

MHRB invites seniors to Five Wishes and Leaving a Legacy event

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1 of 1 Photos | From left are Margaret Kane, Hillary Workman from the Mental Health Recovery Board and Connie Parker. Wertman is explaining all of the programs available for Elder Empowerment Month in June and the benefit of each. (Submitted photo)

The Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County (MHRB) will play host to a free event during Elder Empowerment Month in Ashland County in June, addressing the Five Wishes document and legacy writing.

Offering presentations during EEM is an initiative of the Older Adult Behavioral Health Coalition of Ashland County (OABHC). MHRB partners for this event are the Ohio District 5 Area Agency on Aging, Inc. (AAA) and Hospice of North Central Ohio (HNCO).

This event will take place on Tuesday, June 13, at the MHRB, 1605 County Road 1095, Ashland, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. It will start with a presentation about the Five Wishes document, devoting attention to Wish 5 (what I want my loved ones to know), followed by lunch. The event will conclude with a "Leaving a legacy: What I want my loved ones to know" writing workshop. A discussion about Five Wishes will be led by Megan Thomas, AAA. The legacy writing workshop will be co-facilitated by Diana Spore, MHRB, and Kailey Bradley-Thomas, HNCO.

The Five Wishes document is a unique living will, providing you with the opportunity to express your wishes in five domains, addressing spiritual, emotional, personal and medical needs. The Five Wishes address (1) who you wish to designate as the one(s) to make decisions about your care when you are not able to do so, when you cannot speak for yourself, (2) what forms of treatment you don't want or want to take place, (3) palliative care issues (how and to what extent you wish to be comfortable), (4) how you wish to be treated by other people when you are

dealing with serious medical problems, issues related to death and dying, (5) what you want your loved ones to know.

Legacy writing is an expression of love, a way to touch the lives of those whom you love in a way that your thoughts can be referred to again and again, and remembered. It is a mechanism for expressing your final wishes. Legacy writing is an opportunity to reflect and share treasured memories, to express words of wisdom, values and insights.

The objectives of the workshop are (1) to learn about the benefits and process of journaling and writing legacy letters; (2) to engage in a series of writing exercises, to have the opportunity to interact with other participants, and to share life stories; (3) to be better able to clarify what participants "wan their loved ones to know" as they enter the last stage of their lives and/or complete the Wish 5 section of the Five Wishes document Participants will be provided with useful information about proceeding with journaling, crafting legacy letters, and legacy writing in general.

Seniors are empowered by completing the Five Wishes document and by engaging in legacy writing, by making their wishes known (e.g., regarding funeral and burial plans), by expressing what values they hope will be passed down to future generations, and by indicating what they want their loved ones to know and remember.

Legacy writing is a gift to your children, grandchildren, future generations and others whom you love. Making your wishes known can be useful to those who you designate to ensure that your requests are followed. The Five Wishes document and legacy letters (sometimes referred to as ethical wills) supplement and clarify final wishes revealed in legally-binding documents (e.g., living wills) in the State of Ohio.

Thomas is the program coordinator at the AAA, where she provides service coordination, teaches wellness classes and gives caregiver presentations as a part of the Speaker's Bureau. She is a member of the American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC) and is currently in the AASC University program to receive her certification. Thomas has personal experience as a caregiver and loves that her job allows her to link services to individuals and their families who are in need.

Spore received her master's degree in gerontological studies from Miami University, and earned her PhD in human development and family studies, with a concentration in aging, from Penn State. She completed postdoctoral training at Brown University. Spore's areas of expertise include long-term care, mental health and aging, psychotropic drug use among older adults, and caregiving. She is a board member of the MHRB; serves as project lead on a "Creative Writing for Recovery" initiative (MHRB); has expertise in addressing the benefits and process of different forms of writing for self-empowerment and for promoting emotional well-being; and co-facilitated a workshop on journaling for caregivers. She is a member of the OABHC.

Spore is helping her 89-year-old mother in her efforts to craft legacy letters to family members. Bradley-Thomas received her master's degree in clinical counseling from Ashland Theological Seminary. She is a licensed professional counselor (LPC) in the State of Ohio. Bradley-Thomas is coordinator of bereavement services at HNCO, and specializes in grief counseling and grief education. As a counselor, she is interested in the power of narrative and has worked with all age groups on the benefits of therapeutic tory-telling. She has facilitated groups on addiction, anger management, self-care, grief/loss, depression and anxiety. Bradley-Thomas is a board member of the Ashland County Council on Aging, and is a member of the OABHC. She loves living with her husband, Stephen, and therapy dog, Scout, in Ashland.

Contact Hillary Wertman (MHRB, 419-281- 3139, hwertman@ashlandmhrb.org) for more information or to register/RSVP for this event by Friday, June 9. Registration also can be completed online by visiting the MHRB website: www.ashlandmhrb.org.