



mental health  
CONNECTICUT

YEAR IN REVIEW

# Promoting Health and Wellbeing

2023 Annual Report



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# The Art of Wellbeing

As we embark on a new year, let us take a moment to reflect on our collective achievements and the path that lies ahead. Our commitment to developing a robust infrastructure and dependable systems has laid a strong groundwork for our growth and expansion in the last ten years. Most recently, we expanded our newest initiative The Collaborative, launched our first program in Hartford at the Hispanic Health Council's Family Wellness Center, and partnered to bring "The Love Mural" to Hartford. Two of these programs focus on the power of art in improving wellbeing. In further integrating the arts through new and expanded programs into our wellness efforts, we are allowing for new and creative ways of communication and expression that break the stigma around discussing mental health, emotional trauma, and substance use.

Throughout our journey at MHC, we have witnessed time and time again the remarkable transformations that occur when individuals embrace their creative potential. We have seen how exploring one's creativity serves as a steppingstone towards rejoining the workforce, resuming their education, reconnecting with family and friends, and becoming active and engaged members of our communities. The positive impact we've seen in our program participants has been inspiring. Many participants have achieved personal goals not just in their creative work but also in gaining independence, embracing self-advocacy, reducing symptoms, and rejoining the community in a safe and meaningful way.

The stories of resilience and growth that emerge from our programs are a testament to the boundless potential within each of us. These stories are not just tales of personal triumph; they are proof of the profound impact of creativity on mental health and overall wellbeing. As we look ahead, we will continue to build on the remarkable achievements in this year's report, supporting individuals with the greatest mental health needs, reaching under-resourced communities throughout the state, advocating for systematic changes, providing free resources and programs to all, and empowering individuals through the arts.

With gratitude and determination,



Laurie Molinari  
Board Chair



Luis B. Pérez, LCWS  
President & CEO



**Wellness is the complete integration of body, mind, and spirit - the realization that everything we do, think, feel, and believe has an effect on our state of well-being.**

– Greg Anderson

# Our Team

Fiscal Year, July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

## Board of Directors

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**Sean K. Smedley**

**Ursula G. Sowinski**

**Marlene Thomas**

**Claudia Matos**

## Executive Team

**Luis B. Pérez, LCSW, President & CEO**

**Jill Currier, Chief Human Resources Officer**

**Jennifer Pulse, Chief Financial Officer**

**Michael Culmo, Chief Program Officer**

**Remi Kyek, Chief Experience Officer**

**Suzi Craig, Chief Strategy Officer**

**Domenique Thornton, General Council**

# Expanding Our Impact Through Art of Wellbeing



In 2023, MHC expanded the impact of its arts and wellness programming for participants in Hartford and across Connecticut. MHC's arts and wellness programming is award-winning, evidence-based, and designed to support individuals and communities as they find healing and explore health and wellbeing through creative expression.

Amy Smith, an artist, art advocate, and former gallery owner, founded MHC's arts and wellness programming a decade ago. What once began as a 3-4 person meet-up has evolved into the Art of Wellbeing, a powerful force in healing for hundreds of MHC program participants and now others across Connecticut.

Art of Wellbeing programming provides a safe environment for individuals to express themselves and connect with others. The program focuses on visual arts, dance, music, writing, and more!

**Celebrating 2023**

# Highlights

**PARTNER SPOTLIGHT**

# Partnering with the Hispanic Health Council to Bring the Art of Wellbeing to Hartford

**mhc** art of wellbeing

A Program of Mental Health Connecticut

+



Funding from The Hartford made it possible for MHC, in collaboration with the Hispanic Health Council, to introduce its Art of Wellbeing program to the Hartford region. HHC's newly established Family Wellness Center, which was established in Hartford in conjunction with MHC and twelve other organizations, offers a wide range of community-based services conveniently located under one roof.

The HHC's vision of ensuring Hispanics and other diverse populations reach their fullest potential and achieve a healthy and fulfilled life aligns with MHC's vision of creating a future where wellbeing is rooted in respect for the condition of being human. Both organizations believe that fostering individual creative expression in safe, supportive spaces results in healthy, vibrant communities.

