Through a strong partnership with REACH Healthcare Foundation (RHF), whose mission is to advance health equity through coverage and care for underserved people in our region, as well as the University Health Foundation, we are proud to have been able to increase access to healthcare and benefits for unhoused youth and adults in our community.

Since 2017, the grant funding received from RHF has enabled UH to build a core infrastructure and provide essential staffing in Jared Reck, UH Patient Access Training and Quality Specialist. Reck is our in-house benefits “champion” who supports staff that work with our most at-risk population to find housing. Those benefits include Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability (SSDI) through the SOAR process, Missouri Medicaid, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

“Jared’s knowledge of complex enrollment processes and his dedication to helping the team complete complicated applications has established UHBH as the leader in SOAR applications in Missouri,” said Robbie Phillips, UHBH Senior Director, Community Services. “Approximately 95% of applications submitted (and approved) come from UHBH. He and the team also help individuals re-apply for benefits, and educate them on key requirements and guidelines to remain eligible,” he added.

This year, the grant enabled UHBH to expand into culturally-responsive enrollment services for children and families seeking or receiving services through the UHBH FUTURES program, including school-based behavioral health services embedded within three Kansas City, Missouri-area charter schools, as well as through mobile community-based outreach, intake and family support services.

Additionally, we also expanded to offer enrollment services to low-income individuals (children/adults/families) receiving community-based outreach via our PEER Navigator program at the Lucille H. Bluford Library.

“Funding provided by the REACH Healthcare Foundation enables us to provide important services to those who need it most in our community,” Phillips said.

For more information on the REACH Healthcare Foundation, go to: https://reachhealth.org/
Welcome to our revamped Noble News and Views! This year, we will only be publishing news about UH Behavioral Health in this manner once per quarter. This is part of an effort to make sure our communication is streamlined and clear without overdoing it.

I’m excited to highlight some external partnerships in this first issue of the year. Please be sure to take time to read the article on Jacob’s Closet, an organization devoted to providing the basic needs of those affected by mental illness. I’m sure you’ll be inspired as I was to see how the lasting legacy of Jacob Ryan Skowronski continues to impact those in need in our community who are served on our inpatient units.

I’d also like to highlight a budding partnership with Swope Health Services to co-respond to local calls to the national 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. UH Behavioral Health played a meaningful role in collaborating with local behavioral health agencies to implement our regional response to hotline calls, and now that 988 is live and accepting phone calls, UH Behavioral Health in partnership with Swope has formed the Mobile Care Team. Personnel from both agencies will office together and respond to 988 calls in the community. Be sure to continue to watch for updates about this exciting new endeavor!

In expanding our community focus and impact, we’re also expanding our UH Behavioral Health training department. These efforts are centered on our need to develop a workforce pipeline and to decrease burnout among existing workforce members. If you visit one of our locations, you may notice more students being trained by our exceptional clinicians.

Every day, our incredible staff are impacting those we serve and are making a meaningful contribution to the behavioral health field. I count myself fortunate to play a small part with them in making mental health and substance use services more accessible and available to people in Kansas City and beyond.

A note from our COO...

HUD Announces $2.8 BILLION Continuum of Care (CoC) Funding To Help People Experiencing Homelessness

On March 28, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced $2.8 billion in Continuum of Care (CoC) Competition Awards for thousands of local homeless service and housing programs across the United States. The awards reflect the Biden–Harris Administration’s continued commitment to addressing the nation’s homelessness crisis using equity and evidence-based solutions.

Of the total annual funding, three of our programs were chosen to receive a combined $2M: Haven of Hope, TruFutures and TruRoots, and will be renewed until the end of 2024. These programs provide permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing for adults and transition-aged youth.

“We believe that housing is both an outcome and an intervention,” said James Glenn, UHBH Associate Administrator, Business Strategies. “When we invest in securing permanent housing for our most at-risk clients, we tend to see a reduction in their mental health and physical health symptoms simply by providing a safe and decent place to live,” he added.

UHBH secured the second largest percent of HUD funds in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Securing this funding for another year enables UHBH to assist clients move from temporary shelters, cars and encampments to more stable, safe housing.
Jacob’s Closet Honors Former Patient, Provides Clothing for Patients in Need

In 2017, Jacob Skowronski was a patient on the Behavioral Health Acute Care unit. While there, he identified a need for more books, games and activities for fellow patients working to overcome mental health issues. At the time of his discharge that year, his parents agreed to rent him an apartment in Grandview, MO. While living in his apartment complex, he befriended someone who ultimately ended up murdering him.

During his short life, Jacob dedicated himself to making the world a better place through his business idea, Emerald Gardens. According to his parents, he planned to buy land and feed the hungry. Jacob wanted to “do good in this world” and promised to “make a difference.” In a book for his new baby niece, he once wrote, “The Power to bring Beauty to the Earth lies in your Heart.”

As the result of the tragic loss of their son, John and Michelle Skowronski founded a non-profit organization in his name to honor his legacy: Jacob’s Closet Emerald Mission. According to Debbie Millett, Director of Nursing, UH Behavioral Health Acute Care, Jacob’s Closet Emerald Mission exists to provide basic needs, including clothing, food, and hygiene supplies to patients coming to the hospital on admission who are homeless or who are leaving the hospital setting upon discharge to a homeless shelter. Many times, these patients don’t have the basic supplies needed for self-care.

