



JUNE 2023

# MESSAGES

A PUBLICATION OF MEG'S GIFT INC

## VILLA OF HOPE AWARDED \$40,000

The Villa of Hope, primary beneficiary of funds raised by MEG's Gift in 2022, will use the money donated to expand its behavioral health services. In her comments expressing appreciation for this donation, Christina Gullo, President & CEO of the Villa, stated: "The mission of MEG's Gift is just that, a gift to the Rochester community in order to promote mental health awareness, prevention and treatment. Working together over this past year has been an honor, and Villa of Hope will be forever grateful for our newfound partnership and friendship."

Over the last twelve years, the Villa has transformed from a youth-only residential services provider to a behavioral health organization, serving youth, families and individuals impacted by mental health challenges. It opened its first outpatient mental health clinic in 2013 and since has expanded four times to meet the changing needs of the community.

In 2022, Living Hope Treatment Center, an 18-bed medically supervised drug detoxification facility for adolescents and adults, opened on the main campus in Greece, NY. The most recent addition is the Steven Center which is slated to open this year. The \$40,000 donation from MEG's Gift is earmarked for this facility. It is an integrated outpatient clinic licensed to provide individual, group, and family counseling to individuals with mental health problems and/or substance use disorders. Also located on the main campus, Steven Center is a convenient referral option for individuals being discharged from Living Hope and an additional resource in the Rochester community for needed mental health services.



*Christina Gullo accepts donation from Kathy Garbach.*



### KRINGLE KRAWL BENEFITS MEG'S GIFT

Fundraising to support community service organizations has been a long tradition for Debbie and Brent Pavicic (pictured in middle of photo at left with Ray and Kathy Garbach). Over the years, the charitable events they have organized have raised over \$42,000. In December 2022 they held their 7th annual Kringle Krawl for a Cause to benefit MEG's Gift with a generous donation of \$11,200. Approximately 150 Krawlers gathered in Rochester's East End for a holiday-themed event that featured a unique blend of safe and responsible holiday partying, ugly sweaters, and charitable giving. Preparation for the event began in August with the solicitation of sponsors. Participants purchased entrance tickets and donated additional money through raffles on the day of the event.



## ***Named 2023 Primary Beneficiary***

The National Association of Mental Illness (NAMI Rochester) will be the primary beneficiary of 2023 fundraising by MEG's Gift. This grass roots organization has traditionally provided support, education, and advocacy to individuals and families of all cultural backgrounds who are living with mental illness. In recent years, NAMI Rochester has pursued a self-styled "mental health revolution" that remains true to its mission while making changes in its programs based on evolving beliefs, values, and experiences. "We believe that mental illness, substance use disorders, and suicidal thoughts and actions are inextricably linked," Kristina Mossgraber, Interim CEO, shared during a recent interview, "so all of these issues are now addressed in NAMI groups and classes because many people live with a combination of them, and oftentimes all three can be present." In addition, she explained that "services need to reach people where they are" and that means offering virtual and in-person options and conducting workshops in schools, employment settings, places of worship and other community venues. It also means offering groups for special populations facilitated by persons familiar with their struggles in order to increase their feeling of safety and enhance their willingness to share.

The NAMI Rochester website (<https://www.namiroc.org>) lists approximately 20 groups for different populations, each with a specific focus, structure, and meeting schedule. These include support groups held 2 to 4 times per month for 1 ½ hours for individuals with mental illness, family members of mentally ill persons, and adults who have experienced a suicide loss or lost a loved one due to addiction or drug overdose and are looking for a safe place to process their feelings. A support group is offered, in conjunction with ROCovery Fitness, for persons who identify as LGBTQ+ and are seeking connections and a healthier life.

Another is for parents and caregivers of school age children from 4 to 10 year olds who desire social connections with other parents to share the joys and challenges of parenting.

NAMI's educational offerings get into more depth in their focus on information about mental health problems, resources, problem-solving, crisis management and self-care. They include separate 8 session in-person programs for adult family members, significant

others and friends of people who suffer with mental health conditions and another for adults with mental health conditions who are looking to better understand themselves and their recovery. An on-line suite of mental health resources is available to military service members, veterans, and their families and is designed to increase understanding, communication, wellness and advocacy skills.

