Beans

Ingredients:
- 1 can (28 oz) baked beans
- ½ cup packed brown sugar
- ¼ cup chopped onions
- ¼ cup ketchup
- 1 teaspoon mustard

Directions:
- Heat oven to 350 in a casserole dish or covered pan
- Bake 30-40 minutes until hot and bubbly

Easy Chicken and Rice

Ingredients:
- 2 cans of cream of mushroom soup
- 2 cans of milk (just use the empty can of cream of mushroom soup)
- 2 cups Instant Rice
- Salt and Pepper to taste
- 3 pieces of defrosted chicken breast cut up or 5 pieces of chicken

Directions:
- Put chicken breast or chicken pieces in a frying pan with 3 tablespoons of oil.
- Fry until no longer pink.
- Take chicken out of pan and put in cans of mushroom soup and milk.
- Bring soup and milk mixture to boil
- Add rice
- Reduce heat and cover, cook until rice is tender
- Add chicken and heat through
- Serve warm.

The following parents were recently recognized for their volunteer work with the ICP and the Family Center: Kristy, Chryste, Dana, Melanie, Renee, Yania, Awilda, Robert, Simone, April and Joel.
How can you help the ICP?

To continue building on the ICP’s success, we need your help! You can help by:
• Volunteering to serve as a family mentor, a therapist, a speaker or a support group facilitator.
• Making a financial donation to help support services for the families.
• Donating items such as car seats, mattresses, children's toys and books, beds, cribs, high chairs, toiletries, event tickets, raffle items, etc.

If you are interested in giving a donation or volunteering your time, please contact Kristina Fintel, supervisor of the Invisible Children’s Program, at (414) 276-3122 or kristina@mhadwisconsin.org.

“Life does not put things in front of you that you are unable to handle.”

Mental Health America of Wisconsin
(414) 276-3122 / (877) 642-4630
www.mhadwisconsin.org
info@mhadwisconsin.org

Mental Health America of Wisconsin is dedicated to promoting mental health, preventing mental disorders and achieving victory over mental illness through advocacy, education, information & service.

Bringing Wellness Home

Invisible Children’s Program
Dedicated to strengthening, empowering and preserving families

Mental Health America of Wisconsin is a United Way agency.
How do I refer a family to the ICP?

Simply fill out a referral form. Referral forms are available on our web site at www.mhawisconsin.org. If you have questions, call Mental Health America at (414) 276-3122.

"Nearly 75% of all parents with acute mental illness will lose custody of their children!"

What types of mental health concerns do parents in the program have?

Parents in the program suffer from a variety of mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression.

Why is MHA offering this program?

MHA offers this program because although low-income families have access to many services, there is a noticeable absence of services for families affected by mental illness. Adults who have mental health concerns may be receiving health services, but quite often their children are not. That’s why we refer to those children as “invisible.” They are left to cope on their own. The parents often lack support as they attempt to meet their children’s needs. Their behavior may be inconsistent, and they often lack the resources for proper medical care. The ICP recognizes that regardless of the mental health concerns a family is faced with, all children deserve a safe and caring home. That’s where we can help.

Family Center Services

• Connection to community resources
• Lending library and internet connection
• Drop-in time with FREE childcare
• Transportation options available
• Meet 1-1 with Parent Support Specialists
  They are parents with personal experience living with mental health issues. They have embraced the recovery philosophy and have completed a 70 hour certification in order to work directly with the visitors to the Family Center.

Come be a part of the Specialized Family Resource Center:

• Connect with resources
• Meet new people
• Attend classes
• Volunteer your time
• Enjoy family activities

There is no cost for activities for families who are associated with Family Center activities.

The Specialized Family Resource Center:
Mental Health America of Wisconsin
734 North 4th Street
1st Floor
Milwaukee, WI 53203
(414) 276-3119

The Family Center is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Call (414) 276-3119 for hours and a current schedule of classes.