The University Health Foundation is proud to partner with the Ronald D. Deffenbaugh Foundation to support two UH Behavioral Health programs providing essential services for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness.

New Frontiers is a clubhouse-style day program offering structured psychosocial rehabilitation classes, activities, and community outings to support mental health recovery. The PEER Center, housed in the same facility, is a consumer-operated drop-in center that promotes recovery and embraces hope for individuals with mental illness through peer support.

Outings and activities are vital to developing skills related to community integration and inclusion. Staff organize excursions, such as visiting the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art or spending a day fishing at Lake Jacomo, and the grant funding from the Ronald D. Deffenbaugh Foundation supports these opportunities.

On October 6, New Frontiers hosted a Fall Festival in the parking lot with games, music, prizes, and barbecue! University Health nurses hosted a vaccine drive at the event to provide flu and COVID vaccines. More than 60 individuals received a vaccine.

Thanks to the Ronald D. Deffenbaugh Foundation, the grant also enables New Frontiers and PEER Center staff to distribute winter coats, sleeping bags, and personal care items to individuals participating in the programs.

Since the Mobile Care Response Team (MCRT) partnership between UH Behavioral Health and Swope Health was formed about a year ago, the team has been called on to provide many important outreach services in our community.

Made up of staff members trained in providing life-saving crisis services, the MCRT goes out into the Kansas City community when a call is made to 988, the national suicide prevention line.

On one such occasion in May, the MCRT responded to a call where the gentleman was listed as “SI with a plan,” meaning...
As the leaves begin to change and the air turns brisk, I’m reminded of the approaching colder months and the challenges our clients experiencing homelessness will face. At UH Behavioral Health, our mission has always been clear: to provide compassionate care and support to those in need, regardless of their circumstances. In the last few years, we’ve focused that broader mission into our Noble Cause and its principles of acceptance, bearing hope, and compassion.

As we enter this season, I’m compelled to reiterate our commitment to these principles. The imminent cold weather poses a significant threat to our clients who are without stable housing. This has been evident in previous winters when stakeholders in the city rushed to find adequate accommodations for our community’s most vulnerable.

In response to this pressing need, UH Behavioral Health has started discussing how we might reopen our drop-in center, a resource that was regrettably closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This closure left a gaping hole in our community, so this type of endeavor is both timely and urgent. Once reopened, it would provide a safe haven during the daytime for our clients experiencing homelessness in the midst of the harsh winter months. It would also serve as a hub for critical services, including access to potential housing, food, hygiene facilities, support in healthcare system navigation, and most importantly, the transformative care and support our incredible workforce members provide.

While there isn’t a definitive timeline currently, reopening the drop-in center will be a collaborative effort that reflects the spirit of our organization. It will involve coordination with community partners, local authorities, and our dedicated staff who understand the significance of this initiative.

Before I close, I want to express my gratitude to each of you for your unwavering dedication to our clients and our Noble Cause. Our work goes beyond providing services; it is about extending a lifeline to those who are most often overlooked. The commitment you bring to your roles is a testament to your embodiment of acceptance, bearing hope, and compassion. May we continue to make a positive impact on our community, ensuring no one is left out in the cold.

Sharon Freese, COO, University Health Behavioral Health

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he had suicidal thoughts and a plan for how he would end his life. He stated he watched videos on how to cut himself the correct way to ensure it was done right. An MCR team member was dispatched and spoke to him for about 20 minutes before he started to have seizures from detoxing from alcohol. EMS was called and he was taken to a local hospital to be treated. Once he was discharged, the MCRT reached out to him to encourage him to get help.

Over the next couple of months, the MCRT stayed in contact with him, and he agreed to let us get him connected to services. During this time he relapsed a couple times. Finally, in early August he made it in for his first medication evaluation with the psychiatrist. He was extremely anxious, so a member of the MCRT offered to accompany him to his appointment. During the appointment, he told the doctor that we (MCRT) were his “God send and savior” for what we have done to help him. “I needed this so much after all that I have been through. I am forever thankful for you,” he said.

Two days later, after the MCRT members discussed his case, he was placed into outpatient treatment. Since getting him into treatment, he continues to express his gratitude and is on a path to better health.

“While there is often a delay in a positive outcome, staying with the client and supporting their journey can make all the difference,” said Michelle Rogers, Program Director, Specialized Services at UH Behavioral Health.
BH Training Department Welcomes New Trainees

In August, UH Behavioral Health’s Training Department welcomed 22 Master and Doctoral Level trainees from Psychology, Counseling and Social Work disciplines. This year’s class represents trainees from several universities, including University of Missouri- Kansas City (UMKC), The University of Kansas, Park University, University of Central Missouri, Washington University, and Oklahoma City University.

Trainees receive a wide variety of education, focused on evidence-based assessment and treatment intervention. “My vision is that UH Behavioral Health is at the forefront of innovative and exceptional behavioral health education and training,” said Sharon Freese, COO. “My hope is that people interested in joining the behavioral health workforce will be inspired to come here and learn how to do it.”

A few months ago, the Department welcomed its newest team member, Erica Fisher, Licensed Clinical Social Worker. In her role, Erica will assist in the coordination and execution of the Social Work Practicum Program. “I’m excited to bring my experience in social work, therapy and training to this role,” Erica said. “I hope to elevate the program and assist these students in finding their passion in behavioral health.”