By providing our expertise and programming at HHC's Family Wellness Center, we are meeting our mission of building a creative and inclusive space for individuals to feel part of their community as they continue on their journey toward wellness. Thanks to support from the Hartford, all programming offerings through the Family Wellness Center are offered free of charge and open to the public.

# New and Noteworthy



*Pictured left to right: Dee Thornton, Remi Kyek, Jen Pulse, Jill Currier, Luis B. Pérez, Suzi Craig, Jackie Davis, Hollen Monroe, Jennifer Hunter Smith*

[READ THE BLOG](#)

[HBJ ARTICLE](#)

## Luis B. Pérez Honored by Hartford Business Journal

MHC's President and CEO, Luis B. Pérez was recognized along with others as a 2022 C-Suite Award honoree by the Hartford Business Journal (HBJ). HBJ's 2022 C-suite Awards recognize top executives who have made significant contributions to their companies over the last year. Luis and other honorees have been identified as leaders who stood out for their commitment to excellence and guiding their companies through extremely difficult conditions amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Luis consistently goes above and beyond.”

“Luis consistently goes above and beyond in his role as President and CEO as well as in the communities we serve,” said Scott Brabant, Board Chair of Mental Health Connecticut. “His passion for collaborating across health care stakeholders to improve the health and well-being of diverse communities and his demonstrated ability to reinvent more sustainable and affordable offerings will help drive Mental Health Connecticut's next stage of growth.”



# The National Tour of LOVE

## PROMOTING RESPECT WITHIN COMMUNITIES

With funding from Macy's, we partnered with RiseUp Arts, Parkville Market, and muralist Lisa Marie to bring "The Love Mural" to Hartford and make Connecticut one of the first states on the 50-state tour. "The LOVE Mural" is designed to celebrate diversity, empower abundance, and share love.





## The National Tour of LOVE Continued

Lisa Marie shared, “When people experience my artwork, I want them to feel hope and inspired to continue on, living authentically. My color spectrum is specifically designed to uplift communities, increase joy, and energize individuals. Partnering with Mental Health Connecticut is a true honor, as we share a mission to create environments that support long-term health and wellness.”

“We are thrilled to be one of the first stops on the tour and the Connecticut home of The LOVE Mural. It has been an honor to work with Mental Health CT, RiseUp, and Lisa Marie on the planning of the installation of this impactful piece of art. Parkville Market is proud to be diverse in our offerings and inclusive of all people, and The LOVE Mural is a perfect representation of that. We LOVE it!” said Ashley McHugh, Director of Events and Programming at Parkville Market.



### PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

The funding for this project marks a continued run of support from Macy’s as a valued partner of MHC’s, “Through our social purpose platform, Mission Every One, Macy’s is committed to creating a brighter future with bold representation for our customers, colleagues, and communities we serve,” said Sam Di Scipio, Macy’s, Inc. senior director, social impact.

“We are thrilled to provide Mental Health CT with funding to create dynamic artwork that promotes inclusion and empowers members of the LGBTQ community to be their authentic selves.”



[READ OUR BLOG](#)

[CT VOICE ARTICLE](#)

[VIDEO](#)

# MHC Joins CT Collaborative to End Loneliness

For All Ages' CEO Deb Bibbins and COO Gary Sekorski announced MHC's President & CEO Luis B. Pérez as the newest member of the CT Collaborative to End Loneliness Steering Committee. As a Steering Committee member, Luis will help drive the strategy and impact of the Collaborative to benefit Connecticut residents of all ages.

[LEARN MORE](#)



*Pictured: For All Ages CEO Deb Bibbins (right) and COO Gary Sekorski (left) alongside MHC's President and CEO, Luis B. Pérez*

# New Homelessness Outreach Leads to Improved Results

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MHC participates in the Northwest Coordinated Access Network (CAN) that serves those who meet the HUD definition of literal homelessness, which is required for entry into homeless projects throughout the state. CANs assess the housing needs of all individuals experiencing homelessness. Staff are connecting with participants via phone as it has proven beneficial for the CAN process. By taking calls directly or reaching out to participants for same-day appointments, we can limit the number of obstacles that arise that prevent patients from seeking care. We are then able to work with more participants to assess their needs and help them navigate resources. It has also enabled us to maintain contact more seamlessly with families and individuals who are coming through the CAN system and follow up with them when working on a housing plan.