In addition, NAMI Rochester has created introductory workshops covering mental illness and suicide awareness topics and interactive training for parents, educators and youth workers to identify the warning signs of mental health and substance use problems, how to initiate a conversation with at risk youth and recognize when it's time to reach out to professionals. They also offer nationally-accredited skills-based training courses on Mental Health First Aid.

All staff, volunteers, and facilitators have lived experience with a mental health condition



**Kristina Mossgraber**  
NAMI CEO

as a peer and/or family member. They know firsthand how confusing and overwhelming the mental health system can be. They offer practical knowledge, as well as the wisdom and empathy of someone who has walked in very similar shoes. All support and education groups are free. There is a charge for workshops and trainings. A majority of NAMI Rochester funding comes from their annual community walk, private foundation grants and individual donations.



# FINDING MEG IN OTHERS

By: Theresa Garbach McCormack

*I must admit, I do not enjoy writing. So when Uncle Doug asked me to share some thoughts on how I remember Meg and how I bring her into my everyday life, my first reaction was, "I don't think so." Not only do I not consider myself much of a writer, but, like Meg, I dislike being in the spotlight. I prefer to work behind the scenes, making things happen for MEG's Gift, rather than being the face of the organization. But here I am, writing this; Uncle Doug can be quite persuasive.\**

My journey since Meg's death has been, and continues to be, filled with twists and turns. I work very hard to remember the beautiful person she was, both inside and out. I choose to focus on her wonderful qualities, avoiding the negativity that grief can bring. After all, Meg wouldn't have wanted us to dwell on that.

## So, how do I remember Meg?

*I see her every day in my children as they display her enduring qualities.  
I think of her when my son, Luke, runs into the wall and laughs at himself.  
I feel her when my daughter, Anna, gives me a rib-crushing hug.  
I encounter her in the smile of my youngest daughter, Mary, and in Mary's unyielding stubbornness.*

The list of Meg's attributes that I see in all her nieces and nephews goes on and on.

Sharing stories with my children about Meg's passions and actions—her fascination with weather and care for the Earth, her playful antics like jumping into a kiddie pool fully clothed during a lunch break from work, and her empathy for others so deep that she sometimes overlooked her own needs and pain—helps me bring her into my family's life. I want them to understand that the way her life ended does not define the entirety of the person I knew. No one should ever be defined by a single moment, especially her worst and definitely not her last.

While MEG's Gift emerged from that heartbreaking time, the positive impact it has had on the mental health community has been a humbling experience. My hope is that my children will choose to be a part of that experience someday.

If you had the privilege of knowing Meg, you likely have your own stories about her, qualities you remember, and cherished moments with her. Perhaps you've lost a loved one under similar circumstances and the grief and pain overshadow the happy memories or good qualities of that special person. Try seeing them in your everyday life through your loved ones. This has helped me remember the incredible person Meg was, and the lasting impact she continues to have on my life.

*{Editor's Comment: Theresa is Meg's older sister. I am her "persuasive" Uncle}*



## JOIN US!

The 8th Annual MEG's Gift Golf and Dinner event is at Shadow Lake on August 12. An on-line auction will be held this year to replace the silent auction. As in the past, golf sponsorships are available. For more information about the cost of golf packages, sponsorships, the on-line auction and to register for golf or dinner-only admission, visit [www.megsgift.org](http://www.megsgift.org).

# MEET THE 2022 **CHAMPIONS**

## 18 HOLE COURSE WINNERS

Brian Engler, Matt Rodenheizer,  
Jim Mazzullo, Joe Mohr



## 9 HOLE COURSE WINNERS

Dan Nolan, Chuck Wardell,  
Steve Buda, Joe Corona



## LONGEST DRIVE (MEN)

Mike Guarino-Hyde



## LONGEST DRIVE (WOMEN)

Cindy Steigerwald



## CLOSEST TO PIN (18 HOLE COURSE)

Chris Lumb



## CLOSEST TO PIN (9 HOLE COURSE)

Steve Budda



# Tournament Day

Ideal weather conditions, with temperatures in the mid-70's and a gentle breeze blowing throughout the afternoon, were enjoyed by the 92 golfers who participated in the 7th Annual MEG's Gift Golf Tournament at Shadow Lake Golf Club.

Visitors to our auction tent bid on 180 items donated by area merchants. In the early evening, a buffet dinner was served to 213 guests. We are grateful to our golfers, sponsors, dinner patrons, and volunteers for the amazing success of this annual fundraising event. We are blessed to have you.



