

2018

ANNUAL REPORT

# Making an Impact by Changing Lives



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance





# A Letter from Michael Pollock, Chief Executive Officer



“One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.” – Bryant H. McGill, author & activist

When I accepted the position as CEO at the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA), my first assignment was to listen: listen to my new coworkers at the national office, and most importantly, listen to the heart and soul of DBSA—individuals living with depression and bipolar disorder. What I ended up hearing was an immense amount of courage, strength, and passion.

I traveled to DBSA Chapter Regional meetings to hear how DBSA national can better support our more than 600 peer support groups across the country. I had the pleasure of meeting with several parents and family members of individuals who live with a mood disorder—their expression of love and support were so apparent. I interacted with a number of psychiatrists and other clinicians who are dedicated to research and treatment options to ensure people with depression and bipolar disorder lead thriving lives. I gained an appreciation for how personal their work is to them and the people in their lives as well.

DBSA is built on a foundation of people who provide hope, help, support, and education every day, including volunteers who facilitate DBSA Support Groups; parents who moderate the online parent and caregiver community—Balanced Mind Parent Network; advocates and ambassadors who publicly share their experience as a way to influence systemic change; and a network of peer specialists who are trained to engage and relate to others facing similar challenges and experiences. Further, DBSA is fortunate to have partners with whom to collaborate and offer information and education.

In this annual report, *Making an Impact by Changing Lives*, you’ll see how we’re providing platforms to amplify the voice of individuals living with a mood disorder. Because it’s easier to listen when the volume is at a level that we can *all* hear—peers, chapter leaders, families, clinicians, donors, and partners. New conversations take place and real change happens.

Thank you for your continued commitment and support to the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance. I invite you to contact us with your experiences with our organization. We are listening.

*Michael Pollock*





## Peer Support

### Chapter Regional Meetings: Putting Listening into Action

While DBSA is a national organization, to fulfill our mission we must remain closely linked to our 200 local chapters and thousands of peers they serve.

To that end, in 2018, DBSA hosted a series of regional meetings across the country to hear from our chapters about their needs and the needs of their larger communities. The meetings, which were held in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York City, and Orlando, represented 42 Chapters.

The “listening” portions of the meetings were organized into several parts: identifying mental health concerns and needs facing individual communities, identifying what is most beneficial about each chapter’s relationship with DBSA, and identifying what participants would like to see more of from DBSA. DBSA leaders and participants also had an opportunity to network and share stories and lessons learned.

Chapters communicated that they appreciate tangible benefits that DBSA offers such as online and print materials like brochures and guides, while also valuing the connection to a strong national brand, which translates into website referrals.

A question and answer session with DBSA national leadership provided an opportunity for chapter participants to share their wants and needs and receive answers directly from the national office.

The most important take-away from the event was affirmation that DBSA is a vital resource for individuals living with depression and bipolar disorder. DBSA chapters are implementing critical peer support initiatives, and the DBSA national office is proud to work with them as a partner in this effort.

## 2018 Chapter Service Awards: Local Focus, National Recognition

Each year, DBSA recognizes chapters for the exceptional work they do 365 days a year in their local communities. Following are our most recent Chapter Service Award recipients:

### CHAPTER SERVICE AWARD DBSA SUCCASUNNA (NJ)

DBSA presents an award to a chapter for its services that benefit people living with mood disorders, families/friends, and the communities in which they operate. Winning chapters have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to one or more of the four primary functions of a DBSA chapter: community outreach, education, support, and advocacy.

### ROOKIE CHAPTER SERVICE AWARD DBSA BOWLING GREEN (KY)

DBSA presents an award to a chapter in its first year that has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to one or more of the four primary functions of a DBSA chapter: community outreach, education, support, and advocacy.

### STATE ORGANIZATION SERVICE AWARD DBSA TENNESSEE

DBSA presents an award to a state organization that has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to one or more of the three primary functions of a DBSA state organization: advocacy, recruitment of new chapters or support groups and existing chapter support and development.

