

Community Support Journal

Montgomery County Community Support Program Committee *Newsletter*

May 2026

Volume 5



CSP Logo designed by Chris Ford

2026 CSP Art Contest Winners

By: Penny Johnson, CSP Technical Assistant

We are excited to announce the winners of the 2026 CSP Art Contest! This year's theme was **Community Together: Love, Hope, Support**. After all of the votes were counted, "Stop Hate" by artist Jasmine Baez received the most votes.

The first place winner receives \$100 and the art work is being made into a magnet and will be shared with the community.

The second place winner was "Sunflower" by Ashley Kolpak. The second place prize is \$50.

It was a tie for third place! "A Thing on a Washing Machine" by Kimberly McKeown and "Window View 22nd Floor" by John Weisburg came in third. Each will receive \$25.

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Stop Hate by Jasmine Baez

Thank you to all of the artists who submitted the beautiful pieces of art. And thank you to all of the voters in the contest. We appreciate you!

The winning art will be displayed at local libraries throughout Montgomery County.

To see all of the art work, please click [here](#).

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Celebrating 20 years of peer advocacy at HopeWorx



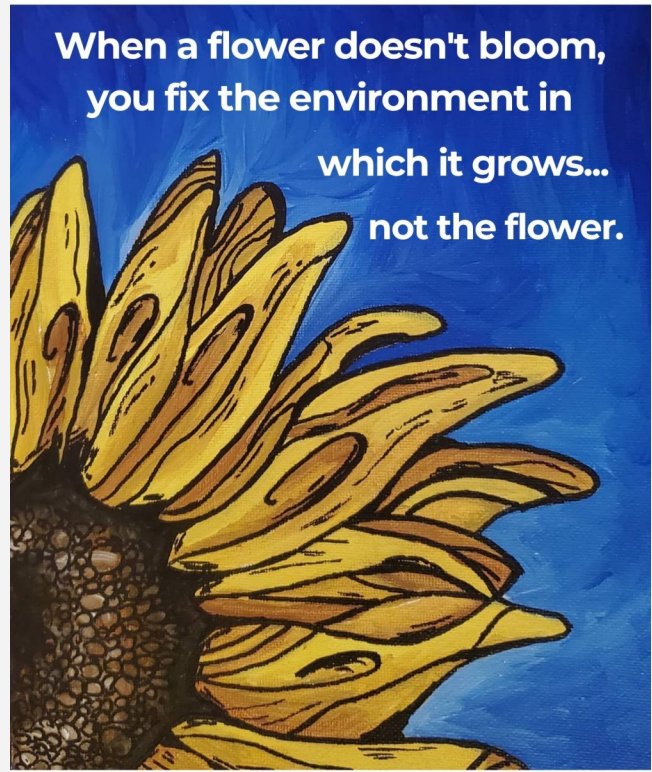
By:
Kathie Mitchell
CSJ Editor

It's the end of an era. On June 30, 2026, we say good-bye to AdvocacyWorx - a peer advocacy program at HopeWorx for the past 20 years. They were also known as

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CSP Art Contest Winners from page one

***2nd Place:
Sunflower
By Ashley Kolpak***



3rd Place Tie!



Above: A Thing on a Washing Machine by Kimberly McKeown

Below: Window View 22nd Floor by John Weisburg



Community Advocates of Montgomery County and they were a team of peers whose expertise came from their lived experience. They used that personal experience and knowledge to assist adults who were having difficulties navigating mental health services or gaining access to them.

The advocates would meet individuals wherever they were experiencing difficulties—at a group home, at a psychiatric hospital or even in jail. They were active listeners and focused on encouraging their customers to advocate for themselves. They did their jobs humbly and without hesitation. Problem-solving was often a team exercise at the weekly staff meetings. There was often more than one way to solve a problem—but the goal was to ensure the customer was satisfied with the outcome.

I think it's time to remember who those advocates were and where it all began.

The idea of an advocacy team started with the Montgomery County Consumer Satisfaction Team (CST) around 2005. Led by then Executive Director Sandra Watson, CST members gathered information by meeting individuals in person with surveys prepared by the team. The information gathered was reported to the county and the providers to address concerns and create pathways for change.

But many times during the surveys, people expressed concerns about problems they were having, and there was no one to help them. The staff would report these problems to Sandy who would personally handle many individuals advocacy issues over the years. Sandy stressed dignity and respect and encouraged staff to talk with then Mental Health Administrator (the late) Eric Goldstein. When they met with Eric, he agreed that an advocacy organization was needed and encouraged them to pursue it. A very small budget was approved to start Community Advocates of Montgomery County.

I was hired by Sandy Watson to lead the advocacy team and I was very excited to return to my advocacy roots. Five years earlier, I had worked as a Patient Advocate at Norristown State Hospital where I also served on the Human Rights Committee and later on the CST Board. Now, I was returning to work at Building 6 on the grounds of the state hospital where CST leased space from the state for \$1.

The advocacy idea was so new that I literally walked into an empty office. I had an office but no furniture and no staff. Sandy forgot to mention that little piece of information! But we quickly got to work from the ground up. There were consultants working a few doors down the hall who would later join our Advisory Board. Dr. Hatti, Andrea Galambos, Betsy Gorski, Mark Boorse, Valerie Melroy, Kim Keyes and others helped shape the idea of Community Advocates. Consultant Maureen Feeny-Byrnes, a core group of CST staff and I created the Community Advocates Self-Advocacy Curriculum using resources from the **Freedom Self-Advocacy Curriculum**, a train-the-trainer curriculum developed by:

- **the National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse,**
- **the National Mental Health Association (NMHA), and**
- **the National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems (NAPAS).**

Community Advocates worked with individuals, family members, professionals and advocates to modify and adapt existing curricula to meet the needs of Montgomery County residents. In addition, NAMI's Peer-to-Peer Training and provider training was used as a resource. Team members from the Consumer Satisfaction Team of Montgomery County assisted in developing a role-play which focuses on dignity and respect and demonstrates self-advocacy skills.

By learning effective advocacy skills, individuals take control of his or her personal recovery and are empowered to assert his or her rights.

