

# LAPEER COUNTY Community Mental Health

R E C O V E R Y



hope; choice; health; fulfilling dreams

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## LETTER FROM THE CEO

# Pandemic provided opportunity to find new ways to serve community

By Lauren Emmons, CEO

Hope; Choice; Health and Fulfilling Dreams. It was that mission that kept the team at Lapeer County Community Mental Health (CMH) going in 2020. I know I'm stating the obvious here, but 2020 was a year unlike any other. I'm proud to say our team met the challenge head on.

While the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health is yet to be fully realized, the team at CMH began to see the initial effects as soon as the pandemic arrived in our community in March 2020.

As the Governor declared a state of emergency and issued a stay at home order, effectively stopping normal life as we knew it, our team jumped into action changing the delivery of CMH services significantly. Knowing that our services were always important to the community, we realized that CMH was now vital. We did not shut down, instead the pandemic provided an opportunity to pivot to new ways of connecting with those in need.

The CMH building remained open, and the staff continued to provide walk-in crisis

intervention services and other essential face-to-face services.

The agency clinical services quickly shifted to telehealth strategies to meet the needs of those enrolled in services. Fortunately, CMH had previously developed a telepsychiatry platform and had been providing telehealth prior to the arrival of the pandemic, in turn, the infrastructure was in place to quickly expand. Case Managers and Therapists continued providing a combination of in person and telehealth services based on the needs and requests of the persons served.



Lauren Emmons, CEO

### Harmony Hall

The stay at home order temporarily halted the normal routines of Harmony Hall, a Psychosocial Rehabilitation Club House. As a recovery community, Harmony Hall staff and members work side-by-side on a daily basis so that members can effectively engage in recovery and community life. Unable to meet in

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Lapeer County  
Community Mental Health  
is located at  
1570 Suncrest Dr. in Lapeer.  
Contact them at  
810-667-0500.

National Suicide  
Prevention Lifeline  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)





# Declan: A Little Acorns success story

**D**eclan Hagemeister, 4, of North Branch has some very special “friends.” That is what he calls the team members at the Lapeer County Community Mental Health (CMH) Little Acorns Program.

“They light up when they see each other,” said Declan’s mom Sara. “They are amazing with him. I can’t believe how loving they are with him and how much he loves coming here. He calls this place his ‘friends.’”

Declan first met his “friends” about two years ago when he became a part of the CMH Little Acorns ABA Therapy Program, which serves children who have autism and have been approved for the Medicaid Autism Benefit. The program provides skill-based group opportunities for children in the community.

ABA stands for Applied Behavior Analysis, which is an evidenced based treatment that focuses on the behaviors that are socially significant to the person. This may pertain to behaviors that occur at home, school and/or within the community. Positive reinforcement is used to increase appropriate behaviors and social interactions, while replacing unwanted or unsafe behaviors that may hinder the person’s independence throughout various areas of their life.

Declan was nearing 2-years-old when his mom began to notice him display signs of autism like hand flapping and walking on his toes. She took him for testing where he was diagnosed with moderate to severe autism. She immediately started research on the best therapy for her son and discovered ABA. She began calling around and found the Little Acorns Program.



Declan’s Program Clinician Alyssa Pelkey works with Declan during a recent class. Declan, 4, has met many of his goals in the Little Acorns Program at CMH.

Little Acorns provides both in clinic and in home services, depending on what is appropriate for the child’s needs. Each child has therapy anywhere between 10-25 hours per week where the team focuses on increasing functional communication and positive peer interactions. A variety of activities are offered, including social group, motor skill activities and independent play. Daily living skill teachings, such as feeding and toilet training are also provided.

Declan attends the program at the Maple Grove Campus two days a week and receives in-home therapy three days a week.

“He’s done great,” said Sara. “His speech took right off and the way he handles situations is improved. His meltdowns have mellowed out.”

Declan’s Program Clinician, Alyssa Pelkey, MA, QBHP, has been super impressed with his progress.

