



OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL HEALTH EQUITY (OMHE)

# Quarterly Newsletter

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Happy Spring DMHAS Family!

We have entered the season of blossoms and better weather. This edition of the OMHE newsletter highlights some amazing multicultural related activities from the DMHAS state-operated facilities during quarter 1 (January through March). You will see there were many wonderful celebrations during Black History Month.



Our Champions for Diversity & Health Equity program (Cohort 2) is nearing graduation in June! We have been together for the last 8 months with a wonderful group of 30 passionate people from various state agencies, excited to be "Champions" at their facilities. Many are busy working on their Health Equity plan proposals and presenting them to their facility's leadership. We are excited to follow their progress over time. We have started the Champions Alumni Board (led by alumni) so all cohort graduates can remain engaged and connected. We also incorporated a networking session during graduation for inter-cohort networking.

Our full-day DEI training continues to be offered weekly to all DMHAS staff. Currently, we are near 80% completion for all DMHAS staff. We continue to track this overtime by facility. We are happy to report that since 2019, nearly 3500 have been trained. Tara Hall and Cynthia Martin continue to offer technical assistance and support (see our Training Catalogue).

As you may have seen, the landscape of DEI continues to evolve, and we continue to stay abreast with what is happening on both the federal and state levels. OMHE remains steadfast in our commitment to uphold our core values, mission, and vision. Our dedication to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment, driven by DMHAS' Cultural Competency policy, ensures that we stay focused on what matters; "Promoting and achieving a recovery-oriented system of care is possible if cultural competence is an integral part of all service system design, delivery, and evaluation."

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the process in any way over the years. Thank you for following our progress, achievements, and collaborating with us!

Warm wishes,  
*Samia Hussein*

# MCAC MEMBERS

SULAIMAN AVERY(DAS)  
LUIZA BARNAT (OOC)  
MICHELLE BEECKMAN (OOC)  
JAMIE CHANDLER(SMHA)  
RACHEL DUFFY (WFH)  
ELLEN ECONS (OOC)  
CLAUDE FIELDS (CRMHC)  
ELIZABETH FLANAGAN  
(YALE PRCH)  
ROBERTA GOLDBERG  
(SWCMHS)  
SHARON GREAVES (OOC)  
TARA HALL (OOC)  
MUI MUI HIN-MCCORMICK  
(PRIVATE PRACTICE)  
SAMIA HUSSEIN (OOC)  
CAROL KNIGHT (WFH)  
ENRIQUE SIERRA(RVS)  
CYNTHIA MARTIN (OOC)  
STEPHANIE LAZARUS (RELIANCE  
HEALTH, INC.)  
CHERYL LEONE (RVS)  
KASHEENE LEVETT (WCMHN)  
BRITT LEWIS(CMHC)  
ALINETTE MONTEIRO  
(SWCMHS)  
WILLIAM PIERCE (OOC)  
STACY DEMARCO (CVH)  
JYOTHI VAYALAKKARA (CVH)  
KYLE PEDERSEN(CMHC)  
SHEMEKIA GARCIA(RELIANCE  
HEALTH, INC)  
TAMEKA ALLEN(RVS)



Special thanks to Cheryl Leone who previously served on the MCAC for many years.

**WELCOME**  
*New Members*



Tameka Allen  
Director of Quality Assurance, RVS



Shemekia Garcia  
Residential Unit Director,  
Reliance Health, Inc.



Britt Lewis  
Director of Care Management,  
CMHC

# MCAC MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

## William “Bill” Pierce



Bill works within the Office of the Commissioner (OOC) as a Client Rights Specialist who oversees use of the DMHAS Client Grievance Procedure by DMHAS and DMHAS contracted providers and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II Coordinator. As Title II Coordinator, he helps DMHAS facilities and programs be equally accessible for persons with disabilities as everyone else. He has worked at OOC since 2012. He came to DMHAS in 2002 after spending 12 years as a Human Services Advocate at the Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA). Bill has a bachelor's degree in public administration and was trained as a Paralegal. He also did course work in divinity at Hartford Seminary and St. Joseph's. More recently, he received an "ADA Coordinator" certificate from the University of Missouri and ADA National Network.