Over 1,000 individuals, including family members and professional staff, have participated in the Community Advocates Self-Advocacy Trainings throughout Montgomery County.

We created a video of the role-play to share at trainings. This was no small feat but we had amongst us the expertise to create the video. HopeWorx Executive Director Sue Shannon (who was hired as office manager in 2005) had a former career in film and productions. Sue was the director and producer and it took hours of practicing lines and retakes to get it right!

It was a wonderfully creative time where hidden talents were revealed. Actors actually auditioned for the parts in the play that was written by CST staff. The video was named “A Call for Change.”

I remember Larry DePetripaolo shining as the first actor on screen, waking up in a group home to shouts by a group home staff person played by the late Pam Baptiste. Ellen Kozlowski, Anthony Garcia, Caroline Chen, Jack Klein, Mary Moore played great parts in depicting “a day in the life” where someone was having a bad day. As the day went on, they learned how to speak up and then realized they had succeeded in making changes for the better after a very important meeting with fictional administrator “Warren Peace.” The video was created by CST through memories of personal experience or actions witnessed during surveys. Despite the seriousness of the material, there was always an air of mischievous humor and puns thrown in for comic relief.

In 2006, we hired three advocates: Caroline Chen, Anthony Garcia and Ellen Kozlowski. We did trainings at mental health centers and residential group homes. Advocates also did outreaches several times a year where they spoke about the advocacy services we provided which included helping with any issues related to community living - problems with service providers, landlords, roommates, utility companies, benefits and more.

In 2011, Community Advocates developed an interactive educational course designed to provide peer advocacy, problem solving information and support for individuals who have behavioral health and justice related issues. In collaboration with Dr. Gail Van Zelfde, a forensic psychologist who worked at the Forensic Center of Norristown State Hospital, peer advocates with lived experience of criminal justice involvement developed a 14-week course which focused on helping people develop good decision making skills to foster successful living in the community and to avoid reoffending and reincarceration.



Jomel Silverio & the late John “J.B.” Brooks

The classes began at the Montgomery County Correctional Facility in Eagleville, PA, and Central Behavioral Health, a mental health agency in Norristown, PA.

During those years, Anthony Garcia, Jonathan Sigal, J.B. Brooks and Jomel Silverio led the forensic self-advocacy training called, “It’s T.I.M.E.”

“It’s T.I.M.E.” stood for: It’s time to Think, Identify, Make changes and Enter a new life.

The class participants responded positively to the instructors and the information. Some of the comments included:

- “We learned about mental illness, signs, symptoms and triggers.”
- “How to deal with society and life in general.”
- “I have learned that you have to think about the consequences behind everything that you do.”



Ellen Kozlowski and Anthony Garcia

In 2016, Community Advocates held a open house celebrating 10 years of their work and honoring all of many community partners who collaborated with them over the years. To bring it full circle, the late Eric Goldstein gave a speech on the importance of advocacy.

To have support from the administrator of mental health was very much needed as we advocates were consistently raising complaints to be addressed while silently praying “please don’t shoot the messenger!”

“Right here at HopeWorx we have several examples of modern day advocacy at work. I would like to highlight the Montgomery County Advocates who for almost a decade, sometimes without recognition, have been daily battling for the rights of the consumer. Using a powerful peer approach with some good old fashioned 1960’s organizing and a modern day use of data, the team works with the community. A few years ago, with people like Tory Bright and Nancy Wieman as encouraging members of the team, set their sights on the prisons. Peer advocacy in the county jails has been tried before but in my years few advocacy teams have really worked as well as wished. HopeWorx Community Advocates are successful because they know when to use the peer and when the advocacy. I tell you as a 40 year professional they are remarkable. One cannot ignore the leadership and the members of the team. So they have not shrunk. Instead, their work has grown.”

- Quote from the late Eric Goldstein’s speech at 10th Anniversary

Community Advocates could not have done the work without the support of the county mental health office, the county mental health centers, NAMI Montgomery County, the Montgomery County Public Defender’s Office, the Montgomery County Correctional Facility, former PA State Representative Thomas Murt, Pat Madigan from PMHCA, Sue Walther of PMHCA and Dr. Gail Vant Zelfde.

For me personally, Community Advocates was a rewarding job and a great place to work. I learned so much from listening—listening to the team, listening to the customers, listening to the families, to the providers, to the wardens, to the public defenders, to probation and parole.

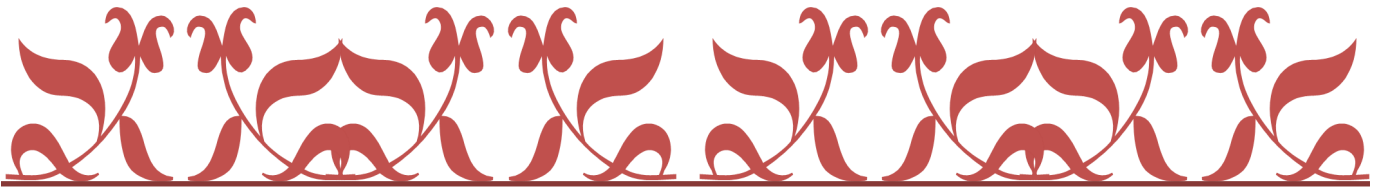


L to R - Kathie Mitchell, Ellen Kozlowski and Caroline Chen

And Community Advocates knew we were part of something bigger—that big flat democracy called HopeWorx.

Note: I’ve appreciated being connected to HopeWorx and CSP over the last 9 years as an advocacy consultant, CSP newsletter editor, website manager for HopeWorx and CSP, and social media content creator. My roots are still in Montgomery County!

