



a San Francisco landmark since 1904

service sector

Mental Health Association of San Francisco Ringing in 60 Years of Service

Now entering its sixth decade of service, the Mental Health Association of San Francisco (MHA-SF) is dedicated to improving the mental health of residents in the diverse communities of San Francisco through education, advocacy, research, and service. In all its programs, MHA-SF works together with people and families challenged by mental illness and with the agencies that serve them to promote prevention, access to services, leadership, and independence.

Central to MHA-SF's mission throughout its history, is the belief that meaningful change can only be achieved with active participation by those challenged by mental illness and that mental health consumers must be empowered to pursue their own goals.

Recognizing that tens of thousands of San Franciscans live near or below the poverty level, mental illness disproportionately affects people of lower income, especially those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. MHA-SF programs address the needs of the underserved and those who seek mental health services only to be barred from access.

"Much in our field has changed since 1947," says MHA-SF Executive Director Belinda Lyons. "Today institutionalization is no longer the primary treatment option for mental illness. Decades of research and experience have shown that people can recover from mental illness, especially by developing skills that lead to their own recovery and with the support of their community."

Over the last 60 years, MHA-SF has continued to adapt and to serve. The organization focuses on high impact systems change and leadership development, influencing the availability and disbursement of millions of government dollars which touch the lives of thousands.

Symbol of the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) is the Mental Health Bell. Cast from iron chains and shackles that once restrained people in asylums, the Bell is both a powerful reminder of the harrowing care individuals endured and a sign of hope for continued progress in understanding and treatment.

In the early 1950s, NMHA issued a call to asylums across the country for their discarded chains and shackles. In April of 1953 NMHA melted down these inhumane bindings at the McShane Bell Foundry in Baltimore, Maryland and forged the 300-pound Mental Health Bell.

Today the Mental Health Bell tolls to end misunderstanding and discrimination and rings out hope in the fight for victory over mental illness. The Mental Health Association of San Francisco is an affiliate of the Mental Health Association of California and the National Mental Health Association. Visit us at www.mha-sf.org or call 415.421.2926 for information.

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