# A CALL FOR EMPATHY

By: Douglas Bufano, Ph.D.

In January of 2023, I was one of an estimated 24 million football fans who witnessed a frightening event. Damar Hamlin, a defensive back for the Buffalo Bills tackled a player from the Cincinnati Bengals. Hamlin stood up for a few seconds and then immediately fell to the turf. Conditioned as we are to football players performing with the resiliency of Roman gladiators, I expected Damar to get up, or if carted off, to do so with a thumbs-up sign for all of us to see. He would be okay and the game would go on. But the orchestrated frenzy of activity by medical staff told a different story which played out in full view of Damar's teammates as they saw him being administered CPR and his heart being shocked by an AED. It was their reactions that first alerted us to the seriousness of the situation.

Damar was NOT okay.

The game would NOT go on.

There is another storyline, however, that received attention in the aftermath of Damar's injury. It's a story of the ways people were impacted by this chilling traumatic event, how it shook them up emotionally, then brought them together in a display of caring. It's a story about **empathy** and it deserves to be remembered and celebrated as one of those precious moments that remind us of

our innate capacity to connect with others on an emotional level without regard for the things that divide us. This is how it unfolded for me. It was strikingly similar to what I found on social media, talk shows and op ed pieces. Hence, I choose to talk about and remember it as a shared ("we") experience.

## FEELING SCARED AND HELPLESS

We tuned in to a sporting event to be entertained. We were not prepared for the show to end, for the performers to stop performing and look so frightened on their own stage. They cried, hugged, held their hands over their faces, prayed, walked about aimlessly, looking forlorn and helpless. Some of us reacted similarly. We could sense what they were thinking, because we were thinking the same: "Is he going to 'make it'?" When informed that Damar's mother was in the ambulance with him, our thoughts turned to her anguish in that moment and the worse fear that a parent can have- the possibility of losing a child. As we learned about the little brother who idolized Damar, we tried to imagine what he was thinking, how scared he must be.

When the TV commentators did speak, they did so in hushed tones and without the clarity and conciseness that would otherwise define their work. Like the players, they were overcome with emotion; they were "lost for words" and admitted so. They had no experience in calling this type of game. No one does

## SHARING. LISTENING. CONNECTING.

At some point, perhaps bolstered by the news that Damar was alive, but still in critical condition, we began to share our thoughts and feelings about Damar and his family with each other. We talked about the fragility of life and what's important in life. We listened to and read what others had to say. It did not take long for people from all walks of life

and from around the globe to weigh in with heartfelt messages of love and encouragement for Damar. People joined prayer vigils, carried signs and wore tee shirts sporting “Love for Damar” and “3”(his jersey number), and donated to his children’s charity in staggering amounts. These were ways of connecting emotionally to this young man, his family and his teammates in their moment of pain.

In the first few days after Damar’s injury, we learned his condition was stable. What did that portend about his life going forward? Uncertainty gave way to cautious optimism with positive news from his doctors about his medical condition and upbeat reports from players and coaches who visited him in the hospital. Their mood was lifted and ours was too. Then, one week later, we got to see him in his hospital bed giving us his “thumbs up”- his hands shaped in the form of a heart- reassuring us that he was okay and returning the love.

Our collective reaction to the events and people surrounding Damar’s near-fatal tragedy represents a uniquely human caring response to the adversity of others that engaged our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. This is the essence of empathy.

Let’s look more closely at empathy-what it is, why it is important, and what we can do to cultivate it in our lives.

## WHAT IS EMPATHY?

Stanford University psychologist, Jamil Zaki, uses empathy as an “umbrella term that describes multiple ways people respond to one another, including sharing, thinking about, and caring about others’ feelings.” Researchers on the topic generally agree that there are three main types of empathy.

- Emotional Empathy is sharing the emotions of others as if they were your own. It might be sharing their sadness in response to their loss or joy in response to their good fortune. It might also include physical responses associated with their emotions, such as crying when encountering their sadness or rapid breathing when reacting to their fear.
- Cognitive Empathy is understanding what others are feeling by taking their perspective. It entails imagining yourself in their situation, considering what they are thinking and why and, from that, deducing how they feel. It has been described as “walking in somebody else’s shoes” or “seeing the world through their eyes.”
- Commonly known as empathic concern, compassionate empathy involves both the emotional and cognitive elements of empathy and motivates action. It moves people beyond just sharing in others’ emotions and comprehending what life is like from their perspective to a desire to do something that relieves their pain, helps them feel better or improves their well-being.