- Warm regards, Kathie

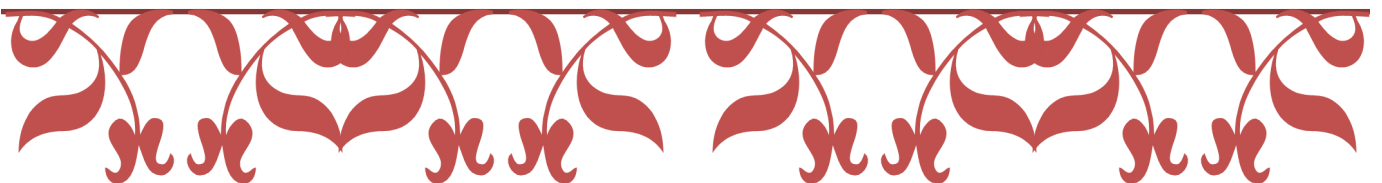


Current and Past Advocates at AdvocacyWorx:

**Erin Villarose
William Moody
Anise Milbourne
Akilah Williams
Kim Renninger
Julie Whitmore
Mary Fala
Anthony Garcia
J.B. Brooks
Jomel Silverio
Jonathan Sigal
Ellen Kozlowski
Caroline Chen
Kathie Mitchell**

“It’s your voice. Be heard!”

**Thank you to all of the advocates
For 20 years of being heard
In Montgomery County**



Update on the MCES 988 Program

By: Kayleigh Gilooly
988 Crisis Counselor Coordinator

MCES is one of fourteen 988 call centers in Pennsylvania. It became part of the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Network in 2013 and made the transition to 988 in July 2022. MCES has a dedicated 988 Call Center and a separate crisis team tasked with answering calls from those in crisis reaching out to 988.



MCES took on 988 coverage of Delaware County in September 2022 at the request of the PA DHS and serves as the backup center for Bucks and Northumberland counties. Most 988 calls are answered by staff in the MCES Call Center, however, all MCES crisis caseworkers are cross-trained to maintain 24/7 coverage of the line.

MCES became a part of the 988 network because it relates directly to its longstanding mission of aiding persons experiencing a mental health crisis and diverting them from contact with law enforcement whenever it is safe and appropriate to do so. 988 is a means of providing “upstream” intervention and prevention before a crisis becomes a potentially life-threatening emergency.

988 subscribes to a “no wrong door” philosophy and accepts calls across a wide spectrum of concerns. Callers are not required to provide their name or other identifying information unless it is necessary to arrange additional services. About 90% of all 988 calls are resolved on the phone. Calls from individuals needing immediate help or support because of anxiety, depression, or thoughts of self-harm or suicide are directly connected with the mobile crisis program in their community.

MCES 988 Crisis Counselors make every effort to collaborate with the caller to use the least invasive intervention. However, if a caller voices strong suicidal intent or is making a suicide attempt, an immediate 911 response is initiated with the caller’s permission when possible or without it if they are at imminent risk. MCES 988 Counselors work closely with 911 dispatchers and police officers. They make follow-up calls to determine the outcome of the emergency response and check-in later with the caller when possible. All calls involving a public safety response are reviewed to determine appropriateness.

In 2025, the MCES call center averaged about 1000 calls a month; it has seen a drastic increase in the number of help seekers and now receives over 1600 calls monthly.

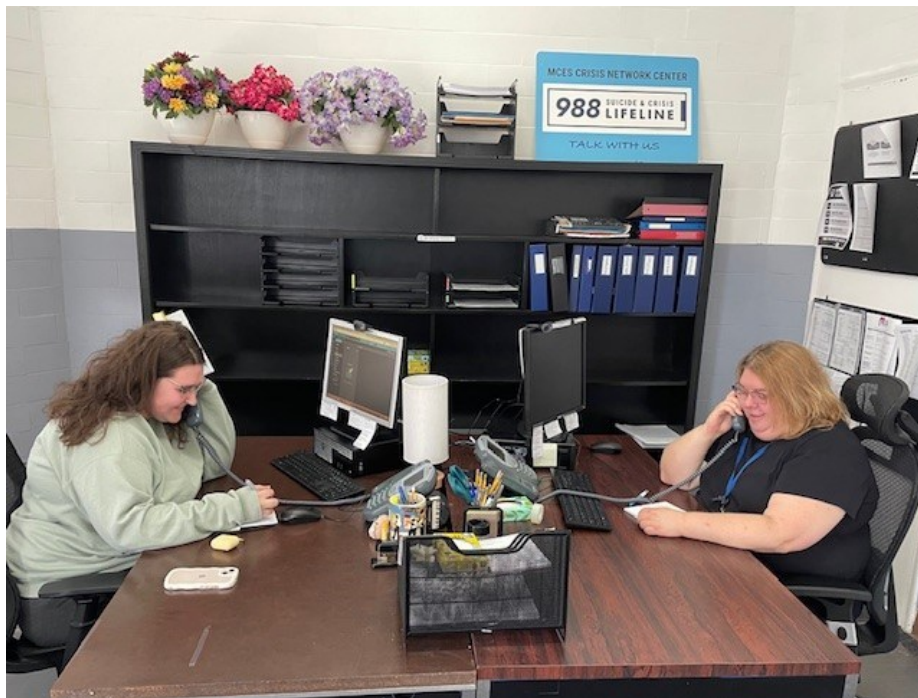
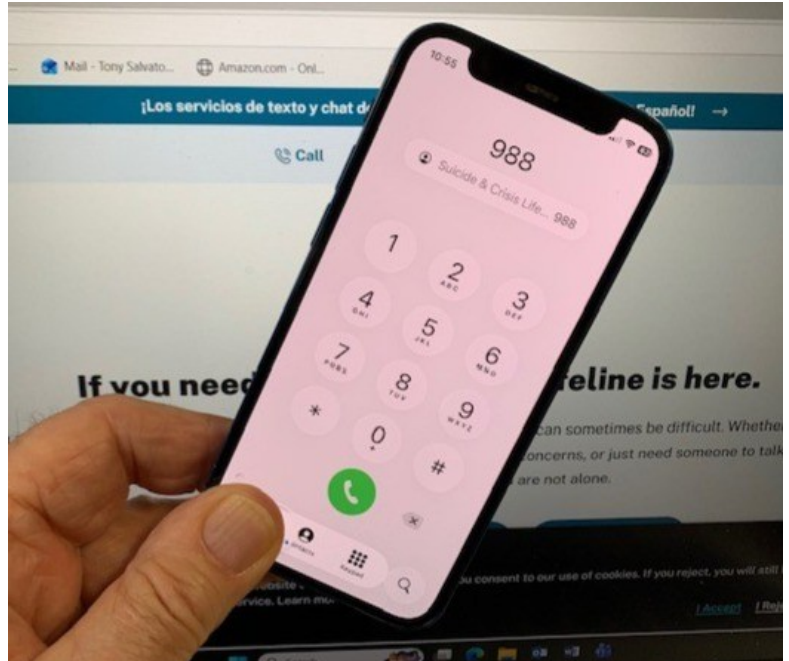
MCES continues to actively promote 988. The Lifeline number is listed on all of the psychiatric ambulances MCES operates. Early on, MCES collaborated with SEPTA to have signs listing the number placed at all commuter rail stations and facilities in the metropolitan area. MCES makes a special effort to reach out to vulnerable populations such as older adults and has seen calls from individuals in home care and long-term care settings increase.