“Over the last 10 months, Declan has made extraordinary progress within social skill, self-help skills, asking for wants and needs, while learning age appropriate academic skills,” said Pelkey. “Declan is a few weeks away from graduating out of our program due to meeting or exceeding skills that are at age appropriate levels or above. Declan enjoys playing with peers, arts and crafts, water play, imaginary play with animals, and loves to tell stories.”

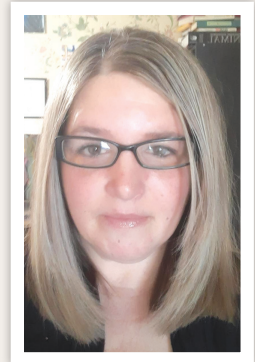
Sara said like any parent of a child with autism, her goal is have Declan lead as much as a normal life as possible. She truly believes the Little Acorns Program is helping achieve that goal. In addition to the care Declan receives, Sara said she and her family are also taken care of, adding that her case manager is always there to answer any questions.

While Sara has a great support system at home thanks to her husband Dan and 10-year-old son Coy, she said she is so thankful for the Little Acorns Program because she could not help Declan achieve all that he has without it.

“I don’t know if Declan would be where he is without this place,” said Sara. “I wouldn’t change a thing.”

## BOARD MEMBER PROFILE: JENNIFER NEMCHEK

**A**s a consumer of Lapeer County Community Mental Health (CMH) services, Jennifer Nemchek was happy to join the board when she was told about an opening. She applied for the position and has been a proud board member since April 2020.



“I believed that with my insights of CMH I would be a valuable member to the board in helping with decisions,” she said. “I have always been passionate about Community Mental Health. I believe that everybody needs a place to go when they are struggling with life issues and to have a mental health facility within the community that offers different programs for different needs is exceptional.”

Outside of her work with the CMH board, Nemchek is a full-time college student pursuing her social work degree. In the past she has also volunteered with the Family Literacy Center and area food banks. Always passionate about mental health care, Nemchek said she has also spent time keeping in contact with people who have needed and/or found mental health care to ensure they continue to be comfortable about their mental health.

Nemchek’s family is very important to her. “I have a small but wonderful family. I have my mother, who has always been here for me and who has supported me through everything. She is also a wonderful grandmother,” she said. “I have my two wonderful adult children who are in their late 20s and early 30s. My daughter is in the medical field and my son has an active role at Lapeer Team Work as a job coach. He was recently married and now I have a daughter-in-law. I have a wonderful 7-year-old grandson, who I love spending time with.”

While school takes up most of her time, Nemchek does enjoy painting in her free time. “I mainly spend most of my time with school. School is very important to me as education is very important to me. I believe that everybody should pursue an education and attempt to move forward in their lives.”



# Lisa Bennett: CMH Employee of the Year

hope to the community. It means a great deal to me to represent the Children’s Department, too, as the second employee in a row to have received Employee of the Year.”

As a Children’s Autism Case Manager Bennett provides support coordination to families. Her responsibilities are vast and vary from day to day but include meeting with families one-on-one, advocating for their needs and the needs of their children and reaching out to organizations in the community seeking support in a variety of ways that are individual to each family.

“I am at times just a phone call for a stressed-out parent, listening and guiding them as we work together until all of the pieces of the puzzle fit,” she said. “While I work directly with families, I also am present in the Autism Center with clinicians and clients where I take part in monitoring achievement of their individual and family goals.”

A graduate of Mott Community College and American Public University, Bennett was working with children and families in Flint before coming to CMH. When she was presented the opportunity to do similar work in the community where she lives, she jumped at the chance.

Bennett clearly has a passion for her work and for good reason.

“I have come to recognize that my passion is driven from the desire to be for others what I wish I had found in another myself, when I was younger,” she said. “There

were moments in my youth that I felt alone, a feeling that I never want the youth in our community to feel. I feel that my experience and empathy really drive my passion in my role at CMH.”

Even with a passion to do great work, every job presents challenges, but Bennett said never having to face those challenges alone, keeps her going.

“I rely on the support from both the Children’s and Autism departments when I am faced with a challenge,” she said. “The experience of others paired with my will to learn allows me to face the challenges head on, but always while feeling supported.”

