

Pies, Policy, and Progress: A Look Back at Our Impactful Event

The MHFA Collaborative hosted the inaugural “Pies and Policy: Funding the Future of Mental Health Education” Reception on January 29th at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus. The intent of the reception was to advocate for funding so we can match the budget to the demand for MHFA training while enticing attendees with an array of sweet tasting pies.

The vision of the event was created by the MHFA Advocacy Team who wanted to provide an opportunity for one-on-one conversations with legislators instead of hosting the traditional formal program. They developed eight poster boards explaining “Why MHFA Matters” and set up the space in the Statehouse to encourage conversations between MHFA Advocates and decision makers about why what we do is so important for a resilient Ohio.

We believe the most effective way to share insights about the event is to let you hear directly from members of our Advocacy Team on how they felt it went.

Jill Sheridan, former MHFA Instructor and Educator shared, “Tonight, we hosted a successful Mental Health First Aid Advocacy Day at the Statehouse in Columbus, and it was truly inspiring! Our “Pies and Policies” event brought together around 100 Representatives, Senators, and staffers, who were greeted with warm pies after a long day of committee meetings.

What started as a casual gathering quickly turned into vibrant and meaningful discussions about the mental health needs in communities across the state. The energy in the room was contagious and for that moment, party lines—whether Republican, Democrat, or Independent—didn’t matter.

This event created a bridge for open dialogue, focusing on how we can use evidence-based research of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) as an early intervention strategy. Together, we can save lives, prevent crises from spiraling out of control, and reduce the long-term effects of untreated mental health issues.

Thank you to everyone who joined us, shared insights, and helped make this event a success. Let’s continue turning these conversations into action for the betterment of mental health care in Ohio!

Megan Petra from University of Toledo said, “I enjoyed meeting and talking with our Ohio legislators, their staff, and the others working in the Statehouse. Many had personal stories about family or friends with mental health struggles, and all seemed to

appreciate the importance of prevention such as Mental Health First Aid. And who doesn't appreciate a piece of pie to brighten the end of a long day?"

Janet Gora, MHFA Collaborative Director shared, "I was blown away by the interest and support for mental health education and the promises to help our cause. People were also very interested in taking the class themselves. That will do a lot to not only equip these hard-working officials with tools they can use as they talk to their constituents, but the experience will help them understand the benefit of the class to the community."

Jessica Wright, MHFA Coordinator said, "I enjoyed our genuine conversations and connections during the Pies & Policy event. It was great to see decision-makers open up about mental health in such a welcoming space, and sharing a slice of pie made it all the more meaningful. The event felt less like a formal meeting and more like a chance to come together, have honest discussions, and build relationships that will help move mental health advocacy forward."

Michelle Rolf, MHFA Coordinator shared, "Advocacy can sound a little daunting. I was surprised at how easy it comes when you are talking about something you are passionate about. I enjoyed talking with everyone about how important Mental Health First Aid is and the difference it has made in Ohio."

Ruth Russell, MHFA Instructor and Former Advocate of the Year summarized the event well as she shared, "It was an incredible experience! We were heard!"

What Legislators Were Most Interested In

Representative Phil Plummer, who is the Dayton Area State Representative. As a former sheriff, Plummer was interested in the correlation between mental health and the correction system and shared he would like to get MHFA in the jails.

Representative Daquan Neal attended Central State University and expressed an interest in getting MHFA into colleges.

Representative Meredith Lawson Rowe serves on the Community Revitalization Committee and was also interested in learning how MHFA can benefit military/veterans.