

**WELLNESS IN ACTION:
THE COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS OF
WEST ORANGE SENIOR SERVICES &
THE MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION**

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THE TEAM

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117

WE SERVED 117 OLDER ADULTS FROM NOVEMBER 1, 2024 TO OCTOBER 31, 2025. ALTHOUGH THIS IS SLIGHTLY BELOW THE ANTICIPATED NUMBER OF 160 OLDER ADULTS AS OUTLINED IN OUR PROPOSAL, PARTICIPANTS REPORTED HIGH SATISFACTION RATES AND SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES WERE ACHIEVED.

GRANT ACTIVITIES

MENTAL HEALTH PLAYERS

- Educate through interactive role-plays to address important issues such as aging, drug/alcohol use, and mental illness.
- Two adult volunteers acted out skits pertaining to aging experiences such as loneliness and adjusting to change.
- The participants were invited to engage in dialogue with the two volunteers, used problem solving skills to come up with solutions, and shared helpful tips with one another.

SUPPORT GROUPS

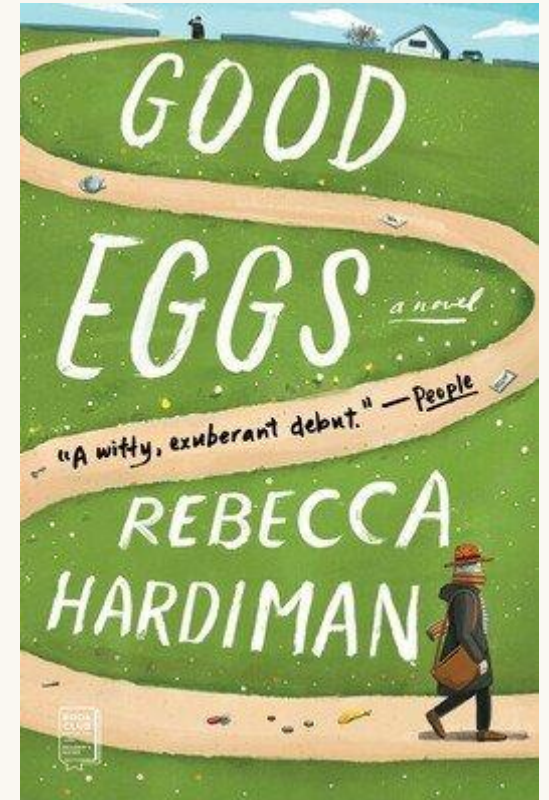
- The Meaningful Conversations with MHA support group series was held during the months of April and May 2025.
- It consisted of the following topics:
 - Spring Cleaning: Living Life with Less Physical and Emotional Clutter and More Clarity
 - Coping with Change: A Closer Look at the Emotional and Physical Aspects of Aging
 - Self-Discovery: Redefining Identity and Independence
 - Growing and Glowing: What Aging Well Means to You

SUPPORT GROUPS CONT'D

- The flow of each group consisted of doing welcome/introductions, informing participants about the purpose of the group, doing an ice breaker, taking 3-deep breaths together, sharing the benefits of deep breathing, and doing a mind dump activity specific to the topic.
- We also engaged in brief mindful writing, open discussion, anonymous post group survey, shared resources and educational articles relating to the day's topic, and participants enjoyed light refreshments.

READ AND REFLECT

- The Read and Reflect series was held during the months of May and June 2025.
- Each meeting began with an ice breaker based around identifying their support systems, in which each participant was able to name, and express the reasoning behind, who they would reach out to for support.
- Participants read the book “*Good Eggs*” by Rebecca Hardiman, which involved the following topics: intergenerational family conflict, communication, connection, self-esteem/self-worth, and the impact of aging on an individual and their family.



READ AND REFLECT CONT'D

- Key Discussion Topics:
 - Their relation to characters in the book
 - Concerns of aging and family conflict reflected their own personal challenges and life experiences
 - Awareness of the importance of maintaining one's mental health in every stage of life
 - Challenges with retirement, no longer being able to drive, and finding a caregiver to assist with symptoms of dementia; as well as issues of trusting caregivers coming into the home
- The third and final group ended with a short Mindfulness-Based Art Activity encouraging participants to consider the question **“What makes you a Good Egg?”**. Each participant was able to identify multiple personality traits and morals they value about themselves.