Most people do respond to others’ adversity with some level of sensitivity for what they are feeling and thinking. The overwhelmingly empathic responses to Damar’s situation illustrates this. Look back at the feelings shared, thoughts expressed, and actions taken by so many who were genuinely impacted by his injury.

Note that many aspects of empathy as described here were clearly evident in the various ways people connected with Damar, his teammates, and his family. We learned that empathy made a difference in his recovery and helped those closest to him cope at a difficult time. Most of us can likely recall instances when someone was willing and able to share our pain and listen to our story intent on understanding what was troubling us, and played a role in making us feel better.

## WHY IS EMPATHY IMPORTANT?

Empathy is fundamental in building meaningful social connections and plays a key role in the quality of your relationships in almost every aspect of your life. Without it, your relationships will be mainly defined by mutual interests and shared activities, but devoid of intimacy at an emotional level, and unsatisfying on a sustained basis. Empathy also drives efforts to understand people who differ from you. It promotes positive attitudes and helping behavior toward stigmatized groups, such as people who are homeless, mentally ill, or disabled. It is also the force that motivates people to volunteer their time and expertise and donate money to humanitarian causes and to support survivors of tragedies and disasters.

## HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR EMPATHY SKILLS?

My experience as a mental health counselor and counselor educator has taught me valuable lessons about developing and nurturing empathic relationships. I suggest attention to these two empathy-building tasks that have been supported by research.

### ***Be an active listener***

Typically people listen with the intent to reply rather than the intent to understand. When you are formulating your response while the other person is speaking, you are self-focused and distracted from an opportunity to



experience what the other person is thinking and feeling in that moment. To counter this tendency, make learning what is going on with the other person the singular focus of your attention.

- Ask open-ended questions to encourage communication. Be patient with pauses and don't move quickly to fill in the gaps. Resist the urge to say something to minimize the other person's pain, share your personal experiences, or offer unsolicited advice. These distract from the central task of active listening which is an accurate understanding of the other person's thoughts and emotions.
- Notice facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and other non-verbal cues as these communicate information about the person's emotional state. Reflect and paraphrase back what you are hearing and observing. Use your own body language, such as a nod or leaning forward, to communicate your understanding. Doing all of these things takes discipline and gets easier with practice. Don't worry about doing it perfectly. The effort put into listening in this manner will be recognized and appreciated as a genuine manifestation of your concern.

### ***Broaden your worldview***

Your ability to take the perspective of others is difficult if you have limited exposure to people who are different from you. You are likely to develop biases and make assumptions based on a narrow (self-oriented) view of how and why people feel and think the way they do. There are a variety of ways to address this limitation in your perspective.

- Initiate conversations with people who don't necessarily share your interests and viewpoint such as those who differ from you in race, nationality, political affiliation, gender identity, religion or other cultural factors.
- Volunteer at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen.
- Attend social events such as festivals celebrating the customs and traditions of others. This can be especially enlightening when you visit neighborhoods and communities in which people who differ from you live.

My experience is that sometimes I felt like an "outsider." It made me realize that this is what others may feel like most of the time when they enter my world. In doing any of these things, be prepared to leave your comfort zone. Enter the experience with a curious mind and a willingness to accept the validity of the other person's life experiences. You don't have to deny your own experience to accept someone else's.

## FINAL REFLECTION

We live in a world that is deeply divided on many fronts and these divisions affect our relationships in almost every area of our life. They accentuate our differences and can be a barrier to treating others with kindness and respect. Showing more empathy with people we encounter in everyday life, while not a panacea for bringing justice and civility to our troubled world, will help us understand what and why others feel and think the way they do, and perhaps foster healthier environments in which we can live, work, and play.

### ***The call for empathy could not be greater than right now.***





MEG's Gift  
P.O. Box 876  
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*Recipient  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code*

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**"I love you from the top, middle  
and bottom of my heart..."**

A familiar closing to messages from our Meg

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MEG's Gift Inc. is a 501(c)(3) public charity

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### TOURNAMENT DAY PICTURES

