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options for independence

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# THE GOOD LIFE

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## We Can All Use A Little Help Sometimes

By Diane Robie, Director of Client Services

It is not easy to reach out for help when we are



Diane Robie

experiencing overwhelming feelings, intense reactions, or having difficulty engaging in daily activities. We often feel alone in our troubles. Nationally, one in four older adults experience mental health or substance use challenges. In Massachusetts, 31% of people 65 and older

have been diagnosed with depression, and in some communities that rate is as high as 49% (MA Healthy Aging Data Report, 2018).

“Andrew,” a man in his mid-60s, knows that he “can’t keep everything bottled up and function very well.” For the last four years, Andrew has been the primary caregiver for his wife of forty-four years. “The mental and emotional challenges of dealing with the unexpected change and loss in our lives has been overwhelming at times. And being a guy who’s supposed to be seen as strong and not supposed to show emotions adds to the pressure inside,” he said. “From the first time I met with Kate [LifePath Well-Being Coordinator], walking back and forth along our driveway, I felt I could open up to her about what was going on in my head. She listened to everything I had to say and understood where I was coming from, gave me good feedback, and was a very willing ear for me to let some stuff out too. I felt she genuinely cared for me as an individual and was not just someone doing a job,” said Andrew.

Some of us may find that we experience significant changes in our well-being due to changes in circumstances, lifestyle, and physical health. However, it is important to note that depression and anxiety are not a normal part of aging. Others may have a serious, chronic, mental health condition we have been living with for many years such as bipolar disorder or generalized anxiety disorder.

LifePath has been providing therapeutic services to help enhance well-being for the last six years through the Elder Mental Health Outreach Team (EMHOT), which has recently been rebranded as Behavioral Health Outreach for Aging Populations (BHOAP—pronounced “Be Hope”) by its funding source, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA). Through this program, LifePath’s behavioral health support counselors, known as Well-Being Coordinators, provide in-depth assessments and develop care plans that may include individualized counseling, referrals to community resources, and care coordination.

Kate Moriarty, Clinical Services Program Director, says, “One of the great things about the Behavioral Health Outreach program is that we truly meet people where they are at, both literally in a physical sense and emotionally. Being able to connect with people at their homes or in the community allows for those to receive services that may not have transportation, may not be able to do virtual meetings, or may struggle to leave their home. We work with individuals to identify what their goals are and then assess how to help them reach those goals.”

For “Liam,” the program was “a lifesaver.” He said that he was in a lonely, dark, and dangerous place before he accepted help from the program. “I was honest with Linda (retired LifePath Well-Being Coordinator) and she didn’t give up. Her sensitivity

and compassion helped me out of the darkness of drugs and despair for which I will be forever grateful,” he wrote in a recent letter reporting that he is now three years sober which he credits to the help, encouragement, and direction the program provided.

Sometimes, the signs and symptoms of emotions and behaviors that affect your overall well-being can be difficult to identify or explain. As we age, it is normal to slow down, feel sad at times, and even to think about dying. But when these thoughts and feelings start to interfere with our daily life or our overall mood, it may be a sign that we need help. Other behavioral health symptoms may include:

- Noticeable changes in mood, energy level, or appetite
- Losing interest in activities that used to bring joy
- Feeling flat or having trouble feeling positive emotions
- Having difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Having difficulty concentrating or increased confusion
- Increased feelings of worry, stress, or restlessness
- Feeling angry, irritable, or aggressive
- Substance use challenges (i.e., alcohol, recreational drugs, prescription drugs)
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Having repeated thoughts of death or suicide, or attempting suicide
- Engaging in high-risk activities (i.e., substance use, behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries, and violence)

- Obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior
- Ignoring personal care needs (i.e., not bathing, brushing teeth, washing hair, eating regularly)
- Seeing, hearing, or feeling things that other people do not seem to experience.

If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these symptoms, call us at 413-773-5555 to learn more about the free services we can provide.

If you are feeling suicidal, like you might harm yourself or someone else, or that you are completely overwhelmed and don’t know what else to do, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (just dial 988) offers 24/7 call, text, and chat access to trained crisis counselors. In addition, the Behavioral Health Help Line (BHHL) is available 24/7. Call or text 833-773-2445.

If you are someone who would rather talk with peers who are going through similar experiences, Moriarty encourages you to consider a support group. “Local behavioral health agencies and substance use programs often provide groups. We are looking to collaborate with Councils on Aging and housing sites to co-sponsor more groups in the coming year,” says Moriarty. Below are the current and upcoming groups through LifePath:

**Virtual Dementia Caregiver Support Group**  
The 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month from 5-6:30 p.m.

**Virtual Dementia Caregiver Support Group**  
Every Thursday, from 10-11:00 a.m.

**In-Person Caregiver Support Group (Starting in September)**  
The 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month from 10-11:30 a.m., at the Community Engagement Center, LifePath, Greenfield

**Holistic Well-Being Group (Starting in late September 2024)**  
At the Athol Senior Center-time to be determined

Reach out to learn more about Behavioral Health Outreach or for support in finding a group by calling the Information and Caregiver Resource Center at 413-773-5555. Email Kate Moriarty with ideas for future groups at [kmoriarty@lifepathma.org](mailto:kmoriarty@lifepathma.org).

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