988 Update

Lifeline interaction to ensure quality of services provided and to identify areas of improvement, as well as examining the impact of our program.

At present, MCES only responds to telephonic 988, but is exploring adding text and chat capabilities in the future. Those who currently prefer to contact 988 through text or chat can do so by texting HOME to 74174 or going to chat.988lifeline.org. Both are available 24/7.

988 is a key part of the new national crisis services model offering someone to call, someone to come, and some place to go, which also includes mobile crisis and crisis receiving and stabilization centers. The MCES Call Center has a strong referral relationship with mobile crisis teams in Montgomery and Delaware Counties, and remains ready to work with the new centers under development in those counties.



Results of Mental Health Needs Assessment

By: Lea Anne Gardner

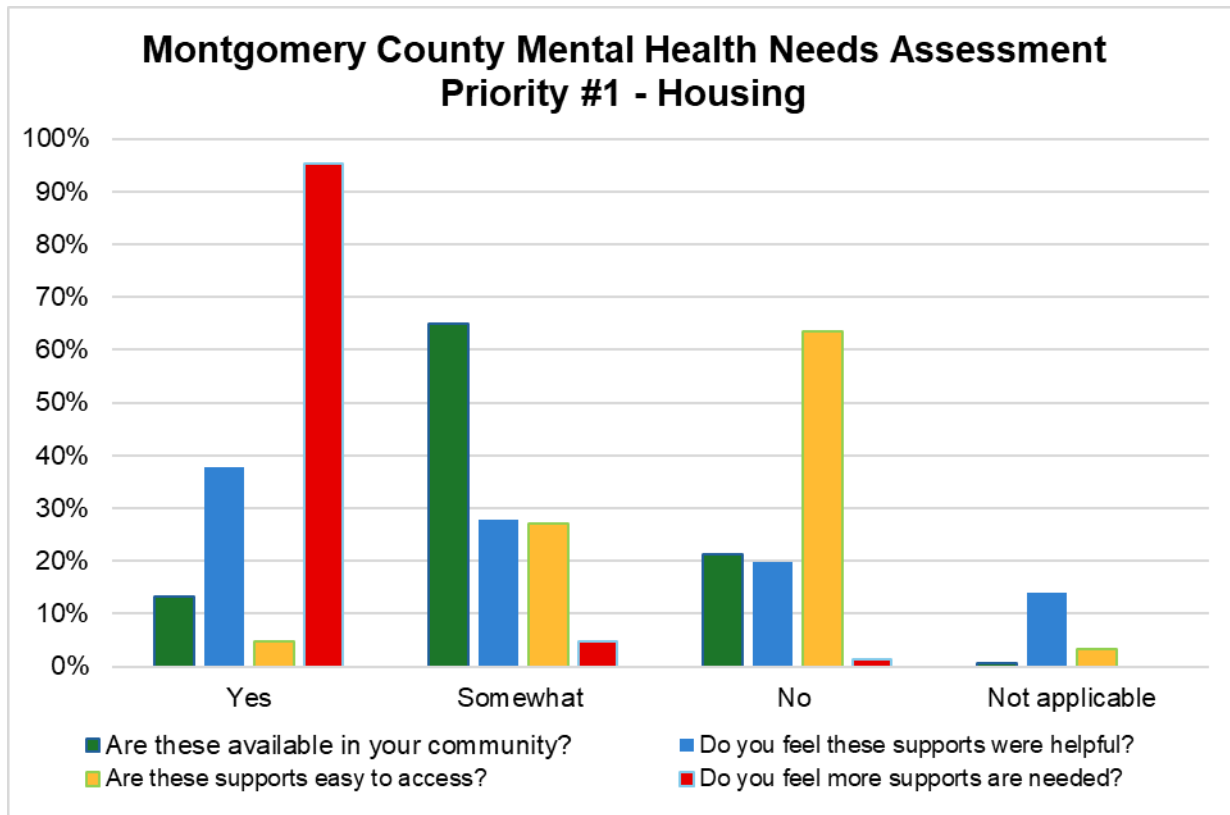
The Community Support Program of Montgomery County in partnership with the Office of Mental Health conducted a mental health needs assessment in December 2025-January 2026. The goal was to get input on the community’s thoughts and concerns for future mental health planning. The survey was composed of 6 questions. The goal was to find out what people felt were the top 5 mental or behavioral health priorities out of a total of 16 topics.

