

**“Strong Brain, Smart Brain, Fit Brain: “**

**A Mental Wellness Awareness, Education and Brain Strengthening Initiative**

**Cognition, Creativity and Wisdom for Age Friendly Living in Rockland County**

## **A) ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY**

### **1. Organization's Mission & Purpose**

The Mental Health Association of Rockland County (MHA) is pleased to submit this grant application for our program “Strong Brain, Smart Brain, and Fit Brain: A Mental Wellness Awareness, Education and Brain Strengthening Initiative Focusing on Cognition, Creativity and Wisdom for Age Friendly Living in Rockland.”

The Mental Health Association of Rockland County is a private, not-for-profit community agency whose mission is to provide mental health preventive, supportive, treatment and advocacy services to children and adults in our community. An expression of these services is our community outreach efforts.

MHA believes it has a responsibility to work more closely with the elderly and their family caregivers, and to educate the Community about the needs of our age-expanding population, and to advocate for those needs.

### **2. Organization's Experience**

Founded in 1951, the Association has established itself as a leader in providing innovative and effective services to the Rockland community. It is one of over 320 affiliates of the National Mental Health Association and a member agency of the Mental Health Association of New York State.

The MHA of Rockland County continuously works to improve present services and develop *new* services that enable our community to move toward understanding mental health. As a member of the United Way of Rockland County, the MHA operates the following programs:

- Rehabilitative Services
- Educational Services
- Residential Services
- Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services
- Family Support Services
- School-Based Mental Health Services
- Rockland Success Teams Student Development
- Children's Case Management Services
- Social Clubs

MHA has formal agreements with over 25 agencies to work with them and expand services in Rockland County, believing that the more education and understanding of mental health and health issues that agencies possess, the more comprehensive their services will be. The agency

very often is invited into partner agencies to enhance their services. Our partner agencies all share our mission - to improve lives and raise awareness about human needs and development.

### **3. Organization's Skills & Experience**

The Mental Health Association has, throughout its history, serviced individuals from cradle to grave. As the demographics of the County now require us to pay special attention to the over 60 population we have once again taken a leadership role in working with the County to address the health and mental health needs of its citizens and raise awareness of the wave of older adults wishing to remain in Rockland and age in Place.

In 2007 MHA was asked to chair the Rockland County Geriatric Mental Health Alliance. The Mental Health Association in New York City established the Alliance in 2004 to advocate for changes in mental health practice and policy to better serve the needs of older adults, especially with the impending retirement of baby boomers. To achieve its mission, the Alliance has these goals: advocate for improvements in public policy, provide public education, build a constituency for geriatric mental health, foster the development and dissemination of innovative service models and provide analytic information regarding geriatric mental health policy

Members of the Rockland County Chapter (RCA) are: Aging in America, Meals on Wheels of Rockland County, Home Aides of Rockland, Rockland County Office for the Aging, United Hospice of Rockland, Rockland County Office for People with Disabilities, Hudson Valley Statewide Senior Action Council, Rockland County Retired & Senior Volunteer Program, Foster Grandparent Program of Rockland County, Jewish Family Service and the Alzheimer's Association.

The mission of the Rockland Alliance is "to promote inclusive, integrated Rockland County Planning for all services for older adults" (October, 2007).

### **Organization's Capabilities & Resources**

MHA believes it has a responsibility to work more closely with older adult citizens and to educate the Community about the needs of older adults and advocate for those needs. The MHA will use all of its resources in the development of this project. We will invite our collaborative partners to join us in this initiative. This endeavor which will continue to change the culture of aging in the County is part of a three year planning and program development initiative entitled "Project Tomorrow" which the agency has been working with various county agencies and government departments. This project is described more in depth later in the proposal.

In these difficult times the agency remains financially sound and has seasoned staff committed to sharing their resources to this project. The agency is a 9.2 million dollar operation with a current

staff of 150 and 45 volunteers. The agency currently has 16 active Board members who are very supportive of the day to day activities of the agency. The agency at its most recent Annual meeting approved a Strategic Plan which will move us into 2011.

