myStrength app offers free mental health tools

A Night to Shine
Spring Spectacular to feature contemporary artist Anna Ryan Drew
A word from the director

Dear friends,

There’s so much opportunity to make a difference in our world. Too often we underestimate our own power, believing our impact is too small or problems are too complex for us to make a lasting difference. If you’re working alone, that may be true. But we’re not alone.

As the Oaklawn Foundation steps into the future, I want to highlight three priorities where your giving is transformational.

1. Basic needs: Your donations provide emergency medications, ensure continuous health coverage through HIP premium payments, give access to safe and stable housing and help some of our most seriously mentally ill clients start a new life.
2. Access to treatment: There’s a nationwide shortage of mental health providers, and our community is no exception. But in the last five years, we’ve invested over $100,000 in helping local people obtain degrees in high-priority areas. And, with your help, we can do even more – not only by continuing this program but also by expanding it to help even more qualified candidates each year pursue their degrees.
3. Prevention and early intervention: This is perhaps our greatest opportunity to make a lasting difference. Programs that focus on prevention and early intervention help youth find a healthy path they can follow their whole life. These programs, which are not funded by traditional payors, help youth learn positive ways to manage their behaviors and emotions, keeping them in school, out of juvenile detention and out of the hospital. Every kid in our community deserves that kind of support. The Oaklawn Foundation helps to fund two amazing prevention and early intervention programs: Camp Mariposa and Partnership for Children. Read more about the life-changing difference these programs make at www.oaklawndonate.org/impact.

Together, we’re making positive, lasting change in our community. Together, we’re identifying practical solutions to our area’s unique challenges. Together, we’re changing the world. Thank you for being a part of it!

If you’d like to learn more about the work the Foundation is doing and how you can join us, call me at 574-533-1234, ext. 2066, or email kari.tarman@oaklawn.org.

Gratefully,

Kari Tarman
Executive Director
Oaklawn Foundation

Mission:
With uncommon expertise in mental health and addiction services, Oaklawn joins with individuals, families and our community on the journey toward health and wholeness.

Vision:
To help people live in harmony with self, others and God, through healing and growth of the whole person.

Values:
As a faith-based organization, the people of Oaklawn are committed to:
- Compassion
- Integrity
- Human dignity
- Professional expertise
- Community partnerships
Peer coach boosts engagement

“I truly believe that idle hands and idle time are the devil’s workshop,” says Sandy Hempel.

It’s a philosophy she lives by. She needs to stay busy and engaged to support her own recovery, and it’s the reason that one of the first things she did when she became recovery coach at Oliver Apartments was introduce a daily activity.

Some days it’s breakfast together at Broadway Church or lunch at Hope Ministries. Once a month the Humane Society of St. Joseph County brings an animal to visit residents. Other days it’s a group trip to the food pantry or Goodwill. Today it’s an art project.

“It’s important to stay busy and do healthy activities and try to remember the things you used to do when you were younger, the things you were passionate about,” Sandy said. Plus, “there’s a lot of residents here who really won’t open up to you until you build that rapport. So over time, with engagement and consistency, I’ve made my way in here. And I love it.”

Last year, the Oaklawn Foundation raised $75,000 to help fund positions like Sandy’s. Those positions are making a difference. For example, Oliver houses 32 residents, nearly all with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders, all who were formerly chronically homeless. It follows a housing first model, which means their tenancy isn’t conditional on participation in treatment. But the goal is still to engage residents in treatment.

“What we’ve seen at Oliver is that as engagement with a recovery coach increases, engagement in all other services also increases,” said John Horsley, Oaklawn’s Vice President of Adult and Addiction Services.

Sandy started at Oliver Apartments in September. Since then, as her service hours increased, so did the hours clients spent in all other types of treatment: skills training, case management, therapy and psychiatric services. The total number of service hours provided to clients more than doubled in just her first few months on the job, from 48 hours in August to over 110 in October. She attributes that increase to staff engagement, but also client initiative.

In addition to daily activities, Sandy also provides one-on-one coaching, where she helps clients establish and work toward specific recovery goals. Through all of her work, she’s able to share her own journey of recovery to encourage clients.

“Life is a beautiful thing clean,” Sandy said. “That’s why I love sharing this hope. It’s worth it.”

Free support through app myStrength

Oaklawn is excited to provide the community with a new app that offers free self-care tools to anyone and extends care to clients. myStrength is a digital platform offering proven ways to help people manage and track their behavioral and physical health.

“Mental health resources are increasingly being accessed online,” said Bonita Schrock, Oaklawn’s Chief Clinical Officer. “What’s unique about myStrength is that it delivers evidence-based mental health tools in an online format.”

It’s free to anyone in the community, thanks to a partnership between Oaklawn and Goshen Health, and it takes a whole-health approach. Topics addressed include depression, anxiety, stress, managing chronic pain, alcohol and drug recovery, nicotine recovery, pregnancy and early parenting, relationships, grief, suicide, caregiving, physical fitness, healthy eating and more. The units include educational content, guided meditations, journal exercises and other activities proven to improve mental and behavioral health. They are age-appropriate for mid-teens to adults.

Sign up today!

- Clients: Ask your clinician for your unique Access Code.
- Non-clients: Go to mystrength.com and click “Sign Up” then enter the Access Code: OaklawnCommunity.

>> Read about Sandy’s personal journey at oaklawndonate.org/impact
There's nothing wrong with you.