When asked about his MCAC experience, Bill shared he has been an MCAC member for about 5 years. "Besides the synergy between the work I do and MCAC, I see every day how as a "white (CIS) guy with a tie" in America, I enjoy privileges not shared by many, many other people. As such, feel by being a member of the MCAC, I can work towards DMHAS being diverse, equitable and inclusive so we can help everyone in their recovery from substance use and mental health disorders."

As to his current profession, Bill enjoys the variety that his work offers. Whether he's helping a provider resolve a client's complaint or discussing aspects of the ADA with a DMHAS program or helping a caller, each day is different. When reflecting on what he knows now and wished he knew earlier in his professional career, Bill stated "I spent a dozen years at OPA, in a culture biased against providers. Probably because of the abuse and neglect complaints we had to address and probably because we believed we knew best for people with disabilities, it wasn't until I came to DMHAS that I realized how most of the support providers offer to people go unnoticed by everyone but the person." For this reason, he embraces the connection of culture and its importance in his profession. He shared he is reminded each day of the culture he grew up in from the banners seen on the way to work. It is a culture where all too often a person is blamed for what others think they are.

### ***On Inspiration....***

"My dad was a definite inspiration as he was always there to support me. Another big inspiration is Bernie Siegel M.D. Doctor Siegel was a Pediatric Surgeon who taught about the connection between health and mind. While his methods may be controversial, it was seeing him talk about "following our bliss" that I began the path which brought me here."

Bill describes his values and beliefs as unconditional acceptance and being mindful of being judgmental and add "But I often miss the mark."

### ***Fun fact, people may not know and hobbies...***

"I recently discovered Dungeons and Dragons. I love One Shots where I can play a short adventure for a couple hours rather than a long campaign. My current character is a "chaotic-neutral" Forest Gnome who has a Mountain Lion as a companion." Bill also writes short stories and sometimes longer pieces as a way of getting outside of my own head. Over the years, he has had non-fiction articles published in several magazines, as well as on Archive of Our Own as "fan fiction."

### ***What would you do if you hadn't chosen your current profession?***

"Many years ago, I spent a dozen or so years being a bicycle mechanic. If I hadn't taken my first state job, I more likely than not would have been happily wrenching these past 30 plus years where all, it takes is a twist here and a new part there for a customer to leave happy."

# Western Connecticut Mental Health Network (Torrington) Spirit Week

by Lindsey Fenton, Human Services Advocate

To break up the winter blues, Western CT Mental Health Network in Torrington added some fun to the office and participated in their second round of “Spirit Weeks of Western!” Both staff and clients were encouraged to dress up according to the theme each week. The themes ranged from Sports Jersey (or apparel) Monday, Silly Sock Tuesday, Mismatch Wednesday, and, inspired by our beloved staff Maylene, Flannel Friday (an office tradition). Spirit Weeks provokes smiles, laughter, some light jokes, and some really great pictures! We are incorporating it into our culture at WCMHN- Torrington.

## SPIRIT WEEKS OF FEBRUARY



Mismatch  
WEDNESDAY



Silly Sock  
Tuesday



Sports Jersey  
Monday



Flannel Friday

# Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System

## Black History Month

by Alinette Monteiro, LCSW

The 2025 Black History Month's National Theme: African Americans and Labor was brought to life at SWCMHS on March 25th! Clients and staff enjoyed a presentation by Geoff Fletcher. Mr Fletcher immersed the audience in the history and powerful reflection on the pivotal role that the hard work of African American has played in shaping our country's history. Mr. Fletcher highlighted the impact of the Pullman Porters, who both as individuals and as a larger labor movement advocated for better work conditions, allowing for communication, information and advocacy to travel North. Attendants were delighted in the artifacts displayed and the contributions the Pullman Porters played in challenging racial discrimination.