As we continue to partner with local provider agencies such as The Center for Renewal in Waterbury and The Gathering Place in Torrington, we can continue to assist those individuals or families who do not have a phone while utilizing phone calls with those who do.

BUILDING TRUST AMONG OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS



Through innovative programs, increased outreach, and unwavering commitment, Mental Health Connecticut has made substantial strides in fostering mental wellness and resilience.

# Expanding Our Impact

# Bringing Mental Health First Aid to WellSpark Customers Nationwide

“We’re committed to supporting the health of the whole person.”



As a part of an ongoing effort to support business leaders and organizations in their goals to make mental wellness a priority, WellSpark has announced a partnership with Mental Health Connecticut to bring Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) to WellSpark customers across the country.

“At WellSpark, we’re committed to supporting the health of the whole person – from the social factors that drive certain outcomes to a person’s physical and mental wellbeing,” said Roberta Wachtelhausen, President of WellSpark Health. “Mental Health Connecticut shares our mission to create healthier futures for the communities we serve.”

This initiative will help further our efforts to reach people where they are by providing additional education and resources that our clients can access.”

“MHC applauds WellSpark and their clientele for taking a proactive approach to mental wellness,” said Luis B. Pérez, President and CEO of Mental Health Connecticut. “MHFA is proven effective in its approach to helping create environments where psychological safety for all is as equally important as physical safety, providing leaders with an important tool in their wellness toolbox that is missing in many organizations.”





SUPPORTING ALL PEOPLE

# Programs & Outcomes

**\$16.8M** Total Budgeted Revenue for FY24

\$14.4 (86%) Gov't Contracts

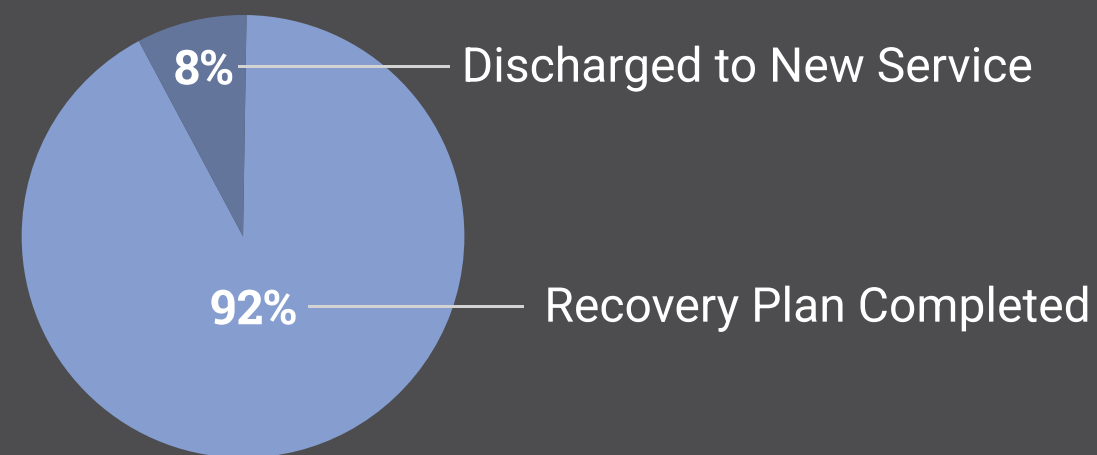
\$1.9 (11%) Fee for Service  
(includes program fees and waiver)