That's what Anna Ryan Drew would tell her 18-year-old self – the scared girl who had just experienced her first episode of bipolar disorder.

For many years, Anna believed there was something intrinsically wrong with who she was. This belief stemmed and grew from the cultural stigmas attached to mental illness. A diagnosis of mental illness is not spoken about. Like so many, Anna chose to keep her diagnosis secret and lived with fear, stigma and shame.

A few years ago, Anna shed the burdens of shame and disempowerment and owned her power.

If one has an illness affecting anything but the brain, people rally behind that person and help them fight. When that illness relates to the function of the brain, however, people tend to blame the person fighting the illness. It is time for people to treat an illness affecting the brain the same as they would any other vital organ. This May, Anna will share that journey to the other side of acceptance, love and self-empowerment at Oaklawn’s 21st Annual Spring Spectacular in a talk moderated by actor and producer Lisa Varga.

“All of these things have happened for me,” Anna said. “I don’t feel like they happened to me. I am the victor. I am not the victim. My suffering, my pain that I went through, is not for naught. It’s been this journey to show up as who I really am.”

And who she is, is a force.

Anna is a contemporary mixed media artist whose work has garnered international attention. She’s a wife, mother, daughter and friend. She lives in Granger, Indiana. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from The University of Michigan and a Master of Social Work from Andrews University. She fights for social justice. She is a source of creative energy. She is courage.

And, yes, she is living with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Her first bipolar episode (she hates the word manic; she says it’s outdated and disempowering) happened when she was 18. Her brain became chemically imbalanced and took away her ability to rationally function. There was a disconnect between her brain and her body. While her family seemed relieved...
to have an explanation for her behavior, the diagnosis was only the beginning of Anna’s journey to find herself.

She was determined to do everything within her power to keep “it” (bipolar) from happening again. She takes her medication religiously. She participates in bipolar research at The University of Michigan. She sought expert second opinions on her treatment options to ensure that she received the best possible care and had an emergency plan in place. She takes great care to maintain a proper sleep schedule and manage stressors. But, as with every illness, the function of her brain wasn’t always within her control.

Anna has experienced psychiatric hospitalization a total of five times during adulthood. Although extremely high functioning during the good times, Anna’s bipolar is extremely severe during the bad times. Hospitalization has lasted over a month, including an episode that kept her awake for over 20 days and required an induced coma to prevent cardiac arrest. That was also the first time her doctors attempted Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) when all conventional medications were unable to calm the bipolar storm.

Each time – with every hospitalization – she kept it secret. And, for months following each episode, she again questioned her self-worth and would ask “What is wrong with me?”

Approximately two years ago, Anna’s perspective began to shift. She started to work towards more awareness and the connectivity between her thoughts and feelings. She was determined to change her mind. She was committed to breaking the habit of shame. She left her past and created her future. She went from feeling trapped to feeling empowered. She realized that she had control over how she viewed her story. She chose to own it instead of run from it. She discovered a purpose larger than her own story. If someone has a heart attack or a cancer relapse, they don’t question their self-worth. Why should mental illness be any different?

“It’s almost like slaying a dragon, except you can’t slay the dragon and kill it, because it’s you,” Anna said. “So you have to tame the dragon with all of this love and acceptance.” Her hero’s journey toward self-awareness and love was a painful and arduous 20-plus year battle. The most important step towards winning that battle meant speaking her truth. Being open and honest with friends, family and, ultimately, strangers (through utilization of social media and her artwork) were all key to her inner healing and acceptance. For the first time, she didn’t care about the consequences and stigmas. In her words, “My word is the law of what I believe and what I choose to think.”

At the time Anna went public, she had not been hospitalized for about eight years. Even as she embraced herself, she admits she was fearful she might be hospitalized again. Then, she was.

A few months ago, an ambulance and firetruck arrived at her home, called by her husband, who felt she needed to be admitted. She didn’t want to go even though she was losing control. Nothing about a psychiatric hospital is empowering, she said. Ultimately, she chose to go and stayed only five days – her shortest stay yet. This progress was due in large part to Anna, her family and her doctors having a clear plan of action and years of trial and error to figure out what treatment worked for her.

She faced her fears. She went 10 years without an episode. Then she had one. Now she’s back – with a story to tell.

**About ECT**

ECT causes a controlled seizure that in effect “resets” the brain and causes the brain to employ its own defense mechanisms to prevent future seizures. Also of note is that medications developed for epilepsy, such as Depakote, are also utilized to treat bipolar disorder. ECT it stigmatized by the inhumane use and experimentation with the practice in early psychiatry and, most notably, as depicted in “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” starring Jack Nicholson. Modern medicine now permits utilization of small amounts of electrical current to pinpointed areas of the brain while the patient is under general anesthesia to induce a safely monitored and controlled seizure.

Anna had great results with ECT and would likely not be alive today without its utilization. Despite its safety and efficacy, ECT treatment can be difficult to obtain. In addition to its stigma, it is not available at all hospitals and carries a price tag given the requirement of a surgical setting and anesthesia.

“Ther’s nothing wrong,” she said. “My brain is beautiful. It’s brilliant. It possesses creative genius. But, there’s this other side to my brain that is prone to chemical imbalance. And that chemical imbalance brings us to the stigma that is perpetuated by not telling our stories and not being transparent. So, to anyone still holding on to that stigma: This is what the other side looks like. This is what completely accepting yourself and loving yourself looks like. Start talking. Break the stigmas and free yourself.”