The Ruby and Calvin Fletcher African American Museum is an institution in Stratford, CT "dedicated to telling stories of the struggles and triumphs of African Americans since the first African set foot on American soil in 1619". The presentation was followed by several raffles offering ticket entry to the museum! A Soul Food Luncheon and Showcasing of the movie: The Six Triple Eight was held on March 27th. A wonderful time was had by all!! A special thanks to the planning subcommittee members: Lance Arrington, Alexis Woods, Daniel Moye, Neelam Joseph, Crystal Ganat, Joanne Butler, Cristina Garcia, Anthony Lawson, Kwan Patton, Art Davis, and cafeteria staff!



**GEOFF FLETCHER, OWNER OF THE RUBY & CALVIN FLETCHER AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MUSEUM, LOCATED IN STRATFORD, CT.**



**PICTURED ABOVE (L TO R): ALEXUS WOODS, ALINETTE MONTEIRO, GEOFF FLETCHER, JOANNE BUTLER**

# Southeastern Mental Health Authority

## Cultural Spiritual Enhancement Committee

by Jamie Chandler, Trainer, MS

On Wednesday, February 19th, the SMHA Cultural and Spiritual Enhancement Committee hosted a Black History Month event for staff and clients focusing on Black Inventions. The event included displays, crafts, giveaways, food and invention bingo where participants were able to learn more about over 30 different inventors and their inventions.

Some of the inventors and inventions that were highlighted that continue to contribute to our everyday lives include:

- Sarah Boone was a dressmaker who migrated to New Haven, CT and was one of the first African American Women to receive a patent for her modern-day ironing board design in 1892
- John L. Love was a Massachusetts carpenter who improved an existing sharpening device for pencils which made it portable and had a compartment to capture the pencil shavings in 1897.
- Garrett Morgan who invented the three-light traffic signal in 1923
- Frederick McKinley Jones was an entrepreneur that pioneered the invention of the first portable air conditioning unit in 1942 and mobile refrigeration trucks in 1949.
- The event was well attended and participants walked away learning more about Black History and how the inventions continue to contribute to our everyday lives today.



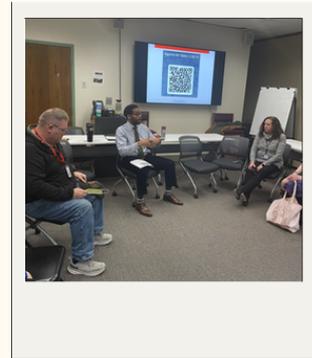
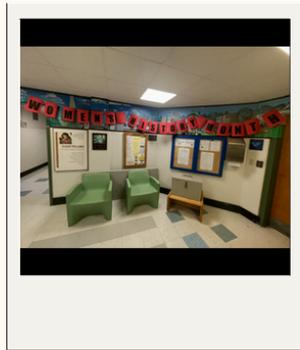
# Whiting Forensic Hospital: Black History and Women's History Month

## by Carol Knight, Behavioral Health Clinical Supervisor

The Whiting Forensic Hospital's IDREAM Team has continued to meet monthly and consists of staff from both buildings, the maximum-security Whiting building and the enhanced security Dutcher building.

In February of this year, the IDREAM Team hosted several activities in honor of Black History Month. A major highlight was a presentation by Troy Brown which included a showing of the documentary, "Against All Odds: The Fight for The Black Middle Class" followed by a facilitated discussion. Mr. Brown's stated goal, to "Foster a deeper understanding and awareness of the complex issues facing Black Americans" was identical to that of the IDREAM Team. Other activities included, weekly challenges, (and prizes), focused on information related to Black History Month for staff and patients, decoration of the lobby in each building, Black History Month banners, daily emails on "Black History Contributors" and a potluck on February 26th. The potluck has become a yearly activity and like previous years was well attended with a variety of several sumptuous dishes.