\$0.5 (3%) Fundraising and Other

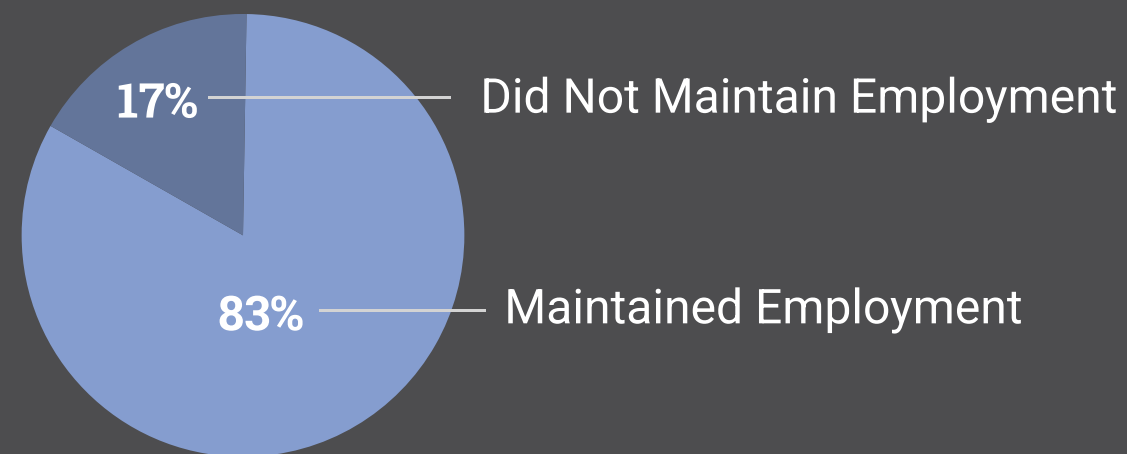
# Programs & Outcomes

The numbers tell the story of our dedication to inclusivity and outreach. Explore our demographics and reach to see how we've touched lives across diverse communities, making mental health support accessible to all.

## Discharge and Employment Data



### Successful Discharge



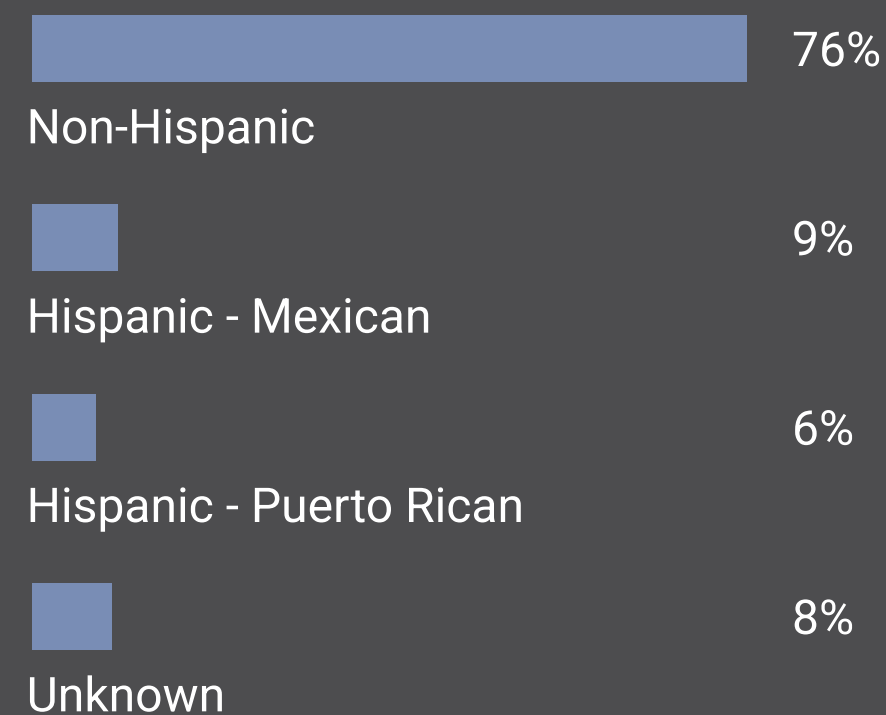
### Maintained Employment

## Gender



Less than 1% of individuals identified as either non-binary, transgender male or transgender female