This year, the Training Department staff has focused on expansion and growth of the program. “The feedback received from trainees during our flagship year in 2022 has helped us shape and enhance the education we offer,” said Dr. Ashlee Jones, Training Director.

Another area of growth this year was the expansion of clinical services offered to patients. This year’s class has the opportunity to create and facilitate new therapy groups for the outpatient Behavioral Health clinics, including Mind-Body Connection, Relationship Skills, Coping Skills and Parenting Skills. These groups will be offered both virtually and in person as a way to increase access to care. “We are looking forward to continued growth and expansion, and are committed to providing the best clinical care to the community,” Jones said.

According to Dr. Abbey Gripka, Training Supervisor, the Training Department has provided 2,003 therapy sessions and 436 group sessions to community members since last year. “Opening and expanding access to care for clients in our community is one of the top goals of this program,” she said.

The Training Department works closely with universities to to ensure degree requirements are met and trainees learn the skills necessary to prepare for a career in behavioral health - and ultimately, a full-time position at UH Behavioral Health, Jones and Gripka said.

If you or someone you know would like more information about the Training Department, go to www.universityhealthkc.org/professional-education/psychology-training-program/.

2023 Mid-America ATTC Leadership Institute Graduation

As the home of the Mid-America Addiction Technology Transfer Center (MA-ATTC), UH Behavioral Health – in partnership with UMKC School of Nursing and Health Studies – supports multidisciplinary practitioners, agencies and communities in implementing evidence-based, substance use treatment practices within the states of MO, KS, NE and IA.

Earlier this year we resumed our annual MA-ATTC Leadership Institute, an intensive, six-month training program designed for emerging leaders in the behavioral health field. The program included assessments, a week-long immersion training, five months of virtual coaching circles and mentorship. All participants also received access to the Leadership Institute’s Linkedin membership to facilitate and encourage networking.

Some of the topics from this year’s program included Working in Teams, Understanding the Behavioral Health Industry and Practicing Courageous Conversations. A graduation ceremony was held last month for 12 emerging leaders who participated in this year's program.

Plans are already underway for the 2024 Leadership Institute. For more information, visit our website at: attcnetwork.org/centers/mid-america-attc/leadership-development-0.

UH Behavioral Health staff, pictured left to right: Robbie Phillips, Vladimir Sainte, James Glenn (Director, MA-ATTC), Victoria Hardy (a UHBH Leadership Institute graduate) and Tiffany Sturdivant-Ervin; Center: De’Andrea Chatmon
Tips for Coping with Holiday Stress

As the holidays approach, you may be feeling the pressures of holiday shopping, gift and travel expenses, the stress of hosting gatherings and impressing guests, or managing a packed calendar of holiday events. High, and sometimes unrealistic expectations for the holidays, as well as loneliness and grief can also be heightened during the holidays.

Practice Mindfulness and Meditation
Mindfulness can be a valuable mental wellness tool. Mindfulness practices can be particularly helpful if you are traveling or dealing with an unusual schedule. If you’re new to mindfulness, there are many online resources and apps to help you, including Insight Timer, Smiling Mind and Healthy Minds Program, all of which can positively impact one’s mental health.

Preventing Burnout — It’s OK to Say, “Not This Year.”
For many, the holiday season brings joy, but it can also bring more stress and some conflicting obligations. It is important to prioritize and simplify: prioritize what brings joy and simplify when you can. If you have social anxiety, you may send your mental health into a tizzy by pushing yourself into situations that stress you out, whether it’s attending parties with people you don’t know well or going into crowded places that could trigger your symptoms.

Take a Break
Every holiday gathering has that one family member who can turn a pleasant conversation into a family feud. If you see things starting to go down an uncomfortable path, try not to let it escalate. Removing yourself from the situation by leaving the room or stepping outside for some fresh air can help mitigate the negative energy. Naps, reading a book and even watching a funny movie can relieve tension and stress.

Get Outside
Getting outside for fresh air and exposure to sunlight can help relax you and lift your mood. Walking outside in the sun — or walking meditation — is a calming way to help you clear the mental clutter. Numerous studies have pointed to the mental health benefits of spending time in nature, including stress relief, better concentration, lower levels of inflammation and improved mental energy.

If You’re in Therapy, Stay in Therapy
Managing mental illness is a challenge, and it can be particularly difficult during the holiday season. Keeping regularly scheduled therapy sessions can help ensure you have built-in time to explore difficult emotions that the holidays often bring to the surface. If you are going out of town and typically meet in person, ask your therapist about a virtual meeting.

Grief and Loss
During the holiday season, many people may have a more difficult time missing a loved one they have lost or simply experience increased grief or loss. Grief is not a tidy, orderly process, and there is no right way to grieve. Every person — and every family — does it differently. This can cause emotions to collide and overlap, especially during the holiday season when the emphasis is on rebirth and renewal.

Starting a new tradition, changing the celebration, expressing your needs to friends and family members and helping others in need are all ways to help honor loved ones missing from holiday celebrations. Giving yourself time to move through the grieving process will — in time — help make the holidays easier to handle.

Financial Stress
Holiday spending can easily leave people in debt, contributing to stress that may last well into the New Year. This year’s inflation is only adding to the financial burden. Create and stick to a spending plan or budget to avoid overspending. Instead of one gift per person, consider a Secret Santa. Instead of expensive gifts, consider homemade or handmade items that may carry special meaning to those receiving them. Focusing on celebrating together and showing affection by being present, engaged, and supportive of each other can reduce the financial pinch that holidays can often cause.