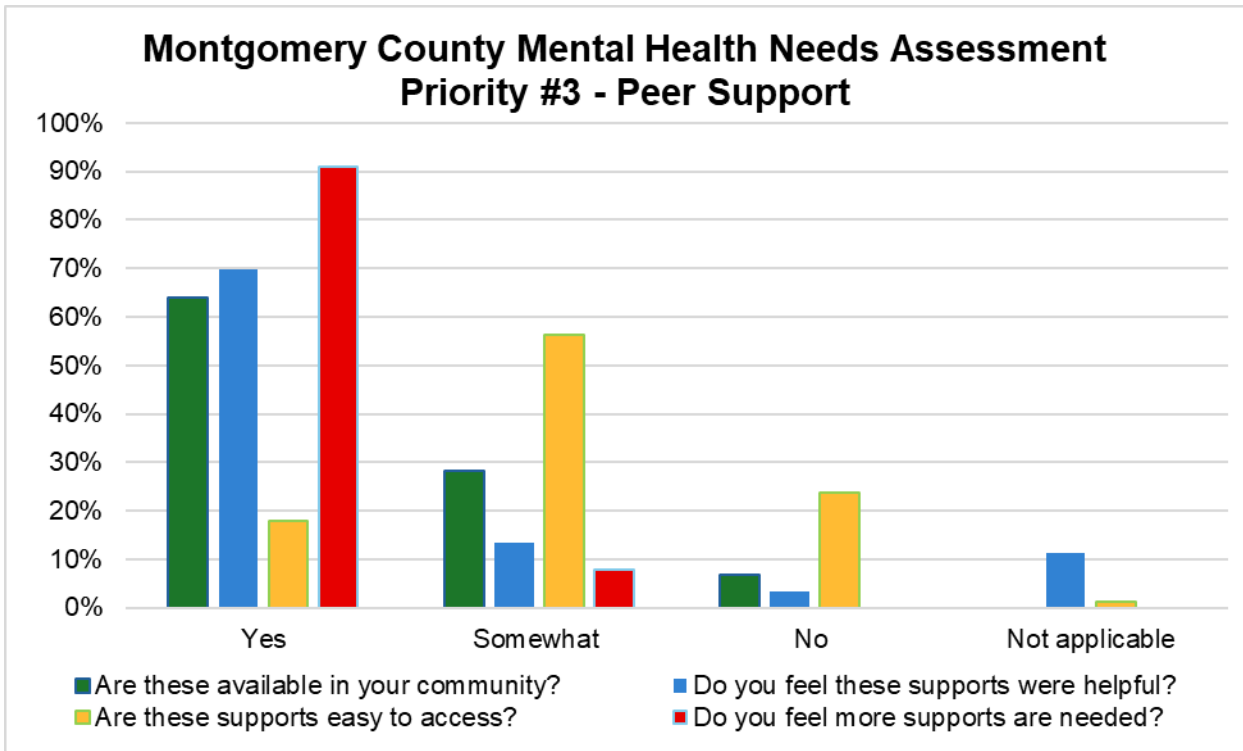
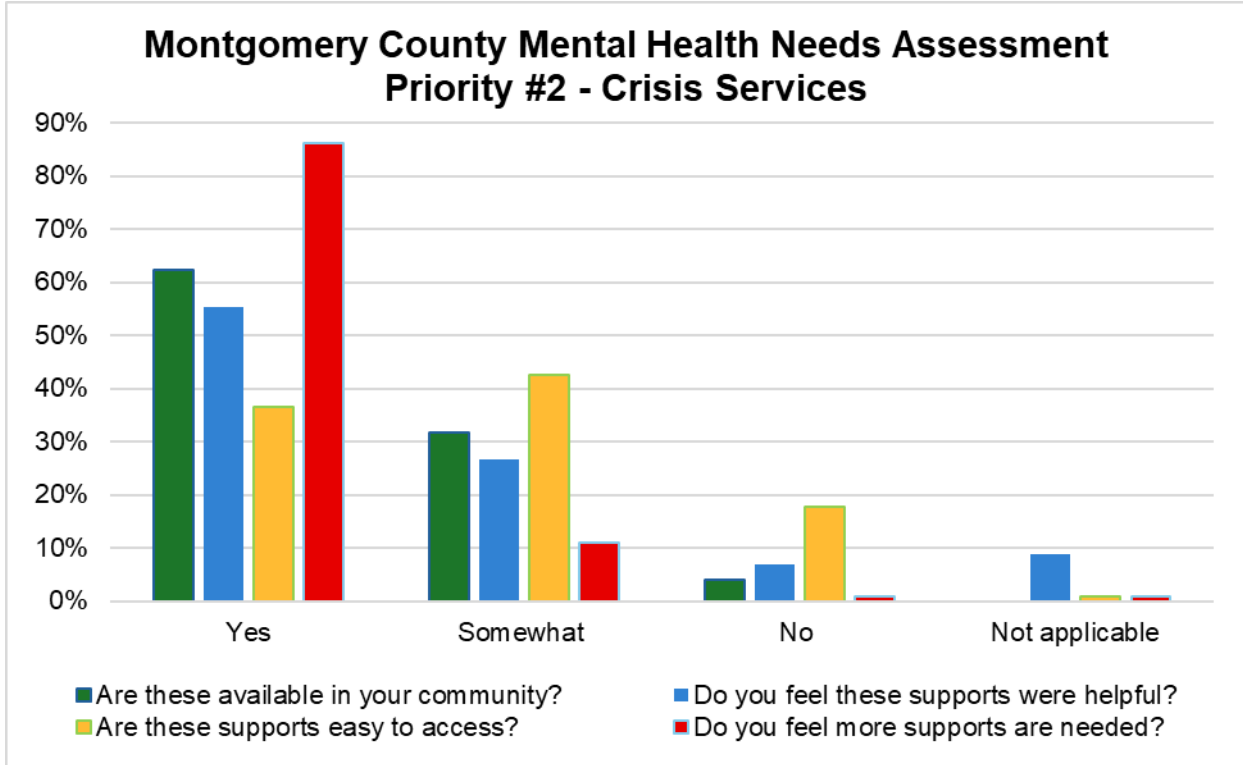
There were 279 people who responded to this survey, of which 64.75% had a lived in experience with mental and/or behavioral health concerns and 61.1% were female. Half of the people who responded were in the 35-54 age group.