When she is not at work Bennett, who lives in Lapeer, enjoys spending time with her family, her husband Pete and two children Courtney and Conner. Courtney is a Lapeer West High School graduate, living in Tennessee, who also finds passion in working with children. Connor attends

Chatfield School and is driven by his passion for aviation.

“Recently, my son and I began attending flight ground school at Lapeer Aviation and are working toward earning our private pilot’s license,” said Bennett. “My family is a great source of support and inspiration.”

**“Being recognized as Employee of the Year is such an incredible honor. I feel truly blessed to be part of a team that has monitored, guided and supported me.”**

In just a little of over two years at Lapeer County Community Mental Health (CMH), Lisa Bennett, a Children’s Autism Case Manager, has made such a big impression on her team that she was honored with Employee of the Year.

The recognition is given each year to one CMH employee and voted on by peers.

“I felt both honored and humbled in hearing that I was receiving CMH Employee of the Year. I was very excited,” said Bennett. “Being recognized as Employee of the Year is such an incredible honor. I feel truly blessed to be part of a team that has monitored, guided and supported me. We really strive to lift one another up and be beacons of

## LAPEER COUNTY COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH FY 2019/2020

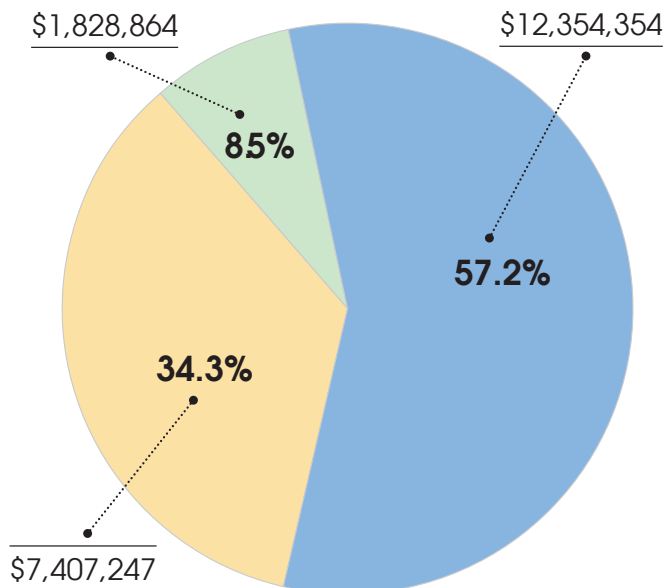
**TOTAL COST:  
\$21,590,465**

Persons with Developmental Disabilities  
**401**

Adults with Mental Illness  
**886**

Children with Serious Emotional Disturbances  
**339**

**TOTAL PERSONS SERVED  
1,626**



Full Time & Contractual Employees .....	<b>141</b>
Outpatient Therapy Visits .....	<b>6,940</b>
Family Therapy Visits .....	<b>721</b>
Group Therapy Visits .....	<b>63</b>
Paid Days in Local Hospitals .....	<b>2,215</b>
Units of Case Management.....	<b>21,750</b>
Persons Served in Skill Building Environments .....	<b>197</b>
Persons Served with Autism Spectrum Disorder .....	<b>39</b>



# Daily success stories are found at the Little Acorns ABA Therapy Program

**W**e have a success story every day! From a child saying their first verbal word to learning how to interact with their peers — we count all moments as victories,” said Rachel Currie, MA, BCBA, LBA and Autism Program Supervisor with Lapeer County Community Mental Health (CMH).

Those success stories are thanks to the Little Acorns ABA Therapy Program, which serves children who have autism and have been approved for the Medicaid Autism Benefit. The program provides skill-based group opportunities for children in the community.

ABA stands for Applied Behavior Analysis, which is an evidenced based treatment that focuses on the behaviors that are socially significant to the person. This may pertain to behaviors that occur at home, school and/ or within the community. Positive reinforcement is used to increase appropriate behaviors and social interactions, while replacing unwanted or unsafe behaviors that may hinder the person’s independence throughout various areas of their life.