MHA is in a strong financial position, having maintained balanced budgets for the last several years. We are prepared to take on this exciting endeavor and be successful in its outcomes. The CEO/President of the MHA will oversee this project, as she is the co-chair of the RCA and will work with both County and Alliance members directly to oversee this program and insure both the implementation of the program and successful outcomes.

### **Timely Implementation**

MHA is prepared to begin this project as soon as the funding is available. The agency will contract with our present consultant for an extended twelve month period to begin implementation as soon as the grant is awarded.

Notification of the grant award will be disseminated in the first week that the agency is notified. A special meeting will be held with RCA and Project Tomorrow Planning Group (SEE BELOW PART B #5) to describe the program and the timeline for implementation.

A press release will be available as soon as notification of the award has been made public. Members of stakeholder groups, business, government and the general population will receive information on the activities of the grant.

**5. Organizational Chart (Please see attached “Attachment A”)**

**6. Organization’s Budget (Please see attached approved 2008 annual Budget and 2007 Audit. “Attachment B.”)**

## **B) PROGRAM DESIGN**

### **1. Project Catchment Area**

The catchment area for the project is all of Rockland County. The population being targeted is the entire older adult population of the county, with special emphasis on the most isolated and those subject to depression, disaffection and mental stagnation. This includes our Non-English speaking elderly, those with health problems such as heart conditions and diabetes, that make mobility difficult, and widowed men over the age of 75, a population with the highest risk of suicide.

Our program is designed to make a difference in thinking about geriatric mental health, and therefore it will benefit all segments of the aging population.

### **2. Rural Project Status**

The project is not intended to reach out to and address the needs of rural adults.

### **3. Targeting Underserved Populations**

Rockland boasts forty ethnically diverse communities including Haitian, Hassidic, Latino, Irish, Eastern European, and Pan Asian. The elderly in many of these communities are among the economically most disadvantaged, but also the group with the richest cultures, native arts and storytelling ability, many are also culturally skeptical of mental health support or counseling, and have notions that aging means the inevitable decline in brain function. We know that many in this population have lost old community ties when they immigrated and are isolated by culture and language and the lack of accessible transportation in the County.

A recent polling study conducted by the MHA revealed that many older adults who have moved from as close as the NYC, remain “home sick,” and do not remake friendships, and becoming socially isolated and depressed. Our “immigrant” population comes from far and near experiencing the same challenges.

We believe that our programs could be useful for all older adults who must move into new communities for whatever reasons. Some move to be close to family, maybe for economic reasons or to be close to NYC or for medical care. As has been stated by many, Rockland has the largest growing numbers of elders returning to the county than any other county in NY State.

We believe that if an older person remains at home, the community changes around them, they lose friends, local establishments close or cater to new groups, and one can become an “immigrant” in one’s own community.

### **4. Statement of Vision & Goals**

Our goal is to enhance the ability of older adults to age in place, and to make ageing in Rockland an experience to which all of our citizens look forward.

Our vision is to increase awareness through education and an impactful messaging that age does not mean mental decline, and that those that have impairments can live a rich and contributory life of value. Contributions can be made to the community to family and to self.

By teaching the public and professionals about the strength, intelligence and restorative capacity of the brain as we age, we will create new space for older adults to function at their highest level. This new level of function will result in the aging process, and the elderly themselves, to be viewed differently by younger people. Our vision is that this revised notion of mental health-Brain biology –Brain Fitness will impact on ageism, as older adults participate in more intergenerational community activities.

“ Brain fitness” will be a new buzz word – it will motivate participation in the community in the arts and in volunteering which will decrease the isolation that causes depression and decline.

By shining a light on mental health issues, we also expect a greater understanding of the aging process with more elderly people willing to seek help when they do suffer anxiety, loss, bereavement and depression.

## **5. Planning Process**

We engaged in a three step planning process over a sixteen month period:

The MHA was able to procure two legislative grants for activities focusing on the aging of the County. The first grant focused on community planning. With the help of a nationally-recognized expert on aging, the MHA and County the Legislature Chair as the lead organizations initiated a series of meetings with leaders of Rockland County government and non-profits who had an interest in aging. The result of these meetings was “Project Tomorrow”, a public-private initiative to promote aging in place and age-friendly communities in Rockland.