### OUTSTANDING PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR AWARD BARB STEPHENS, LCSW OF DBSA KNOXVILLE (TN)

DBSA presents an award to a mental health professional who personifies clinical expertise, commitment, and compassion for those affected by mood disorders.

These award recipients have gone above and beyond to consistently provide hope, help, support, and education to peers in their communities.





“Your support groups have been a bonafide lifeline for me and my family. The information offered, and the safe space provided, where people really, truly, understand what I live through has kept me from falling to pieces.”

BMPN PARTICIPANT

## Balanced Mind Parent Network Offers Empathy, Support

DBSA strives to offer innovative and effective solutions to address the needs of parents whose children are affected by mood disorders. Across the country, parents have turned to DBSA's Balanced Mind Parent Network (BMPN) to learn from, find support from, and make connections with other families working towards wellness. This network of parents connects participants with other parents who understand firsthand the victories and setbacks involved in raising children who are living with mood disorders. BMPN provides them with caring, empathetic, knowledgeable partners who are available and willing to help. BMPN offers a sense of hope and clarity through an experience that can otherwise feel isolating, confusing, and mentally exhausting.

Founded nearly 30 years ago, BMPN grew out of the need for parents of children with mood disorders to have their own community for support and guidance. BMPN's co-founder Ruth Field's first message online was: "My son has just been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Is there anyone out there who understands?" Responses poured in from around the country, and Ruth recalls, "The sense of isolation I felt instantly lifted."

Today this same empathy, support, and sense of community makes BMPN a beacon of hope, offering

answers and connection to families raising children with mood disorders. Parents struggling alone can join a network of more than 350 community members, accessible anywhere, anytime. The online community has diverse groups to participate in, including focused areas of ages (very young to young adult) and topics such as residential treatment centers, substance use, and age transitions.

This rich community of resources helps empower families to collaborate powerfully and transparently with clinicians and educators. The goal: to inspire understanding that mood disorders among young people are very real, very complex and can benefit greatly from therapeutic alliances among families, clinicians, educators, and children themselves. With this knowledge, families can make informed decisions based on where their children are in development—armed with the crucial information that only parents and other caregivers can know about their own children.

## Young Adult Council Offers Support, Tools for Mental Wellness

The transition to adulthood is challenging for anyone. Transitioning from high school to the workforce or college, moving out on your own, finding first jobs, connecting with significant others—all of these life transitions can trigger anxiety and in some cases depression for young adults.

For those individuals living with a mood disorder, this time of life can be particularly challenging. DBSA supports young adults through these challenges and helps connect them to other young adults with similar experiences. Being diagnosed with a mood disorder as a young adult can feel like a life sentence. It's easy for these individuals to believe they'll always feel this way and won't be able to have the life they had hoped for.

DBSA's Young Adult Council (YAC) has outreach and specialized programming to help young adults as they transition from family support to independence. The Young Adult Council provides counsel on all matters relating to young adult programming, resources, education, and outreach.

The tools they provide include:

- **Wellness Resource Guide:** addresses the needs of youth affected by mood disorders. The guide urges members to have a "wellness plan" of people, places,

and things that reinforce positive mental wellness. It reminds the reader to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health concerns in themselves and others, and to practice self-care while recognizing what triggers can increase their risk for a bipolar or depressive episode. The guide encourages young adults to listen to peers, friends, and family with compassion, empathy, and respect, and to avoid being judgmental.

- **Specialized Care Poster:** helps to identify symptoms of mental health issues and reinforces mental wellness for young adults. The poster contains useful advice for supporting positive habits and addressing concerns, promotes mental health literacy and awareness, and calls attention to accessible resources for general and specialized care for individuals.

- **DBSA Website:** The Young Adult section of our website (DBSAAlliance.org/YAC) helps this group cope and thrive in their unique challenges, and connects them to others through the weekly Young Adult Online Support Group, where they can share experiences, discuss coping skills, and offer hope and support to one another. The site also offers local resources such as school and



community-based mental health professionals and sections with topical themes such as Maintaining Wellness in Interpersonal Relationships, Wellness on Campus, Workplace Wellness, among many other resources.