MINDFULNESS ART-BASED GROUPS

- The Mindfulness Art-Based Group series was held during the month of August 2025.
- Each group included brief psycho-education on mindfulness, a positive quote, a breathing exercise and an explanation on the benefits of breathwork, an art-based activity, open discussion and sharing, another positive quote, and resources provided at the end of the group.

SCRIBBLE ART

- This consisted of participants loosely drawing lines on a page, taking time to view the scribble to find an image in the lines, taking time to create what they see, and then sharing their process with the group.
- Participants then loosely drew another scribble on a separate page and engaged in a Round Robin activity, which included each person passing their scribble to the person to their right.
- Each drawing was added to and then passed on again around the circle, until each participant received their original paper again.
- The goals for the first group were letting go of perfection and expectations, relieving stress, promoting relaxation, and tapping into one's inner child.
- Participants engaged in discussions surrounding grounding themselves in the midst of chaos, love and support through family, allowing free expression without overthinking the process, adapting to changes, connection of the body, mind, and soul, and playfulness and connecting with one's inner child.



LET GO OF, HOLD ON TO ACTIVITY

- This consisted of participants completing three mindful writing prompts [(a) When I look at my hands, I see... (b) I'm still holding on to... (c) I would like to...] and then traced both of their hands on a piece of paper.
- Over the left hand they wrote “Let Go Of” and over the right hand they wrote “Hold On To.”
- Participants then used art supplies, including markers, colored pencils, oil pastels, watercolor, and tissue paper to fill out each hand with what they want to let go of and what they want to hold on to and created designs to represent these thoughts and feelings.
- Themes that came up during the group included recovery, positive signs of aging, growth, and goal setting.
- Participants discussed wanting to let go of anger, resentment, and pain; and wanting to hold on to love, family, memories, and healthy habits.

