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Contact:

Maggie Gainey

Interim Executive Director

Mental Health America - Spartanburg County

(864) 345-0014

info@mhaspartanburg.org

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MHA-Spartanburg Honors Outstanding Mental Health Advocates at 9th Annual Symposium

Spartanburg, S.C. – Mental Health America of Spartanburg County is proud to announce the recipients of this year’s prestigious awards, recognizing individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to the mental health field. The awards were presented at the Ninth Annual Mental Health Symposium held on October 11, 2024, celebrating the dedication and efforts of those who promote mental wellness in our community.

Award Winners:

• **Cathy Sparks:** *Lifetime Achievement Award*

Dr. Cathy Sparks has dedicated her life and career to advancing mental health services in Spartanburg. This award is given annually to an individual who serves as a role model and has been a pioneer in the mental health field, making many contributions to the mental health community during their years of practice.. Previous recipients include Dr. James “Jim” Rentz, who played a vital role in pioneering family and marriage therapy efforts in Spartanburg County. “Dr. Sparks has trained hundreds of students and clinicians during her teaching career and has helped many, many clients,” said Susan Lea, MHA Spartanburg’s Advisory Board Chair. “The impact of Dr. Sparks’ teaching and clinical practice are felt by many.”

Biography: Dr. Cathy Sparks is a native of Spartanburg, S.C. She graduated from Wofford College with a B.S. in Psychology and earned multiple degrees in counseling, including an M.Ed. in Elementary School Counseling and an Ed.S. in Counseling from the University of South Carolina, as well as an Ed.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Converse University. She also holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Liberty University. Dr. Sparks has taught at Converse University and the University of South Carolina Upstate. At Erskine College, she began as an adjunct professor in Christian Counseling and currently serves as the director of the Master of Arts in Christian Counseling program. Dr. Sparks maintains a clinical practice in Lyman, S.C., specializing in play therapy for young children. She has also contributed to the field through publications in *Play Therapy* magazine.

• **Terance Dawkins:** *Mental Health Clinical Advocate Award*

Terance Dawkins, LISW-CP, is recognized for his significant efforts to spread the message of intergenerational trauma across many audiences and in innovative methods. This award acknowledges a mental health professional who exemplifies leadership and innovative solutions to the challenges faced in mental health services. Patty Nodine, the first recipient of an MHA Spartanburg Advocacy Award, presented Dawkins the award this year. “Terance has shared the message of intergenerational trauma across many audiences and highlights that healing is possible. People need to know these two things.”

Biography: Terance Dawkins is a native of Spartanburg, S.C. He earned both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Social Work from Winthrop University and is a Licensed Independent Social Worker-Clinical Practice (LISW-CP) in South Carolina. Terance is dedicated to destigmatizing mental health, believing that therapy is beneficial for everyone. He employs an eclectic therapeutic approach and fosters a non-judgmental and relaxing environment to support his clients' healing journeys. Currently, Terance is expanding his knowledge of attachment and trauma, focusing on their implications for mental health, including the impact of transgenerational trauma. Additionally, Terance recently wrote a grant to provide no-cost services to clients.

- **The Charles Lea Center:** *Mental Health Community Advocate Award*

The Charles Lea Center has demonstrated outstanding leadership and service in improving access to mental health care services within our community. This award honors organizations that have established innovative programs promoting mental wellness. “The Charles Lea Center has three Mental Health First Aid instructors that have successfully trained over 250 employees to be mental health first aid responders, made available an EAP, created areas for rest and relaxation, as well as an environment for employees where their mental health needs are made a priority so that they can all support each other and the community they serve,” said Jennifer Sevick, who received the Mental Health Advocate award last year.

Biography: The Charles Lea Center has dedicated 45 years to helping individuals live independently by empowering them to make choices about their lives through person centered services. In the past seven years, the Center has enhanced the health and wellness of its 500 employees and the 1,500 individuals it serves. Over the last seven years, the WeCare Health and Wellness Clinic has implemented wellness initiatives focused on mental well-being, especially in response to the pandemic, thanks to grants from organizations like the Mary Black Foundation and Spartanburg Regional Foundation. Notable programs include Mental Health First Aid training for more than 220 employees, free medical services, biweekly stress management classes, and counseling for those served. By fostering a culture that prioritizes work-life balance and mental health, the Charles Lea Center remains committed to improving the quality of life for employees and individuals with disabilities.

- **Isreal Sevick:** *Mental Health Youth Advocate Award*

Isreal Sevick, 17, is recognized for his remarkable volunteer service that aligns with the mission of MHA-Spartanburg. The Youth Advocate Award celebrates young individuals who contribute their time and talents to raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce stigma. “Israel has remained an integral and innovative force for young voices throughout his many years at the Uplift Outreach Center, and his accomplishments there

are what have earned him the Youth Advocate of the Year award,” said MHA Spartanburg’s Youth Advisory Board Member, Isaac McLeod.

Biography: Isreal Sevick began his community mental health journey with the Uplift Outreach Center at 13 as a straight ally. He continues to support youth facing mental health challenges, including gender dysphoria and difficult family relationships. An accomplished artist, Isreal dedicates his work to his mental health journey as someone with pediatric bipolar disorder and recently showcased his art in a Spartanburg County Public Library exhibit in November 2023. He participates in podcasts and webinars with his mother, Jennifer, a mental health professional, bringing awareness of mental health issues to an international audience. Notably, he will be featured in an upcoming documentary about his mental health journey, expected to air on PBS or Netflix. Despite his own health challenges and his father's battle with cancer, Isreal remains a positive role model in the mental health community, demonstrating unwavering dedication to his own journey and support for others.

MHA-Spartanburg’s awards not only honor exceptional individuals and organizations but also highlight the importance of mental health advocacy within our community. By recognizing the hard work and dedication of these winners, we aim to inspire others to join the conversation about mental health and work toward improving services for all.

For more information about our award winners and MHA-Spartanburg’s initiatives, please visit www.mhaspartanburg.org or contact us at info@mhaspartanburg.org.

About Mental Health America of Spartanburg County

Mental Health America of Spartanburg County is dedicated to promoting positive mental health, raising awareness about mental illness, and reducing stigma through education, advocacy, and community engagement.