- **Podcast Series:** Hosted by members of the DBSA Young Adult Council, this series is focused on the unique challenges that young adults face living with a mood disorder. Podcasts are added throughout the year.
- **Ask a Peer:** YAC members offer their perspectives on questions posed by young adults about living with a mood disorder and answer questions in the "Ask a Young Adult Q&A". Visitors can read common questions and perhaps ask one of their own.

By meeting youth where they are and addressing issues most important to them, the Young Adult Council is an invaluable resource helping young people with mood disorders transition into adulthood.







“Being a Peer Specialist has allowed me to reconnect with other peers and to gain tools to add to my toolbox in my own recovery. It takes me back to when I was in the service and it has saved me from self-destruction.”

BRYAN, VA PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST

## Peer Support Specialists

### DBSA Helps Pass Bill to Bring Veterans Together

The shared experiences of military service and a commitment to overcoming mental health and substance use conditions create a bond like no other between Veteran peers. To ensure that quality Veteran peer support services are available to all who have served, since 2005 DBSA has trained Veterans who live with mood disorders to offer peer support services to other Veterans at Veterans Administration (VA) facilities and community-based organizations throughout the country.

For the past two years, DBSA has been advocating for the PEER Act national legislation authorizing the VA to employ additional peer specialists in a primary care setting. Thanks to the collective efforts of individuals and organizations who are committed to improving mental health care for Veterans, language from the PEER Act was included in a much more comprehensive VA bill that passed in both chambers of Congress. This bill, known as the MISSION Act, has been signed by the president.

This law better supports more than 1,200 peer specialists already working in the behavioral health settings at the

VA, and paves the way for strengthening the peer support model for everyone who lives with a mental health condition in the US.

Veterans now have access to a peer specialist, regardless of their VA health system entry point, at 50 locations across the country, including rural and underserved areas. There is also greater emphasis on employment of certified female Veteran peer specialists.

Following successful completion of this five-day course, and the post-course exam, our peer support specialists meet national VA training and certification requirements.

Veterans may be able to use G.I. Bill and/or vocational rehabilitation benefits to support their participation.

Part of DBSA’s advocacy effort focuses on improving the lives of Veterans living with mood disorders through increased access to quality mental health care. Peer Specialists’ advocacy can literally make the difference between life and death for Veterans and others affected by mood disorders.

## DBSA Peer Specialist Training: Put Your Passion for Peer Support to Work

Only someone who’s “been there” can truly empathize with others who are also living with a mood disorder. That’s why DBSA created Peer Specialist Training, a 40-hour course that teaches participants to share their lived experiences to support and give hope to others as they work towards their own personal wellness.

Peer Specialist Training Courses, which are facilitated by nationally recognized trainers, are comprehensive and highly interactive. They offer a solid foundation in recovery principles, peer-support intervention skills, and ethical practices. The curriculum incorporates small-group coaching sessions and can be used to meet many state and Veterans Administration requirements. In 2019, a new five-week course designed to provide peers with enhanced skills to work as a peer specialist was developed—a combination of independent, online, and classroom learning.

DBSA conducted training in VA facilities around the country and traveled to Long Beach, Ca., to train employees of the County Department of Mental Health. Our training partners include Lake County Veterans and Family Services and Volunteers of America. The goals: broadening the availability of quality peer support, promoting development of our peer workforce, and catalyzing health care transformation.

In 2018, DBSA trained 181 peer support specialists.

Do you have employees who need training and certification?

Is your agency having difficulty securing spots in existing training courses due to demand?

DBSA will work with you and your certifying body to bring contracted DBSA peer specialist training to your area. This program illustrates our mission to provide hope, help, support, and education to those affected by mood disorders.



“In going thru the Peer Specialist training in 2018, I was given a chance to learn more about living with being Bipolar in a positive manner. The training helped me and others to be more proactive and motivated towards a better understanding of how to help ourselves, our family, friends, and others in need. The training has offered me a greater sense of calmness, wellness, as well as given me an improved sense that I am an amazing person who deserves to live a full, happy, and complete life.”

SINUÉT Y





# Transforming the Definition of Wellness

One of the most critical elements of wellness is ensuring that individuals effectively manage their mental health. This is especially true for those living with mood disorders.