The first phase of Project Tomorrow was a series of three public forums (LISTENINGs) for stakeholders, residents and family members, who were invited to share their views on obstacles and challenges faced by Rockland’s aging population. The latest statistics from the Rockland County Planning Department predict a 12,000 person increase in people over 60 by the year 2020 .That figure is in addition to current over 60 populations of 36,000 people. Over the course of the Listening, 77 of the hundreds of attendees testified formally as to the needs of aging in Rockland. Attached is “Attachment C” are three reports from these meetings.

The second phase of “Project Tomorrow” was the production of a short video highlighting interviews with 70 plus residents about their experience of *aging in place* in Rockland. This 12-minute clip shows people from diverse sections of the county speaking about the joys and challenges of living in Rockland. Senior Centers were heralded as the best part of aging in place while transportation difficulties and the subsequent isolation of individuals and communities was identified as the key obstacle in making Rockland and ideal place to age in place. The video was recently nominated for a Telly Award. The video is available for public viewing.

Following these hearings, with new information and challenges in hand, “Project Tomorrow” moved beyond our own county planning to reach out to the experts who help communities plan. The MHA and the Alliance joined forces with AARP and on May 8, 2009 there will be a

Community Visioning Forum, a daylong event to help the County-at-large identify the most pressing community needs and develop an action plan for Livable Communities.

The second legislative grant MHA received is for the OWL program (Older Adults Wellness Ladder). This is a pilot project designed to utilize a mobile team of skilled health and mental health professionals to conduct 235 interviews with people aged 60 and older about their immediate health and mental health needs. This project will collect data to help plan for wellness centers for the current and further population in the County and this data will be available by March 2010.

The alliance has been meeting monthly for almost 24 months and has identified eight top goals to prepare for aging in the County. Alliance members are: The Foster Grand Parents, Aging in America, Meals on Wheels of RC, Home Aides of Rockland, RC Office for the Aging, United Hospice of Rockland, RC Office for People with Disabilities, Hudson Valley Senior Action Council, RC Retired & Senior Volunteer Program and Jewish Family Service.:

- Establishing Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities
- Creating a magnet older adult center-with boomer-friendly programs
- Launching a traveling exhibition about older adults promoting volunteerism, employment and anti ageism
- Forming a countywide coalition focused on the optimum development of older adult services, similar to the Rockland 21st Century Collaborative for Children and Youth
- Researching and providing more accessible transportation
- Recruiting to attract more geriatric health professionals to the county
- Piloting a Social Model adult day care program
- Educating the public about the latest medical information on brain research and educating professionals and care givers on brain fitness and making services boomer-ready

The most important and achievable goal with this additional grant is the professional and public mental wellness and strong brain initiative, which is also an anti-isolation, anti-late onset depression and cognitive decline program, which we call “Strong Brain, Smart Brain, and Fit Brain: A Mental Wellness Awareness, Education and Brain Strengthening Initiative”.

It is this program for which we are seeking help from the Office of the Aging to once again bring the latest and greatest adult mental wellness to Rockland County.

## **6. Community Action Plan**

See “Attachment D” for full plan.

### **Highlights of Plan**

“Strong Brain, Smart Brain, Fit Brain” is a far reaching mental wellness awareness initiative for older adults of diverse ethnicities living in Rockland County. This program is designed to promote mental and emotional wellness through education; brain fit training, social messaging, and opportunities for creative community involvement. A significant side benefit of the initiative

is the training of geriatric professionals and other stakeholders that touch upon the lives of older adults, caregivers and boomers, in understanding healthy mental aging.

We have chosen this initiative because there is a gross public and sometimes professional misunderstanding and underestimation of the health status of the aging brain, and because mental health support is often stigmatized, trivialized or resisted by the general population and elders and their families specifically.