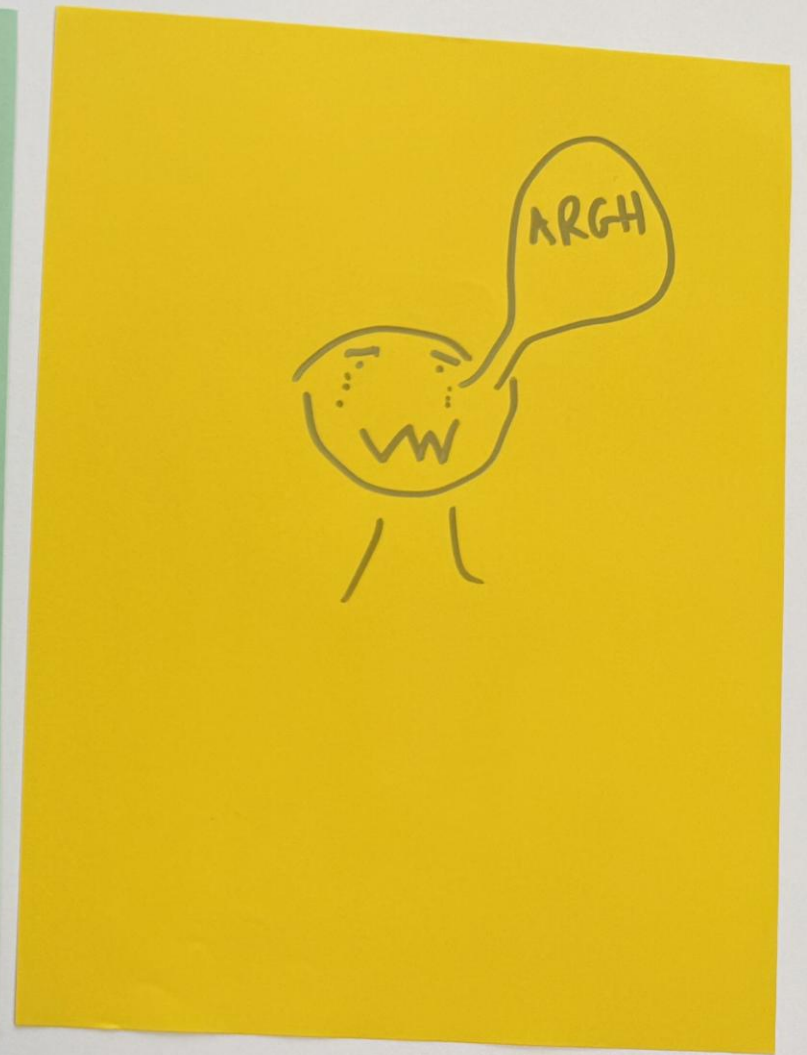
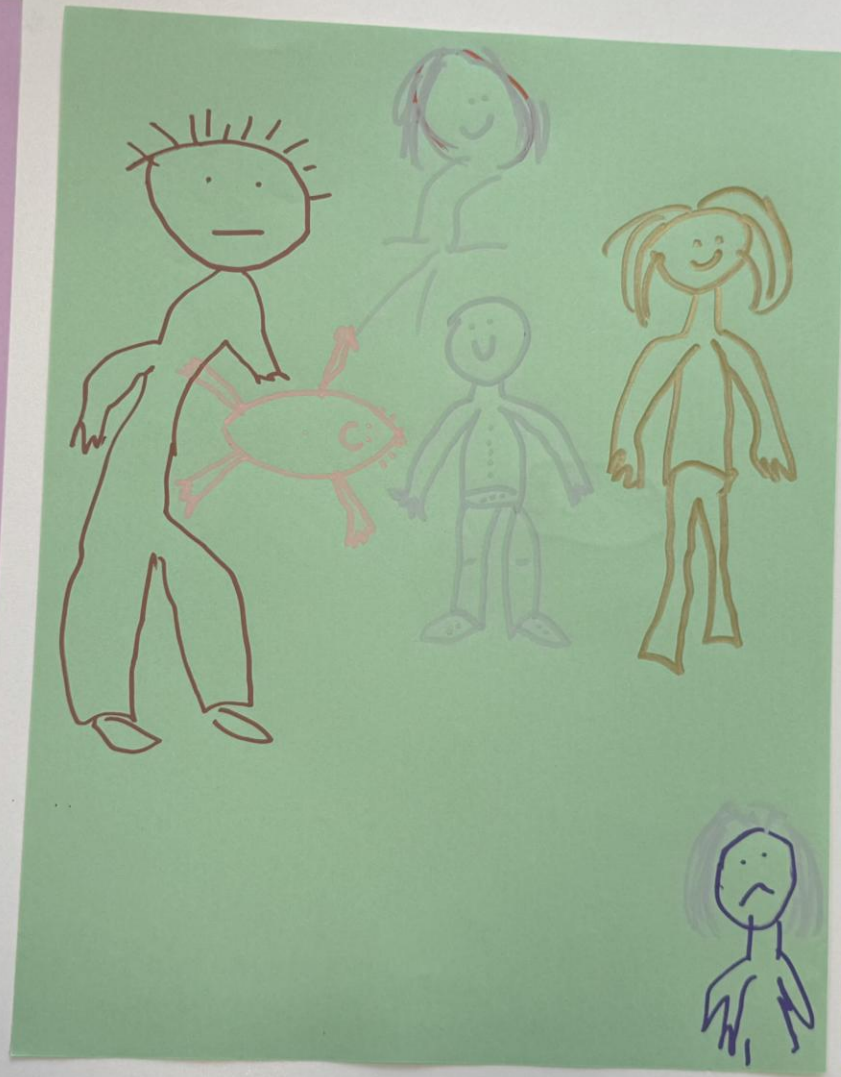


FEELINGS TRANSFORMATION COLLAGE

- This consisted of multiple steps:
 - (a) participants were given a list of emotion words and were encouraged to identify three uncomfortable emotions
 - (b) participants then chose one of the feelings they identified and a piece of blank paper, and used lines, shapes, marks, colors, and images to express and process that feeling
 - (c) participants repeated step b for the other two emotions they identified on two other sheets of paper
 - (d) participants then took a moment to silently view their drawings before tearing them up in any way they chose
 - (e) participants then used the torn up pieces of the three papers and on a new sheet of paper created a transformation collage, and used markers, colored pencil, oil pastels, magazines, and tissue paper to complete their transformation collage
 - (f) upon completing the collages, participants spent time sharing the three uncomfortable emotions they had processed and shared their completed collage

FEELINGS TRANSFORMATION COLLAGE CONT'D

- The goals for this group were to identify, express, process, and transform uncomfortable and difficult emotions.
- Participants engaged in discussions surrounding their uncomfortable emotions, which included grief of loss of a spouse, loneliness and isolation, disconnection from loved ones, feeling disgusted with self, overwhelmed, heartbroken, anguish, and terrified.
- Participants discussed some themes surrounding their transformations as connection, joy, self-love, recovery, pride, and love of family.