“We provide both in clinic and in-home services, depending on what is appropriate for the child’s needs,” said Currie. “Each child has therapy anywhere between 10-25 hours per week where we

focus on increasing functional communication and positive peer interactions.”

Currie and her team, including three other clinicians — one BCBA, one QBHP and one BCaBA — and 17 ABA technicians, have a few main goals in mind when working with families.

“(We want) children to gain as much independence as possible and allow them to communicate with family, friends and others in their community,” said Currie. “We always make sure to choose areas to work on that will be significant to them

**“Over the past year one of the biggest success stories is having two of our kids no longer qualify for the service because they have made so much progress. While we will miss them, we are so happy that they get to enter the world with new skills and the ability to be independent.”**

outside of ABA therapy, so when presented in that environment, they will thrive. We also promote parent involvement, as this will also effect the progress of the child.”

The team achieves those goals in a number of ways. A variety of activities are available, including social group, motor skill activities and independent play. Daily living skill teachings, such as feeding and toilet training are also provided.

All team members participate in monthly trainings to assure they are giving the most up-to-date and accurate treatment to the children and families. Parents participate in monthly meetings with their clinician to learn methods used in their child’s ABA therapy, as well as discuss their child’s progress in and outside of services.

There is no cap on the number of families that can be served by the Little Acorns program as it is open to all who qualify. Currently there are 24 families enrolled.

Currie has worked in the ABA field for six years and just celebrated her one-year anniversary with CMH. She said it’s easy to stay passionate about her work.

“Seeing the progress and the end results in our children and families (keeps me going),” said Currie. “Everything we do is for them and we want to make sure we are giving the best possible service so they can reach their full potential. Over the past year one of the biggest success stories is having two of our kids no longer qualify for the service because they have made so much progress. While we will miss them, we are so happy that they get to enter the world with new skills and the ability to be independent.”

While the COVID-19 pandemic presented some challenges, Currie and her team were able to continue to serve families.

“We were fortunate enough to remain open throughout the pandemic and took specific measures to keep both the kids and the staff members safe,” she said. “Scheduling was tricky from time to time and adjustments had to be made; we are all excited to see the light at the end of this tunnel.”

The Little Acorns program takes place at the Maple Grove Campus. Currie said any family who believes their child may benefit from the program is welcome to call.

“If you feel as though your child is showing signs of ASD, please call the Access number at 888-225-4447,” said Currie. “They will conduct a screening, and if eligible, they will refer the family to Lapeer CMH Children’s department for an initial intake.”



The team with the Little Acorns ABA Therapy Program at CMH works hard with each family to develop and achieve individual goals for children with autism.



hope; choice; health; fulfilling dreams

## CEO FROM PAGE 1

person during the stay at home order, the Harmony Hall staff stepped up and continued to support their membership by converting the normal lunch program to a meal delivery program thanks to a partnership with the Stone Soup Food Bank. Harmony Hall members received a nutritious meal and a brief visit with a staff member. This program was so successful that within a few weeks it was expanded to provide a home delivered meal upon request to anyone enrolled in CMH services. When the lunch program ended, Harmony Hall with the assistance of other CMH staff, had delivered over 10,000 meals. In addition to the meal program, in June, Harmony Hall began offering site-based services based on the various restrictions in the state emergency orders.

## Stepping Stone Program

The Stepping Stone Program, a skill building program for people with developmental disabilities, pivoted from providing site-based services to a combination of phone outreach and visiting persons assigned to the program at their home. Staff provided additional support and an opportunity for those served to take walks and get out of the house during the summer months. In June, the outreach program began offering site-based services based on the various restrictions in the state emergency orders.

In spite of the challenges of the pandemic and the changes in service delivery, overall satisfaction with CMH services was high in 2020. The entire team at CMH stepped up to meet the challenges and continued to provide services. As an agency, we have seen an increase in the demand for mental health services during later phases of the pandemic and foresee that need continuing in the year ahead. As always, we are ready to serve offering crisis intervention and referrals for treatment to anyone who lives in Lapeer County. If you, a loved one, or a friend need help, we are just a phone call away.