## **Objectives**

Our objectives are

- To promote Rockland as an age-in-place and age-friendly venue because:
  - ✓ There is a structure for lifelong mental wellness and cognitive engagement
  - ✓ There is consensus among professionals and all stakeholders to promote mental wellness through a specific geriatric training program.
  - ✓ All citizens have easy access to brain strengthening games and new devices as they are created
- To eliminate elder isolation that comes of boredom, marginalization and cognitive decline
- To include all of the elders, from all communities, including those with limited English and with diverse cultures that traditionally relegate the aged solely to the home
- To make the seeking of mental health support and the availability of such support without stigma to the current older adults and the boomers
- To create programs and training models for various age groups –identifying the differences that exists in the 60+, 70+ ,and the 80+ age group

## **7. Implementation Activities and Anticipated Outcome**

Our initiative consists of four activities:

### **Train the Trainer Education on Teaching the Aspects of Mental Wellness**

We will design a training manual, audios and teleseminars covering the basics of mental wellness as we age. Topics will include understanding of the aging brain, a tutorial on brain fitness and how to strengthen the brain in areas of prowess long term memory, short term memory, hand eye coordination, and processing language, learning, retention, speed of recollection. This training will also cover how the brain ages, normal and abnormal function, signs of decline, the importance of lifelong involvement, the importance of purpose and stimulation.

### Who Will Be Trained

We will train professionals at older adult centers, health facilities, and rehabilitation centers, assisted living and continuing care communities, and lay citizens through caregiver support groups, older adult volunteer centers, local employer work balance programs, the 120 older adult clubs, and places of worship.

### Brain Fit Centers

We will install older adult friendly computer brain fitness software in existing computer centers i.e. libraries and older adult centers, clubs, health facilities, faith based facilities, adult learning centers, and participating agency members of the Alliance.

### Media Outreach and Social Message Dissemination

We will launch a full scale radio, TV, new media, web based campaign to promote a better understanding of geriatric mental health, the ability to keep learning and make contributions, and that seeking mental health support when needed is not a stigma but a sign of health

### The Creative Brain Haitian Day

We will work with the Haitian community to develop an arts program for poetry, music, storytelling and crafts, based on the cultural skills of our elder Haitian population that can also be rolled out into a more general Creative Brain series. The Haitian Community has been identified by Alliance members as an underserved community with a large percentage of older adults.

Program Activities	Train the Trainer (education)	Public Awareness (campaign)	Brain Fit Games	Creative Brain (anti-isolation project)
<b>Strategy</b>	develop materials and training sessions	partner with traditional and new media to deliver message points	install brain fitness software at various assessable computer locations	design arts program for Haitian elders
<b>Number of (unduplicated) adults to be served</b>	10 Trainers	The larger community(30,000)	250 at 8 sites	125 people
<b>Rationale</b>	professional /lay education to make changes	social messaging for public awareness to make changes	cognitive improvement for older adults	anti-isolation program
<b>Overcome Barriers</b>	lack of professional knowledge on the	change attitudes	create mental reserve	create contacts and friendships and idea density

	aging brain/stigmas			
<b>Deliverables &amp; Milestones</b>	training materials, older adults for pros and older adults	articles, website, press, PSA	Installations in 25 sites	event
<b>How Achieved</b>	design and presentation	ad placement and creative marketing	partnership with neuroscience companies	arts program at local faith based center
<b>By When Achieved</b>	Oct.31-2009	Throughout project	January 2010	March 2010
<b>Time Line (see attached)</b>	8 months after grant inception	2 months after grant inception	3 months after grant inception	8 months after grant inception, group set, performance after 8 months
<b>Administrative Structure</b>		See organizational chart		
<b>Personnel</b>	Consultants ( 3-4)			
<b>Collaboration</b>	aging community and professional aging community	media and business community	neuroscience business community and venues	Haitian community, centers and faith based orgs
<b>Anticipated Outcomes</b>	ongoing increased awareness of mental wellness and continued training	public awareness of mental wellness	increased brain fitness and participation	less isolation and model program

TimeLine Highlights:

## 8. Partnerships

One of our major partners will be Information Rockland—NY Connects. Information Rockland—NY Connects is the first point of contact for Rockland residents to be connected to the vast array of health and human services available to them. Equipped with the latest in call center technology, Information Rockland—NY Connects maintains a database of community and government agencies, organizations and services to refer individuals to in their time of need. Information Rockland—NY Connects clearly demonstrates the County's commitment to make access to services user-friendly and efficient.