CREATURE, SYMBOL, ENVIRONMENT

- Creature, Symbol, Environment which consisted of multiple steps:
 - (a) a guided meditation encouraging participants to practice deep breathing and to connect with their inner selves and consider what they value and what they believe defines them
 - (b) using model magic to create a symbol or creature that they feel represents themselves
 - (c) create an environment on paper that the creature or symbol would be able to survive and thrive in.
- Participants utilized model magic, as well as acrylic paint pens and markers to embellish their creature/symbol.
- The goals for this group were to practice mindfulness, become aware of personal values and reconnect with sense of self, explore feelings and self-expression, relieve stress, and promote relaxation.

CREATURE, SYMBOL, ENVIRONMENT

- Participants created symbols including a peace sign, Hamsa Hand, a heart, a racket and ball, and braided pieces weaving together.
- Participants engaged in discussions surrounding free expression, healing, recovery, spirituality, endurance, and perseverance.
- Some participants utilized bright colors to symbolize releasing feelings of shame, while others reflected on what is important to them, expressed feeling whole and grounded, and enjoyed utilizing the art materials. Many participants noted making art made them feel like a kid again, as well as helped with reducing feelings of stress and anxiety.
- Participants were provided with resources, including resources for mental health services, medical services; as well as a link to a guided meditation centered on self-love.



COLORS OF CONNECTION

- The Intergenerational Art Gallery/Museum was renamed Colors of Connection and was held during the one-time intergenerational GenMix Festival, hosted by West Orange Senior Services, on September 7, 2025, at the West Orange High School.
- Colors of Connection was a 1-hour group, including 5 teens and 3 older adults.
- The group included a guided meditation, discussion of What Connects Us Across Generations, an art-based activity of painting a symbol of connection on a 4x4 canvas, and time to share what each participant created.
- Participants created symbols and images, including flowers, a heart, scenery, and abstract pieces with an emphasis on what the colors meant to them.



MATINEE WITH MHA

- Matinee with MHA was held on October 29, 2025 as a one-time event involving food, and a showing of the movie *The Intern* (2015) followed by a discussion on aging and intergenerational supports.
- Participants were able to identify their intergenerational connections and supports, discussed themes in the movie related to agism as well as positive aging experiences that were showcased and how that impacted their personal views on aging; and discussed ways to promote positive aging experiences for themselves and others, including getting involved in free social events within their neighborhoods.
- One participant noted the amount of services offered to older adults in Essex County and stated she has encouraged others to consider moving to Essex County due to available resources and activities; and also discussed the movie helped her **recognize that in later-life older adults are able to pursue romantic interests and love connections.**
- Another participant discussed **knowledge he has gained throughout his life and how, despite advancements in technology and changes in the world, he can still use his experiences to impart wisdom to younger generations and mold his skills to be used in different ways.**
- Participants also discussed the importance of authenticity and knowing that our differences can bring us together.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Our community partners have included:

- **Mental Health Players Volunteers** – two adults from the community volunteered to act out two skits
- **Toby Katz Community Center** – offered space for us to host the Mental Health Players program and support groups
- **West Orange Public Library** – assisted us with obtaining books for the Read and Reflect groups
- **Rock Springs Golf Club** – offered space for us to host the Read and Reflect groups
- **Zufall Health** – offered space for us to host the Mindfulness Art-Based Groups and Matinee with MHA, and offered information about their services and provided each participant with resources

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS AS INDICATED ON THEIR POST GROUP SURVEYS:

- "Very good program! Full of good ideas on how to approach decluttering clothes, etc."
- **"I'm happy to know my issues and concerns etc. are shared by all the other folks in the meeting."**
- "The dialogue was excellent and helpful and gave me great new ideas."
- **"Excellent information given to us. Realized a lot of people have my same problems."**
- "Having the opportunity to share what is happening to me and hearing everyone else is going through the same things gave me some reassurance - I'm not alone. Thank you for today."
- **"Good to talk to other seniors and see what they are up to."**
- "Glad to have a chance to meet with people around my age and learn new things."
- **"Awesome. Loved sharing my thoughts with others and not feeling alone."**
- "Having had a tough morning at home, this exercise helped me focus on my feelings and hopefully clarify them."
- **"I love it, thought it was very helpful."**

Many participants expressed enjoying and obtaining relevant coping strategies from the Mindfulness Art-Based Groups, with one participant stating in the post group survey, **“It made me think about, where do I spend my time and what’s important to me.”**

Another participant from the Mindfulness Art-Based Group e-mailed the Department of Senior Services Township of West Orange and stated: **“Wanted to let you know that the Mindful Art with MHA sessions were lovely. It was calming, creative and encouraged me to think about my emotions, feelings, etc.”**