Mood disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder, affect approximately 21 million people—about 15% of the total U.S. population. DBSA advocates for understanding and identifying better treatment options for every individual living with a mood disorder.

In August 2018, DBSA and the Milken Institute administered a survey for peers and peer-supporters that focused on living with mood disorders. The survey was part of a multi-year patient-centered program to keep the patient's perspective of treatment and desired outcomes front and center. By the survey's completion, more than 6,400 participants had responded.

In November 2018, DBSA hosted a Patient-Focused Drug Development meeting for the FDA and industry partners. The forum brought together 130 peers and peer-supporters, eight medical product directors, along with panelists and peers in the audience and others via webcast, to share the challenges they have experienced due to limited treatment options.

Key findings from the survey served as the basis for the event discussion:

- 43% of the respondents said their overall health had worsened since they were diagnosed.
- 75% said their symptoms had a significant impact on their lives.
- 86% ranked “ability to be independent or act according to my own will,” as a wellness priority.

“This is the closest yet we’ve come to ensuring that those living with mood disorders are heard,” said CEO Michael Pollock. “DBSA is committed to continuing to keep a finger on the pulse of peers and peer-supporters.”

DBSA has summarized the survey results into a final Voice of the Patient report that will be presented to the FDA, and encourages peers and peer-supporters to continue to share their personal views on total wellness at [Advocacy@DBSAAlliance.org](mailto:Advocacy@DBSAAlliance.org).

## Scientific Advisory Board Brings Experts Together

DBSA is guided by a Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), which advises the Board of Directors in matters of science and medicine. The Board is comprised of 40 leading researchers and clinicians in the field of mood disorders.

DBSA publishes a wide variety of educational resources written by SAB members, peer-reviewed articles in medical journals, and surveys on issues of importance to individuals living with mood disorders and those treating these disorders.

In addition, SAB members review DBSA publications and programs for medical and scientific accuracy, participate in a question and answer feature in DBSA's monthly newsletter, author peer-reviewed manuscripts on behalf of the organization, serve as subject matter experts to national media outlets, and present the Gerald L. Klerman Awards—the highest honor that DBSA gives to members of the scientific community.

For more than 30 years, the SAB has been comprised of clinical and scientific experts who have made tremendous contributions in advancing DBSA's mission.

Survey respondents reported the following desired outcomes from their treatment:

**86%**  
Ability to Be Independent and Act According to My Own Will

**81%**  
Get Through the Day

**74%**  
Purpose in Life

**73%**  
Self-Acceptance





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Thank you to all DBSA supporters. We appreciate your commitment to our mission.



Statement of Financial Position

	2018	2017
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$630,935	\$917,212
Contributions receivable	402,777	75,624
Other assets	126,208	96,626
Investments	1,134,022	1,125,832
Property and equipment, net	120,635	89,783
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$2,414,577</b>	<b>\$2,305,077</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>		
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$167,004	\$142,320
Deferred rent	102,705	107,660
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>269,709</b>	<b>249,980</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		
Unrestricted	1,539,822	1,564,889
Donor restricted	605,046	490,208
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>2,144,868</b>	<b>2,055,097</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$2,414,577</b>	<b>\$2,305,077</b>

Statement of Activities

	2018	2017
<b>REVENUE</b>		
Contributions	\$2,231,534	\$1,842,982
Special event, net	55,112	-
Program fees	343,665	321,349
Net investment income	(30,177)	57,110
Donated goods and services and other	71,973	37,697
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>2,672,107</b>	<b>2,259,138</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Program expenses	1,778,264	1,644,775
<b>Supporting services expenses</b>		
Management and general	381,352	304,455
Fundraising	422,720	467,552
Total supporting services expenses	804,072	772,007
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>2,582,336</b>	<b>2,416,782</b>
<b>CHANGE IN NET ASSETS</b>	<b>89,771</b>	<b>(157,644)</b>
Net assets, beginning of year	2,055,097	2,212,741
Net assets, end of year	\$2,144,868	\$2,055,097



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**We've been there.  
We can help.**



**Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance**

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