## Ethnicity



## Northwest Coordinated Access Network (CAN) Data

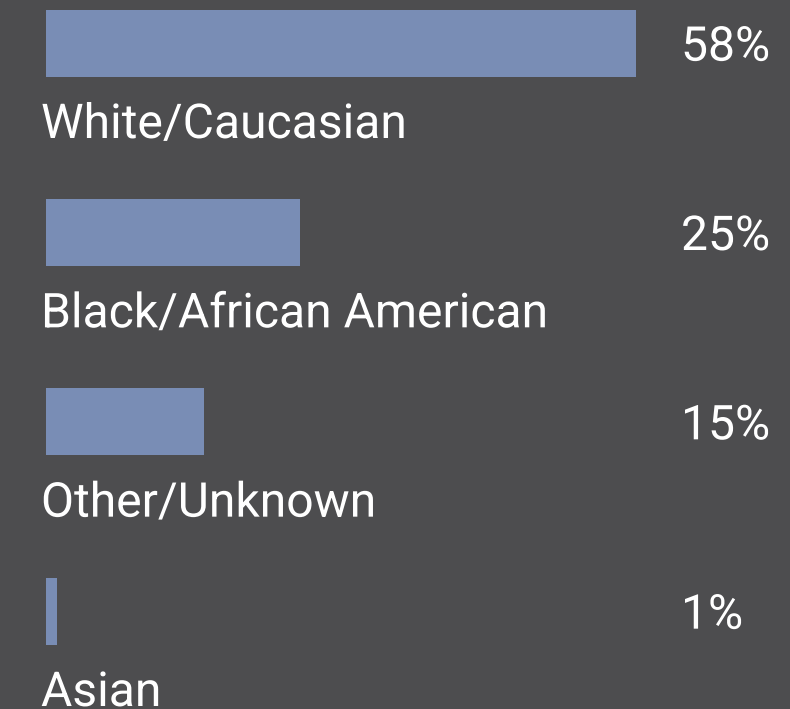
**2,755**

CANs attended

**1,030**

CANs diverted from shelter

## Race







# Strengthening our Residential Programs

Leadership and site program staff relocated to or expanded their offices at our 24-hour program sites in Torrington, Waterbury, Danbury, Bridgeport, Stamford, and West Hartford. With funding from DHMAS, we expanded BLOOM House in Waterbury from ten supervised apartment program slots to sixteen and welcomed several new staff and participants over the past few months.

For ease of transition, we chose to renovate the building next door to BLOOM House and began admitting participants in May. Since finding comfortable, peaceful outdoor spaces in downtown Waterbury can be challenging, we purchased a gazebo and new furniture for the participants to be able to enjoy time outside and socialize together.



# Continuing our Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

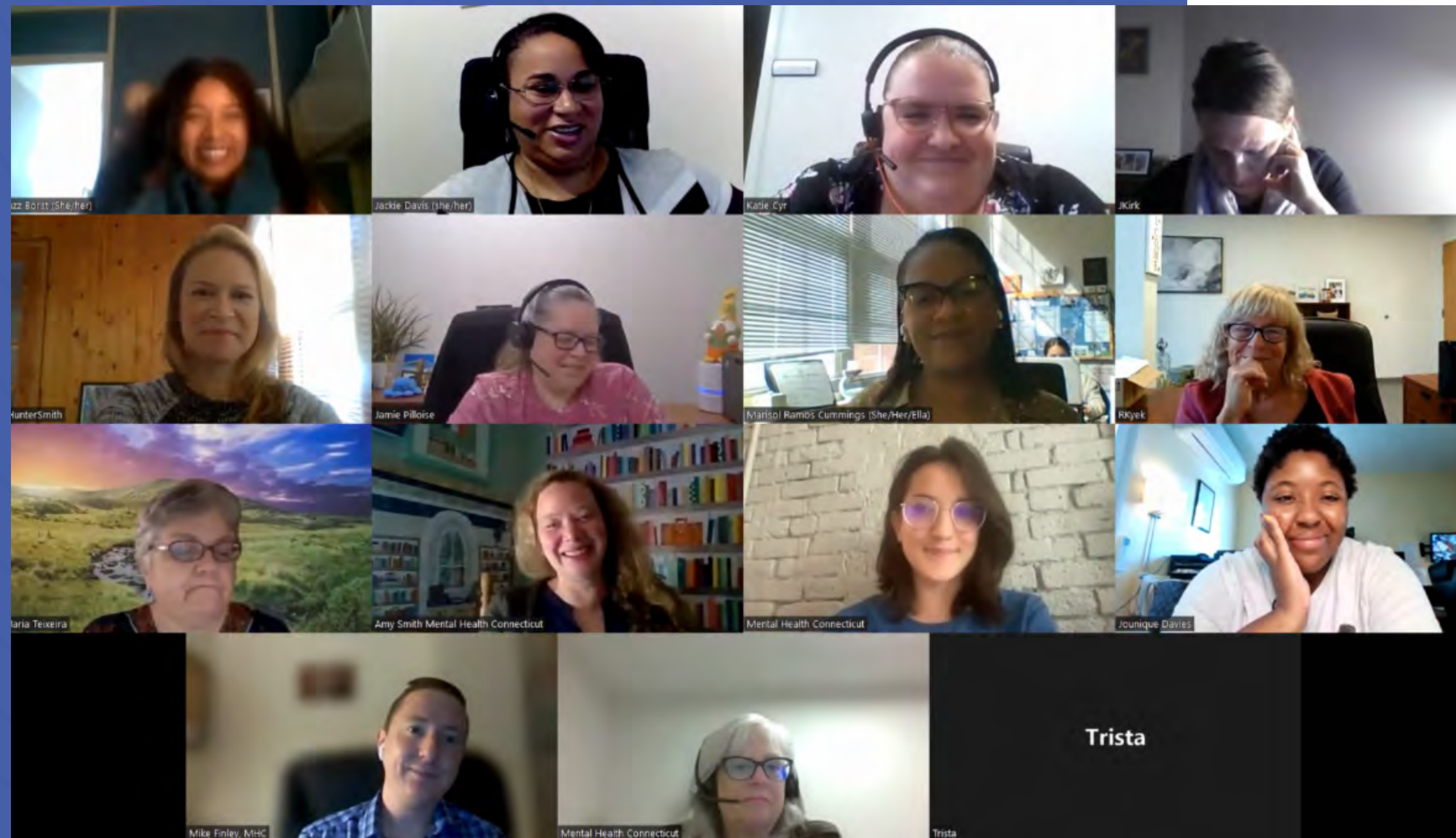
## CREATING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