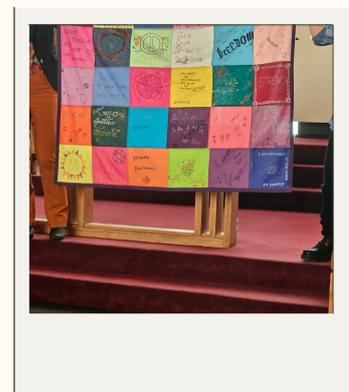
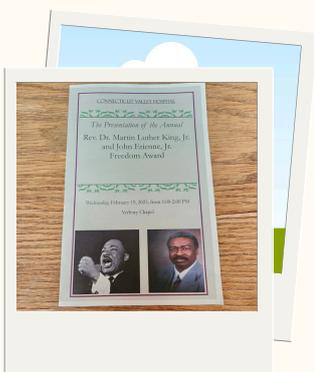
Celebration of Women's History month has included a banner for each building and daily emails highlighting women from different cultural groups who have made significant contribution to the USA as well as other countries. These emails will continue to the end of the month.



## Connecticut Valley Hospital

### by Stacy DeMarco, Director of Social Work/Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

On February 19, 2025, Connecticut Valley Hospital held their annual Martin Luther King, Jr., and John Etienne, Jr., award ceremony celebration. This celebration honors those employees who are nominated by their co-workers for their service and commitment to upholding the ideals of equity, justice, diversity, freedom, and the legacy of these two great men. Over 50 staff and patients braved the cold for this celebration. In addition to the presentation of awards, there was a motivational keynote speech provided by Talitha Coggins, a dedicated Manager of Equity and Inclusion Initiatives with the Department of Social Services, as well as a presentation of a peace and unity quilt created by patients and staff at CVH that will be on display in Valley View Café in the months to come.



# Office of the Commissioner

## Black History Month & St. Patrick's Day Programming

by Tara Hall, MS, OMHE Trainer

After months of planning, the OOC, Multicultural Committee hosted its annual Black History Month Program on 2/25. Nearly 60 attendees from various state agencies attended the luncheon. The program opened with African drums being played by Leonard Epps as guests entered the room. Mr. Epps engaged the crowd and provided a short history of the drums and its role in the labor and resiliency of Black people. The keynote address was provided by Windsor Mayor, Nuchette Black-Burke who highlighted her familial immigrant story of hard work as well as the role of the labor unions in the City of Hartford. Attendees enjoyed a catered Caribbean, Soul food style luncheon inclusive of vegetarian options provided by a black-owned business, The 881 Grab & Go Restaurant on New Britain, Avenue, Hartford, CT.

On 3/12, we also celebrated St. Patrick's day with a morning breakfast which included a historical presentation of the history of St. Patrick. The presentation was led by Margaret O'Hagan-Lynch and Bill Pierce, OOC Multicultural Committee members.



Greetings and Registration Table  
Pictured (L to R)  
Sharon Greaves and Justin Mehl



Drums played by Leonard Epps



Pictured (L to R)  
Keiyana Hairston, Mayor Nuchette Black-Burke, Tara Hall, Samia Hussein



Pictured on the (R)  
Bill Pierce and Margaret O'Hagan-Lynch

# Diversity Equity and Inclusion Resource Corner

## Articles, Links and Videos

[The FrameWorks Institute](#)

[The Trevor Project](#)

[How Healthy is Your ZIP Code?](#)  
[\(youtube.com\)](#)

[Wealth Inequality in America](#)

## OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL HEALTH EQUITY (OMHE)

The Multicultural Advisory Council (MCAC) was established in 1996 to “be the multicultural change agent for DMHAS.” The Director of the DMHAS

OMHE chairs the MCAC, which is comprised of people passionate about the importance of multiculturalism in a recovery oriented system of services and supports, who volunteer their time to the council. The Council meets the 1st Friday of each month. Each of the five DMHAS regions have developed Regional MCAC’s, to further the work of the Council. They provide activities that improve multiculturalism within the DMHAS system, and educate and enhance awareness of the importance of multiculturalism at the local level. Through these efforts, DMHAS will reduce healthcare disparities within its system.



We value your feedback, Help us improve the MCAC newsletter by connecting and sharing your feedback by clicking the link below!

[\*\*OMHE Newsletter Feedback Survey.\*\*](#)  
[\*\*\(surveymonkey.com\)\*\*](#)

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