



Community Connections — June 2026

Advocacy Action: Voice Your Support for NAMI “Family to Family” Funding



Each year, the Missouri Department of Mental Health serves more than 170,000 individuals and their families, yet the need for services exceeds availability. For 40 years, the [Missouri chapter](#) of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has used modest state funding to fill service gaps with free family support groups and peer-led courses.

In May, [Missouri lawmakers restored \\$65,000 in funding](#) for NAMI Missouri’s Family to Family program, which gives families the support, coping skills, and encouragement to

help members with mental health challenges.

Governor Kehoe, who originally recommended cutting money for the program that fills important gaps in the mental health system, has until July 1 to leave the funding in place or cut it back to his original proposed level.

Please contact Governor Kehoe and urge him to leave Family to Family funding in place to ensure this vital program can continue to offer families much-needed mental health support.

[Contact Governor Kehoe’s Office](#)

Celebrating 45 Years of Mental Health Support!

Save **September 12** on your calendar — that’s the date for our community celebration of CMHF’s network partners and the recovery-focused mental health support we’ve achieved together over the past 45 years in Jackson County.

Details coming soon!



Meeting Men in Need with the Support to Succeed

Benilde Hall offers counseling, treatment, temporary housing, and peer support to provide what some residents call “an oasis in the middle of chaos.”



Along with its standard links to "Get Help" and "Who We Are," Benilde Hall's [home page](#) includes an extensive list of "Partners & Contributors." When asked how these partnerships typically start, Executive Director Dr. Erin Fraser, pictured here, offers a straightforward answer: an in-person program tour.

Anyone can read about the agency's successes in its mission to assist veterans and other individuals who have faced challenges such as incarceration, addiction, trauma, and housing insecurity.

But to see the real-life fruits of its many community collaborations and to witness the positivity and sense of hope they instill, nothing beats seeing it in person.

Taking Time to Make Connections

Touring the primary facility, which was once the Queen of the World hospital, requires periodic pauses. Sometimes Fraser stops to introduce staff members, many of whom are former residents; other times, she takes a listening break while a resident describes their new job or how they purchased a new car to help them find work. Their excitement is infectious. For some residents, Fraser says they're being heard for the first time.

Visitors who arrive at Benilde Hall with a black-and-white understanding of the agency's work quickly find their perceptions don't tell the whole story. Fraser, who interned with the agency as a student and previously served as its Clinical Director, knows the building like the back of her hand. Her tour narration adds dimension and color to the stories of the human beings with whom she and her staff work.

She praises the progress of a resident passing her in the hall who happily announces he's leaving soon. She shows off residents' art symbolizing the pain they've experienced and the possibilities life still holds. She congratulates a staff member who graduated from the program and now inspires other residents. "Lived experience is often overlooked," Fraser says. "But it instills credibility and allows residents striving toward goals to see that success is possible."

With Benilde Hall housing providing a stable foundation for healing, residents can access various CMHF-funded mental health services, including counseling, case management, treatment planning and recovery support. These services enable them to address their traumas and mental health challenges, overcome substance use disorders, and take additional steps toward long-term stability.

The Multiple Benefits of Measuring Success

Benilde Hall is one of many partner agencies participating in CMHF's Value-Based Payment program (VBP), which provides additional funding for performance and treatment advances based on Key Performance Indicators (KPI) tied to their services. As attuned as she is to her agency's programs and the residents they serve, Fraser commends the VBP program for the precise data it produces.

"VBP has been incredibly helpful for understanding our programming elements with new clarity, which is useful for planning," she says. "We also share results with staff and residents to show them how mental health-related progress can be measured in different ways."

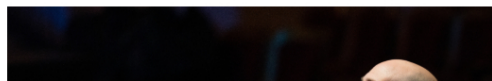
When she presents her agency's work to the public, Fraser reminds the audience her residents aren't a diagnosis or a data point. They are Fathers. Husbands. Kansas Citizens. And they aren't just working to improve their own lives.

Thanks to Benilde Hall's temporary housing and mental health services, its former residents take new skills and coping methods home, creating opportunities for generational change that benefits their families and community for years to come.

Interested in being highlighted on CMHF's social media and in our newsletter? Reach out to smccall@jacksoncountycare.org.

Heartland Men's Chorus Celebrates Pride Month & the Collective Power of Healing

Artistic Director of the [Heartland Men's Chorus](#), Shawn Cullen, shares the full spectrum of community connections behind every HMCKC performance.





At a time when many corporations and organizations are backing away from [sponsoring Pride celebrations](#), the Heartland Men's Chorus Kansas City (HMCKC) enters its 41st season as a steadfast beacon of LGBTQ+ equality.

"Our work is bigger than performance," says Shawn Cullen, HMCKC's Artistic Director. "A chorus like ours becomes a public act of healing because it gathers individual stories and gives them collective power. Onstage, our community is not abstract. It has faces. Names. Breath. Humor. Grief. Glitter. History. Scars. Joy."

Cullen celebrates the personal restoration that comes with chorus membership. "I have watched people walk into rehearsal carrying grief, shame, anxiety, loneliness, and the heavy armor of survival. And over time, the shoulders drop. The breath deepens. The laugh comes back. The voice opens," he says. "That is the power of group singing."

That connectedness extends to the community, where Cullen says the group's performances strive to give audiences the "full spectrum of LGBTQ+ experience."

HMCKC welcomes its new Executive Director, Dr. Chipper Dean, in August. In the meantime, Cullen encourages Kansas Citians to experience his group doing what it does best. "We do not just perform for people. We gather them, we reflect them, we advocate for them, and sometimes, if we are very lucky, we help sing them back to themselves."

[Explore HMCKC's community pride](#)

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