To support our staff, our Equity, Social Justice & Antiracism (ESJA) Advisory Committee continues to provide monthly educational offerings to our 200+ employees to promote the practice of cultural humility and a venue for open and honest discussion.

“...a venue for open and honest discussion.”

MHC also hosted a Deaf Culture training for MHC staff and the Board of Directors, presented by MHC employees, Tammy Ennis, Amelia Saunders, and Nicholas Campbell. Externally, MHC’s Director of Workplace Mental Health & DEI, Jacquilyn Davis, is leading the charge of offering DEI-focused workshops, training, and presentations to educate workplaces across the northeast.

OUR COMMITMENT





# The MHC Collaborative Cohort Launches

In 2022, the MHC Collaborative program launched as a 6-month cohort. The Collaborative focuses on creating a culture of workplace mental health. Membership in the MHC Collaborative is an annual investment that includes a mix of strategic guidance and a point-in-time needs assessment for leadership that is delivered simultaneously with training and workshops for all employees. Members also have access to a collection of templates, guides, and toolkits to aid in their ongoing workplace mental health efforts.

“Our agency reached out to MHC when we were undergoing a change in executive leadership and recognized that we need help navigating the waters with our team. MHC was a great partner in helping us to find the space for our team’s concerns to be heard and with creative ideas to improve upon what we were doing.”

Christa Latteri, Executive Director,  
Long Island Consultation Center,  
MHC Collaborative Member

[LEARN MORE](#)

## Mental Health Awareness Month Campaign Reaches Thousands

For Mental Health Awareness Month in May 2023, MHC brought back the #LetsFaceIt campaign and asked members of the community to join us and help lead the conversation around what mental health and wellness mean to them. #LetsFaceIt 2022 alumni, Yoga In Our City and the Connecticut Historical Society (CHS) joined as partners to help share impactful stories from past and present.

# #LetsFaceIt



*Kenny Mercer shares his story.*

“It’s easy when you’re dealing with physical issues to spiral into a dark place. I feel the best way to counter all those things that are negative is to keep an eye and thoughts on your own mental health and how you can stay on top of it.”

—  
KENNY MERCER

[mhconn.org/letsfaceit](https://mhconn.org/letsfaceit)

## #LetsFaceIt

ConnectiCare, a leading health plan in Connecticut since 1981, signed on once again as MHC’s primary sponsor, with a generous donation of \$23,000 for 2023. Stamford Health and Lockton Companies also signed on as top-level sponsors for the campaign. In total, there were 14 sponsors and community partners supporting the #LetsFaceIt campaign in 2023. Thanks to the help of our incredible sponsors and donors, we exceeded our \$75,000 goal and ended with more than \$83,500 to support bringing MHC’s award-winning arts and wellness program to Hartford with a partnership through the Hispanic Health Council (HHC).