We have worked with institutions of higher education like Rockland Community College and, Long Island University, Rockland Campus, and others to create internship programs and intergenerational events. We expect that our training program will be offered to the social science and gerontology departments of those schools. We also intend to translate our awareness

messages into Spanish, at least one Asian language, and Yiddish, so that the more ethnic clubs and faith centers will disseminate our message. We will access the local business community to support our efforts, especially those in local media, Silver and Boomer markets.

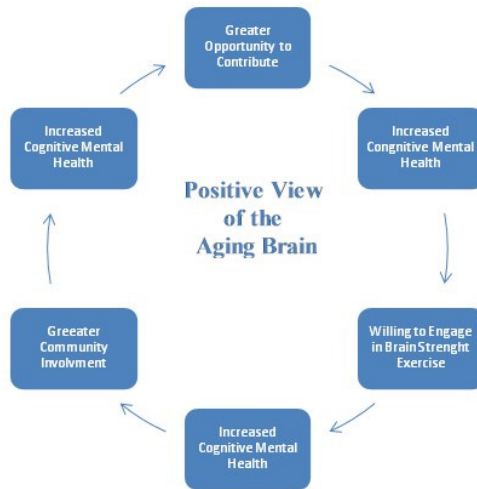
All partners will be asked to offer our educational programs, assist us in internet e-blasts, contribute web content, disseminate social messages, provide trainers, promote our teleseminars, sponsor our media, and make direct donation and contributions. We call all of the partners our Ambassadors

(For A full list of our “Partners see Attachment E”)

**9. Letters of Support (Attachment?)**

**10. Unique Project Aspects-Our project is unique in these aspects:**

1. Rockland County is unique. We are a statistical model of how America is aging. Already 18% of our population is over the age of 65. We boast multiple ethnicities in a natural NORC setting. We have an interested community, primed through “Listeenings” to be aware of aging-in-place issues.
2. Our emphasis is on healthy mental aging, not solely prevention and amelioration of Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. We approach issues of mental wellness from the prospective that it is the overriding issue of successful aging, and the motivating factor that catalyzes the use of mobility devices, community involvement, volunteering, spiritual aging, intergenerational involvement, thriving in place, and lifelong learning.. Rather than just one cog in the wheel of healthy aging, we see mental wellness as the hub of the wheel.



a.

3. We take a traditional marketing approach by “selling” mental health and wellness as an important aspect throughout the life span particularly for the older adult. We use viral marketing and “ambassadors” to engage all citizens and stakeholders.

4. We create a “train the trainer team “of educators, in cost effective ways, by allowing them to teach at established venues for older adults, with established and regular communication lines to older adults and geriatric professionals
5. We have created the possibility of teaching the most disenfranchised and vulnerable; elderly that has lost their community ties in their country of origin, which may not have English language skills, by establishing networks with community service providers. These providers will be part of the “train the trainer” programs allowing them to bring this education to their own communities.

## **11. Sustainability**

We assure sustainability as follows:

-Once educational materials are created the information will be available to all communities in several languages.

-The project will train direct service programs, faith based organizations, to use the trainings in their own communities.

-We hope to link this project to the work which is being conducted at the Nathan Kline Institute located in Rockland, which is an internationally recognized research center.

NKI is conducting geriatric research and by partnering with them this initiative has a wonderful potential to open the doors, as barriers are broken and stigma is reduced, to bring the work of NKI to the community of Rockland.

-We will attempt to link this project and the education and learning from this project to the research which is being done at NKI.

## **12. Monitoring and evaluation**

-The project will have both a pre and post test for all participants. Success will be determined by the change in knowledge which is seen in the results of these tests.

- There will be a data analysis of public media for language change –( Age Friendly Communities- Fit Brain- Mental Wellness-Strong Brain) a list of key phrases will be identified at the beginning of this project and we will attempt to capture the language shift as we promote these concepts in the community.