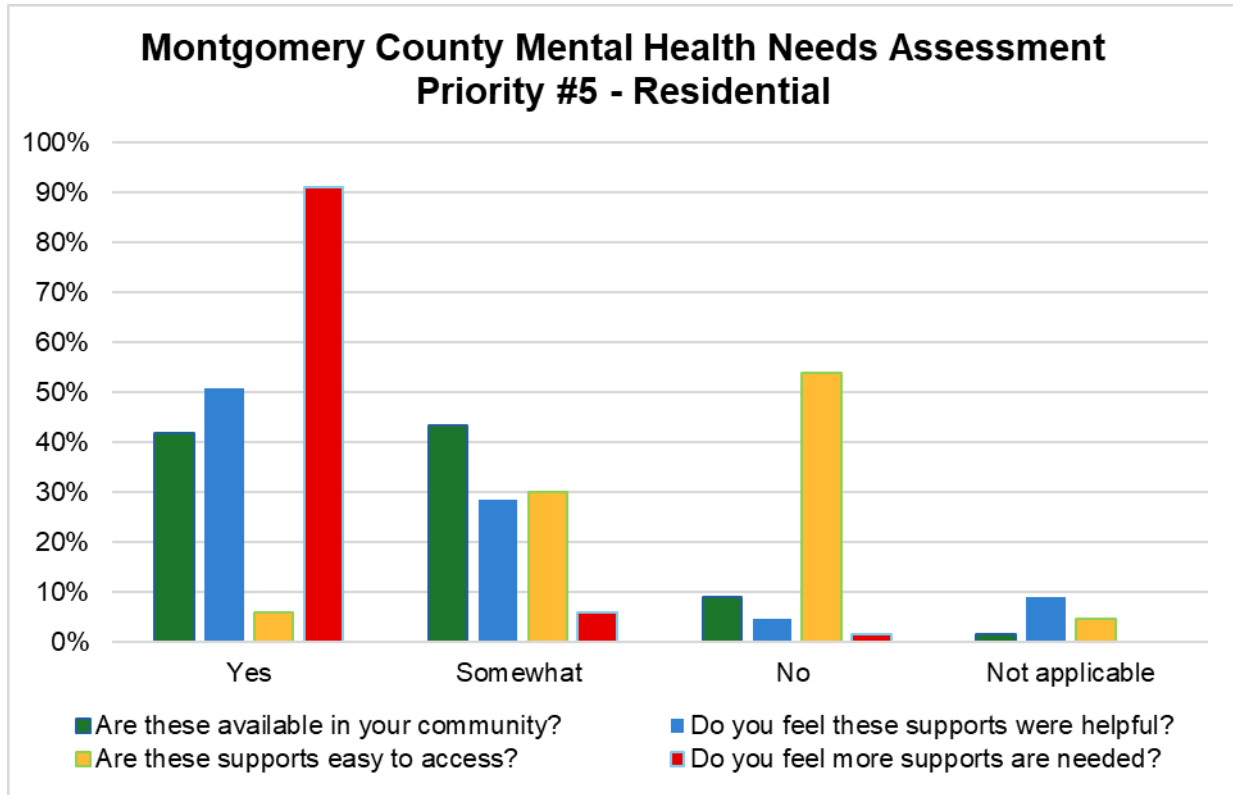
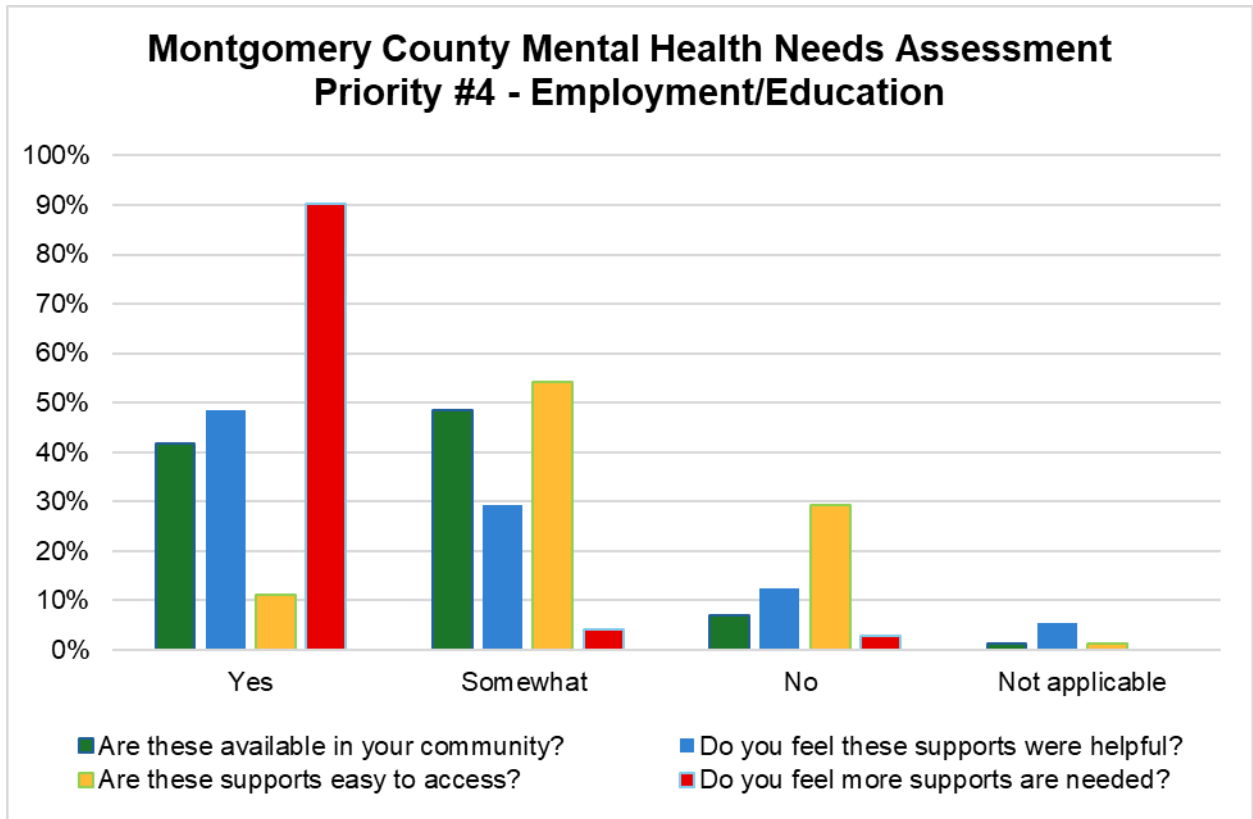
After identifying 5 topics, each participant was asked to identify the priority for each topic. The top five topics by priority are:

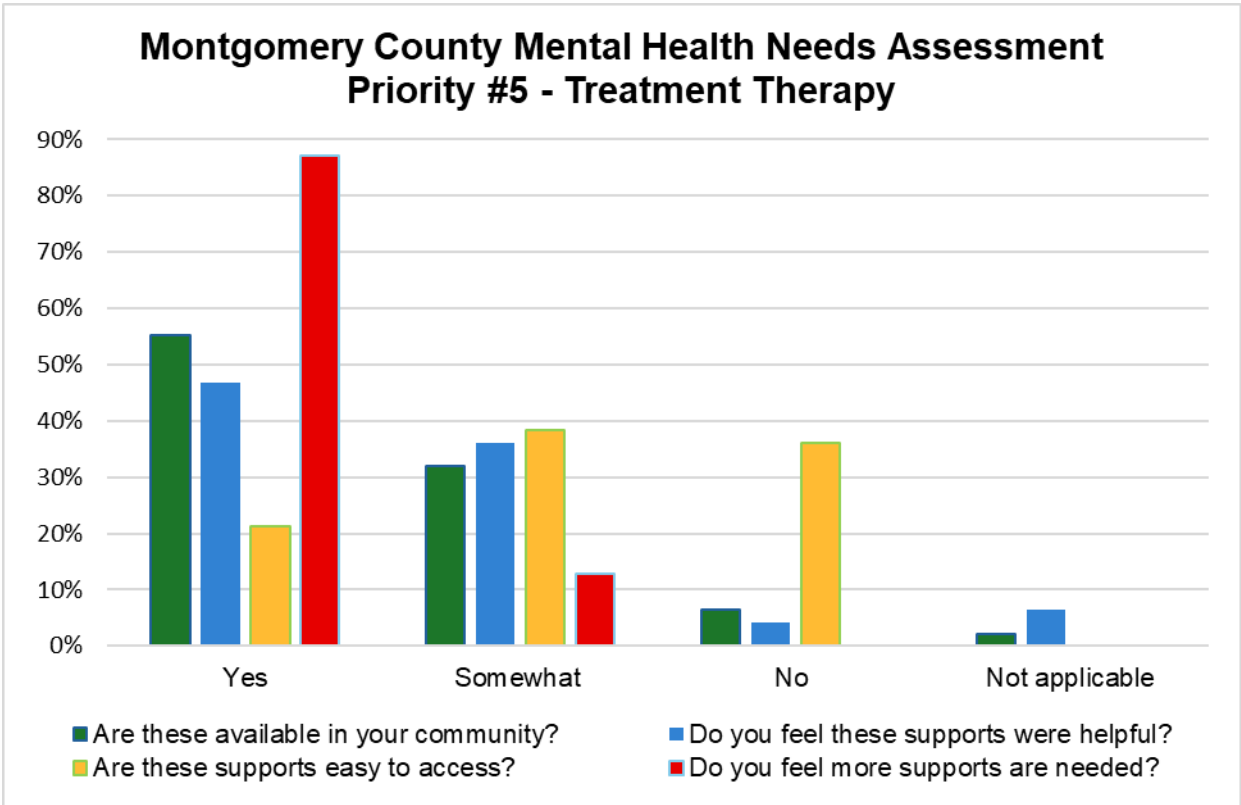
- #1 Housing - 69.06%
- #2 Crisis services - 47.84%
- #3 Peer Support - 39.57%
- #4 Employment/Education - 39.57%
- #5 Treatment therapy and Residential both - 36.33% (These two topics had the same number of votes, so they are both listed as the fifth priority.)

When prioritizing the topics, there were four questions asked about availability of these topics and supports. The following 5 charts show the responses.











A group for people who experience things that others may not experience, where you can share these experiences in a non-judgmental environment. This includes hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting, and any other unusual beliefs.



Taking Back Our Power Is Moving Beginning June 8th



MONDAYS

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

**Senior Adult Activities Center of
Montgomery County (SAAC)**

**536 George St,
Norristown, PA 19401**

**Last day of group at current location
May 18th, 2026**

All other Taking Back Our Power Groups
will remain at current locations

CICONNECTIONS.ORG

CONTACT:
SHEILA.HALL-PROILEIOU.ORG





Creating Increased Connections
A program of Resources for Human Development

CREATING INCREASED CONNECTIONS (CIC) GROUPS



TAKING BACK OUR POWER

Taking Back Our Power is a peer support group for individuals with lived experience of sensory phenomena (like hearing things others don't hear) and unusual beliefs

MONDAYS 2:00PM-3:00PM
Senior Adult Activities Center of Montgomery County (SAAC)
536 George St
Norristown, PA 19401

TUESDAYS 2:30PM-4:00PM
Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
625 Montgomery Ave
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

THURSDAYS 1:00PM-2:00PM
Trinity Reformed Church
60 N. Hanover St
Pottstown, PA 19464

CIRCLE OF HOPE

Circle of Hope is peer-to-peer led discussion group. Join us for lively conversation about how we are feeling, our successes and challenges, our recovery, and how we maintain our wellness. Everyone is welcome.

WEDNESDAYS 1:00PM-2:00PM
Hopeworx
1210 Stanbridge St #600,
Norristown, PA 19401

THURSDAYS 10:30AM-12:00PM
Hopeworx
1210 Stanbridge St #600,
Norristown, PA 19401

LIVE ANOTHER DAY

TUESDAYS 12:30PM-1:30PM
Lansdale Library
301 Vine St
Lansdale, PA 19446

Alternatives to Suicide groups are intended as non-judgmental spaces where people can share some of their darkest thoughts without being assumed to have an illness or being assessed for involuntary interventions. Openly exploring these thoughts - and the feelings and experiences underneath them - is often the key to moving toward something different.