Over the last few years, John and Michelle, along with many of their friends, have donated clothing, winter coats and gloves, games, eye glasses and musical instruments for our patients who may be homeless or in desperate need of clothing items. To better organize and house the donations, Millett recently turned a room in the CBM building into what is now known as Jacob’s Closet.

“Over the past few months, the Skowronski’s have had many amazing families donate clothes, shoes, coats, and other items. With these donations, they continue to replenish Jacob’s Closet to help improve our patients’ lives,” Millett said. “We are thrilled to have been able to continue Jacob’s legacy by providing our patients with hundreds of items, including an electric guitar and a cordless amp for those participating in our music therapy program,” she added.

For more information on Jacob’s Closet Emerald Mission, go to:
https://jacobsclosetemeraldmission.org/

Child Psychiatry Team Helps Children and Adolescents Heal & Grow

Children who face stressful situations at home and school often experience delayed or arrested development. At UHBH, providers help children and adolescents of all ages move on with their physical, mental and emotional well-being, as well as academic development, for as long as it takes.

Family and social issues, combined with biological or genetic factors, all play a role in mental health issues affecting children, including mood and anxiety disorders, ADHD, Autism and anger control problems. This can result in the child struggling at school, home and with peers and family members.

During the course of treatment, our providers maintain close communication with parents, school and the individual patients. We combine medication and individual and family psychotherapy sessions tailored to the specific needs of each patient's case. “We follow patients, sometimes over the course of several years, to help ensure positive outcomes,” said Maria Otayza-Navato, Medical Director, UHBH Child and Adolescent Medication Clinic.

One such patient, who came to us 10 years ago at age five, lives with ADHD and Autism. Being in and out of foster care for the 10 years due to neglect and mom’s substance and alcohol abuse created many problems, both at home and at school. Throughout the 10 years, whether in foster placement or home, we have continued to follow his progress. Last month, he returned to his mother (hopefully for the last time), and both he and mom are adjusting and doing well.

Stories such as this can be told many times over by the providers at UHBH Child Psychiatry. If you or someone you know needs an assessment, the walk-in intake clinic is available Monday through Friday from 8a-12 noon at our Crossroads building, located at 300 W. 19th Terrace in Kansas City. For those referring a patient to UHBH Child Psychiatry, referrals will be offered the first available appointment, unless a specific provider is requested.

Contact us at: 816-404-5727.

Referrals call 816-404-5709 or visit BehavioralHealthKC.org
Lights, Camera, Action! BH’s Employee Engagement Committee Brings the Cinema to Crossroads Counseling

February was Black History Month, the time of year that honors the triumphs and struggles of Black and African Americans throughout U.S. history. As a way to create a forum for furthering the understanding of the significance of this observance among our staff, the Crossroads meeting room at Crossroads Counseling was transformed each Friday in February into a movie theater, complete with a popcorn machine.

Instead of a formal training in a classroom or Zoom setting as was held in previous years, UHBH’s Employee Engagement team decided to step out of the mundane and launched Friday Movie Matinees, shining the spotlight on Black History Month. Each week, a different movie was shown to entertain and educate staff on the systemic forms of racism that existed not only in history, but that continue today.

After each movie, which included One Night in Miami, The Woman King, Black Panther: Wakanda Forever and Emergency, attendees were invited to participate in a discussion to explore their thoughts and reactions, creating an open dialog about issues impacting our daily lives.

“The Friday Movie Matinees served to cultivate a space for open, honest dialog among a diverse group of colleagues,” said Vladimir Sainte, LCSW and Senior Project Coordinator. “People absorb information in different ways, and this forum enabled staff members from different cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, age groups, gender and departments to have a shared experience. There’s something profound about that, and it can’t always be captured in a more formal training environment or Zoom event.”

More than 50 staffers attended the movie series, and UHBH leaders fully supported the idea by offering cultural competency credit for attending one of the movies. The last movie event included a rousing Black History Kahoot Challenge that tested attendees’ Black History knowledge and created a lasting and memorable experience.

Feedback on the Friday Movie Matinees has been very positive, so the Employee Engagement Team is holding ongoing discussions to continue the momentum throughout the year. “The more our team members seek to open themselves to different perspectives, the better we can serve our community,” Sainte said. Watch this space for updates!

UHBH’s Employee Engagement Committee includes: Tamika Bables, Rob Ellis, Victoria Fry, Marquitta Jackson, Ann Kaeding, Carolyn Lovelace, Joyce McCoy, Mary McCurdy, Latonya Mitchell, Francesca Parra, Michelle Rodgers, Vlad Sainte, Tiffany Sturdivant and Desiree Summers.

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Robbie Phillips, UHBH Senior Director, Community Services says that several staff members contributed countless hours navigating the arduous renewal application process to secure this funding. “Without this team’s hard work, we would not be able to serve those clients who are most in need in our community,” he said.

In the state of Missouri, 153 projects received funding totaling $43,689,722. To read the full announcement, go to: https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_23_062