Learn more, read the stories, and watch interviews here:  
[Let's Face It - Mental Health Connecticut \(mhconn.org\)](https://mhconn.org)


### CAMPAIGN SPONSORS

ConnectiCare, Inc.  
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### PARTNERS

Yoga in Our City  
Connecticut Historical Society



We're proud to highlight our extensive efforts in driving change, from promoting mental health awareness to advancing legislation and fighting discrimination.

**Advocating for**

# **Mental Health**

# Allyship in Practice

We believe that MHC's mission of creating environments that support long-term health and wellness must include a commitment to practicing cultural humility, antiracism, and allyship. When an individual can celebrate their diversity, receive equitable access to care and support, and is included in their community, it directly impacts their overall health and wellness.

During the last year, MHC has spoken up and taken action to continue our legacy of advocating for the safety and respect of communities facing discrimination. Our online blog and social media channels have been tools for raising awareness of the social injustices across the country as well as sharing resources and support for those in need.



[READ OUR BLOG](#)

[COMMUNITY RESOURCES](#)



# Program Participants Speak Out on Our Legislative Priorities

MHC joined others to create a visual presence at the Capitol in support of CT Community Nonprofit Alliance members and our legislative priorities. Program participants from MHC's Independence Center attended and had the opportunity to speak with Representative Reyes of Waterbury.

[VIEW OUR 2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES](#)



*Pictured: Program participants from MHC's Independence Center alongside Deborah Holcomb, Program Supervisor, and Mike Finley, Public Policy Coordinator.*





# Connecticut Mental Health Caucus

MHC spearheaded the establishment of the bipartisan Mental Health Caucus during the 2023 Legislative Session, making CT only the eighth state in the country to form a Mental Health Caucus.

Senator Heather Somers and Representative Susan Johnson, who serve as co-chairs, are dedicated to fostering sustained investments in mental health initiatives through this caucus.

MHC eagerly anticipates collaborating with the 25 legislators who have already pledged their commitment to this essential caucus. Together, we aim to ensure that Connecticut residents have the necessary resources to surmount any challenges they may encounter on their mental health journey.

# Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz Visits Independence Center

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MHC had the pleasure of hosting Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz for a site visit at the Independence Center (IC) in Waterbury. Joined by MHC Board President, Scott Brabant, the Lt. Governor was able to learn about the many great programs and services offered through the IC.

During the visit, she got to see participants enjoying our Mending Arts program and was gifted a beautiful painting by a participant. The visit allowed the IC staff to raise awareness about the many ways the IC benefits the community and the resources necessary to continue to provide these critical services.



*Pictured left to right: Mike Finley, Trista Genova, Michael Culmo, Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz, and Agustin Lopez.*

# State Legislators United Behind a Common Goal



On May 30th, MHC President and CEO, Luis B. Pérez, joined State Legislators, including Senator Saud Anwar, Senator Heather Somers, and Representative Susan Johnson for a press conference in honor of Mental Health Awareness Month.

“...a collective determination to prioritize mental health was uniting legislators and advocates”

At the event, advocates discussed their commitment to addressing mental health and the legislative efforts undertaken to enhance mental health services across the state. As they shared their insights and experiences, it became evident that a collective determination to prioritize mental health was uniting legislators and advocates. There emerged a shared mission to better serve the mental health needs of the community. This collaborative spirit serves as a beacon of hope for Connecticut residents seeking improved mental health resources and support.

# Thank You to Our Donors

We are grateful for the support of all our donors, including many who choose to remain anonymous.

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## ORGANIZATIONAL DONORS

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Please excuse any omissions or inaccuracies. For corrections, please email [info@mhconn.org](mailto:info@mhconn.org).

# Industry Partners



HEALTHY MINDS ■ STRONG COMMUNITIES



United Way  
of Greater Waterbury



# Mission

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Mental Health Connecticut partners with individuals, families, and communities to create environments that support long-term health and wellness.

# Vision

---

Mental Health Connecticut (MHC) envisions a future where wellbeing is rooted in respect for the condition of being human.

## OUR VALUES

**Safety**

**Respect**

**Trust**

**Support**

**Accountability**

FOLLOW OUR STORY

# Inspiring hope in 2024 & beyond



mental health  
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