WALK AND TALK

Every 1st and 3rd Friday 11:00AM-12:30PM
King of Prussia Mall
Meet at Food Court on 1st Floor
Join us for a time to work on our wellness, and enjoy each other's company as we exercise together.
Enter between KPOT and Bonefish Grill
160 N Gulph Rd
King of Prussia, PA 19406

WOMENS IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCES GROUP

This group was created for women as a safe environment to voice & openly share our life stories as women & to empower ourselves to find greater meaning & purpose in life.

WEDNESDAYS 3:00PM-4:00PM
Teams Link
<https://teams.microsoft.com/Womensgroup>

For More Information Contact Sheila.HallPrioleau@RHD.org 215-906-0453
www.ciconnections.org

Join the Celebration!

a HopeWorx Open House
Thursday, May 21st | 5-7p



Join us to celebrate the Hopeworx legacy, and take a little something to remember us by! We will be offering giveaways of pre-loved furniture as well as original artwork from CommunityWorx participants.

take a piece of HopeWorx home with you



light refreshments!

free stuff!

a group art project!



MENTAL HEALTH HAS NO AGE LIMITS.

There's always someone
ready to listen.

#MentalHealthMatters



**MONTGOMERY
COUNTY, PA**
DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES



Mental health doesn't have an age limit. Whether you're 13 or 93, your feelings are valid. If you're struggling, please reach out. There's always someone ready to listen.

Mobile Crisis Support (24/7): 1-855-634-4673

☎ Adult Peer Support Talk Line (1–9pm): 1-855-715-8255 | 📱 Text: 267-225-7785

☎ Teen Talk Line (1–9pm): 1-866-825-5856 | 📱 Text: 215-703-8411 | 🌐

Email: teentalkline@accessservices.org

☎ Or dial 9-8-8 from anywhere in the U.S.

Thank you to every walker, sponsor, volunteer, and supporter who showed up, shared hope, and helped remind our community that no one walks alone. Your energy, compassion, and commitment continue to move our mission





MORE GOOD DAYS *together*

Mental health is personal.

What works for one person may not work for another, and that's okay. Finding what works for your mental health can involve trial and error, pauses, and changes as life shifts.

The path may look different for everyone, but we all deserve more good days, together.

*Find free tools and ways to get involved during
Mental Health Month at mhanational.org/may*

Subcommittee Reports from April 2026

Advocacy Subcommittee – Working on Medicaid stories.

Community Outreach – No Meeting.

Conference Subcommittee - No conference this year.

General CSP Update : Tracey said things are in flux but the Montco CSP is going to be continuing. There is an RFP going on, so we just don't know. It will likely be the same but we don't know where it's going to be housed. More information should be available June or July. It will be ongoing. There will still be funding for it. There will still be meetings. Tracey will remain as liaison. She doesn't know who's going to be awarded the RFP.

CSP MEETING
CALENDER
2026

*Meetings are held every third
Thursday, monthly from
12: 00-2:30pm*

The next meetings will be:

June	17
July	16

*Meetings are held in person
and via Zoom.*

Montgomery County CSP Executive Committee

2024/2025 Tri-Chairs

Provider Member: Jim Markey
Person in Recovery: Morgan Killian-Moseley
Family Member: Vacant

County Liaison -
Tracey Riper-Thomas



2024/2025 Sub-Committee Chairs

Community Outreach: Erin Villarose
Advocacy: Cindy Todd & Christine Stutman
Conference: Harry Bowles & Justin Chamrin

Fiduciary - HopeWorx, Inc.

1210 Stanbridge Street,
Suite 600
Norristown, PA 19401
610-270-3685

2024/2025 Treasurer

Erin Anguish

CSP Principles

- * Person Centered/
Person Empowered
- * Culturally competent
- * Designed to Meet
Special Needs
- * Community Based
with Natural Supports
- * Flexible
- * Coordinated
- * Accountable
- * Strengths-Based

CSP Mission Statement:

Montgomery County's Community Support Program (CSP) brings together individuals that receive mental health services, their family members, providers and the Department of Behavioral Health in an equal partnership to promote recovery and excellence in the delivery of community-based mental health services.

The committee strives to include a balance of people who use services, people who provide services, family members, and interested members of the community at large. The CSP initiatives continue to grow state, regionally and county wide. As the involvement increases CSP has become a place that feedback can truly be given to the county from individuals that receive services and information can be given that suits the needs and requests of those that attend.

Organizations who regularly send representatives to CSP:

Central Behavioral Health, AdvocacyWorx, Community Satisfaction Team of Montgomery County, Magellan Health Services, Montgomery Co. Department of Behavioral Health, Montgomery County Emergency Services (MCES), NAMI Montgomery County, Norristown Vet Center, Resources for Human Development, Salisbury Behavioral Health

CSP Subcommittees:

- * **Advocacy Subcommittee**—Works on legislative, policy, communication, budget, voter education and other issues related to mental health services in the county, statewide and at the federal level when relevant. At the direction of the CSP Committee, the Advocacy Subcommittee gathers information on issues, plans advocacy events and creates a monthly newsletter to provide information to the stakeholder network as well as the community at large about the work of CSP. The newsletter also provides updates on new and changing mental health services provided in Montgomery County. The newsletter editor can be contacted at: kathiemitchell8221@gmail.com.
- * **Community Outreach Subcommittee**—Works on facilitating opportunities for people in the CSP community to be more involved in the Montgomery County community. This includes implementing the Community Connections grants, which provide funding for people to participate in a variety of activities. The committee also implements transportation grants that provide gas cards and SEPTA day passes to CSP community members. The annual CSP Poster Art contest is also organized by this committee.
- * **Conference Subcommittee** – The conference subcommittee will plan and fundraise for the annual Montgomery County CSP Conference.

Meetings:

12:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

3rd Thursday of each
month

Montgomery County
Community College
Blue Bell, PA

In person & Zoom

Kathie Mitchell, Newsletter Editor

Join our Mailing list!

We have an email list as well as a regular mailing, to join:

Send an e-mail to:

pjohnson@hopeworxinc.org

Or send your contact info to this mailing address:

We invite all peers, family members and providers/professionals to attend.

Website: www.montcopacsp.org

<https://www.facebook.com/montcopacsp/>