

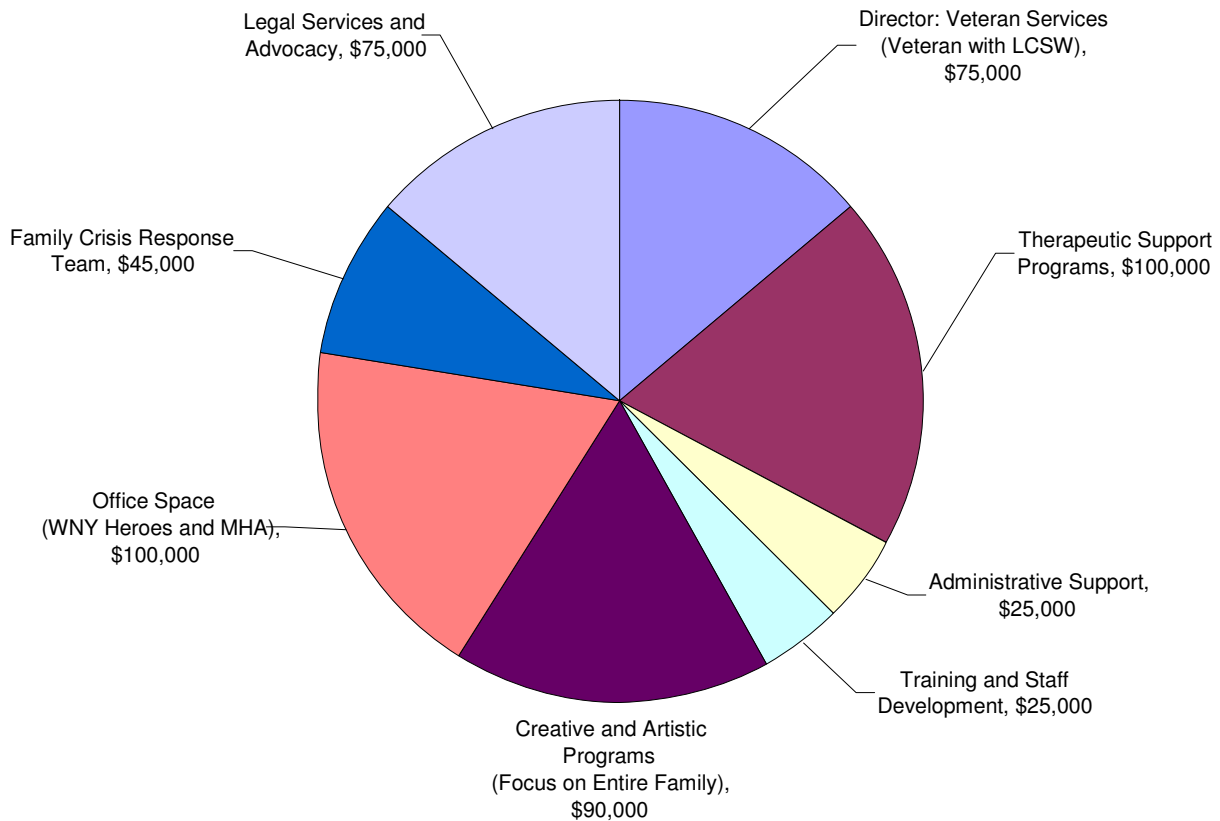
A Salute to Service

Our Community Cares

The Mental Health Association of Erie County (MHA) is hosting the largest fundraiser in western New York history to support the mental health needs of veterans and their families. A community-wide fundraising initiative, funds will be used to provide needed services for the more than 3,500 military service members from Western New York who have served or remain on active duty. **A Salute to Service: Our Community Cares** will conclude with a celebratory event on Saturday, May 22, 2010 at the Connecticut Street Armory where all branches of the military will be recognized by the community, event sponsors and dignitaries.

Goal of initiative: \$ 500,000 to support existing and create new programs that support the mental health needs of veterans and their families. How the funds will be applied:

Mental Health Association of Erie County Veteran Service Areas



Description of Programs and Initiatives to be Funded

Director: Veteran Services - \$75,000

The Director will be a qualified mental health professional (minimum LCSW) who is a recently returned veteran.

Therapeutic Support Programs - \$100,000

This initiative will develop three support group locations in the WNY region for ease of access. The support groups will run between 6-8 sessions and be conducted by qualified mental health personnel of MHA. The central focus of the support groups will be to provide a confidential outlet for children, adolescents, individual adults, parents, spouses and couples to have a safe place where they can openly share feelings and experiences in a therapeutic environment. Those requiring a higher level of care will be connected to outside sources by the MHA staff.

Legal Services and Advocacy - \$75,000

An attorney will be assigned exclusive responsibility to assist veterans experiencing a mental illness with legal intervention, advice and support. The attorney should be a veteran – part-time position.

Family Crisis Response Team - \$45,000

This service, coordinated under MHA's Child and Family Support Program, would be readily available to intervene on behalf of a veteran family in crisis. It is understood that what constitutes a "crisis" will be mental health related and vary from case to case. The rationale is based on the fact that early, therapeutic intervention leads to better outcome. One full-time staff position.

Creative and Artistic Programs - \$90,000

The primary focus on this initiative will be the therapeutic use of the creative arts as an avenue for healing and a way to keep families engaged with one another through healthy and creative programs. While all artistic options will be explored, the program leader will have both a mental health and arts background.

Office Space - \$100,000

Because of an established natural synergy, the MHA and WNY Heroes will create and share Veteran Services office space. The new space would be located off the grounds of MHA's current operation on Delaware Avenue. Visit www.wnyheroes.com

Training and Staff Development - \$25,000

Ongoing training of *Give an Hour* volunteers, *Take a Case* attorneys and MHA/WNY Heroes staff.

Administrative Support - \$25,000

These services include, accounting, audit, financial, secretarial, IT and marketing/public relations.

Our Current State

More than 3,500 military service members from Western New York have served or remain on active duty. It is widely accepted that more than 60% will have a need for emotional and mental health support upon return. You may know that the current suicide rate amongst military personnel is the highest in our nation's history. Additionally, devastated veterans often become addicted to alcohol and drugs to ease their physical and emotional pain. Others engage in crime, domestic violence and acts of rage associated with feelings of despair and hopelessness.

Their children are affected as well.

The MHA made an organizational commitment to respond to the needs of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in 2008. Despite having no funding to do so, the entire staff at MHA with full support of the Board of Directors, voted to do whatever it takes to respond to those who have done so much for us and our country. *It is the right thing to do.*

Because of our years of service in schools from pre-K through 12th grade, we began to see a need for support surface for the children of service men and women. The children exhibited separation anxiety, increased sadness, isolation, nightmares and a sense of impending danger. Adolescents were acting out anger, depression and we saw an increase in cutting behaviors among girls.

Our educational staff, in concert with our Child and Family Support Program, has been responding to the needs of these children. The MHA created *Operation C.O.M. (Children of Military)* to allow children to have a safe place to share their feelings and know they are not alone. For many, this support group is in addition to therapy MHA has facilitated for them.

In December 2008, MHA became the only New York State chapter of *Give an Hour* – a national effort to rally behavioral health providers to offer free, private, confidential therapy for at least one hour per week to a veteran or family member. To date, the MHA has registered more than 30 therapists for the program in the WNY area. Specialized training sessions are continually offered at MHA for therapists needing more information about the unique needs of service men and women.

In August 2009, MHA created and launched, *Take a Case*. This program recruits area attorneys to help an Iraq or Afghanistan veteran with a mental illness in need of legal intervention and support. The attorneys agree to take such cases free of charge. The program is in collaboration with the Erie County Bar Association and more than 20 attorneys have volunteered to date.

The money raised at MHA's *A Salute to Service: Our Community Cares* will support these programs and allow MHA to respond to the needs of our veterans and their children. We will have support groups for couples, services for adolescents, artistic and creative outlets to channel emotions and a designated staff member (a veteran) to coordinate our programs. Further, we are working toward formally creating a Veteran Service Department at MHA to expand our programs and creatively collaborate with organizations such as WNY Heroes.

Salute to Service

A Community Cares

Details of Initiative

- **Press Conference March 25, 2010. Launching 60-day fundraising effort**
 - 25,000 wrist bands will be sold by the Greater Niagara Council, Boys Scouts of America at sporting events and throughout the community
 - Posters will be distributed throughout the community encouraging donations and inviting the community to the May 22nd event at the Connecticut Street Armory
 - Radio and television interviews

- **May 22, 2010 event at the Connecticut Street Armory**
 - 5:00 pm: Dignitary Cocktail Reception for event sponsors
 - 6:00 – 11:00 pm: Food and beverage stations, entertainment, silent auction. Formal ceremony to recognize our servicemen and women by the community.

- **Sponsorships and Tickets**
 - \$ 5,000 Table Sponsor

Sponsors will host or sponsor a table at the event. Table can be used by the sponsor or given away to veterans and families currently being served by the MHA.

 - Company listing on MHA web site
 - One table of 10 at May 22, 2010 event
 - Table signage
 - Quarter-page ad in program
 - Banner displaying company name at event
 - 10 tickets to Dignitary Cocktail Reception prior to event

 - \$ 2,500 Co-Sponsor Table

Sponsors will co-host or co-sponsor a table with another sponsor. Table seats can be used by the sponsor or given away to veterans and families currently being served by the MHA.

 - Company listing on MHA web site
 - One-half table (5 seats) at May 22, 2010 event
 - Table signage
 - Banner displaying company name at event
 - 5 tickets to Dignitary Cocktail Reception prior to event

 - Tickets
 - \$65 includes open bar