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**Mental Health America of Lake County (MHALC) and Early Learning Partnership (ELP) Unite to Serve More Families Together**

**HAMMOND, IN** - After decades of serving Lake County, IN, families as two separate entities, Mental Health America of Lake County (MHALC) and Early Learning Partnership (ELP) will become one, with ELP becoming a division within Mental Health America of Lake County. This strategic alliance brings together two like-minded organizations focused on strengthening families through empowerment and education.

Under an agreement signed December 26, 2017, Early Learning Partnership, originally incorporated in 1999 under the *Parents as Teachers* name, will continue to offer programs and services as part of a division of MHALC. Mental Health America of Lake County celebrated 60 years of service in 2017 and has achieved significant growth over the past four years under new executive management and board governance.

“For the first time in the history of Mental Health America of Lake County, I am proud to say that we are growing at a remarkable and impactful pace,” said John J. Freyek, Board President and Vice President / Senior Relationship Manager for First Merchants Bank, “In a span of just four years, we have grown from a staff of 38 dedicated professionals to over 70 – and now, with the welcome addition of the ELP team, we will have an even greater number of dedicated professionals helping Northwest Indiana moms, dads and children. I couldn’t be more proud of the work both organizations have done to unite and serve more families, *together.*”

Mental Health America of Lake County is the largest home visiting parent education organization in Lake County. The alliance heightens the opportunity to provide evidence-based programming to ensure children are healthy, safe, and ready to learn.

As one unified organization, Mental Health America of Lake County (MHALC) will provide services through two core divisions: (1) Health & WellBeing, which is comprised of programs to empower families through prevention and education; and (2) Early Learning Partnership, which includes both MHALC and ELP programs that will continue to inspire, educate, and support parents as their child's first and most important teachers.

With like-minded goals, MHALC will provide synergies between all programs offered under the umbrella of MHALC, including many well-known programs in the community: Healthy Families, Empowering Teens as Parents (ETAP), Parents as Teachers (PAT), Ready to Soar, Infant Safe Sleep, Baby & Me Tobacco Free, Parent's Village and I'm Thumbbody Special. The new alliance strengthens both entities' ability to increase the depth and scope of services, reduce duplicative efforts and create greater administrative efficiencies. According to Freyek, the integration of ELP is about cost synergy, not cost savings – noting that the core goal of the alliance is growth as MHALC continues to thoughtfully and strategically find ways to expand its programs and services in the market. Echoing his sentiments was Renae Vania-Tomczak, CEO of Mental Health America of Lake County.

“We are beyond excited about our new partnership with ELP,” said Vania-Tomczak, “Coming together in this way puts us in the best possible position to deliver on our core mission to transform our community through proven programs that educate, empower, and strengthen the way families function for life. I couldn't be happier to add our partners in ELP to our sensational team of professionals at Mental Health America of Lake County. We have a tremendous opportunity to combine resources and leverage the relationships of both

organizations to make an undeniable impact on the lives of children and families in Northwest Indiana.”

Under the new agreement, all ELP staff members have been retained as employees of Mental Health America of Lake County, creating a continuum of service and employment. According to Vania-Tomczak, a full integration affords employees from both groups the opportunity to learn and grow *with* one another. “We will create training synergies that benefit all staff members and greatly impact the communities we serve,” said Vania-Tomczak, “This is truly a moment of growth as we bring two incredible teams together to blanket the entire county with support.”

Vania-Tomczak has served as MHALC’s President & CEO since 2013 and will continue in this role. She has more than 15 years of executive level non-profit leadership experience and 10 years of entrepreneurial business experience, as well as 5 years as an independent consultant to non-profit organizations. She is a co-founder of the Indiana Mental Health America Executive Roundtable and was recently named a 2017 Northwest Indiana Influential Woman, Nonprofit.

Adding to its leadership team, former ELP Executive Director Kimberly Smith will now serve as Vice President, Operations of MHALC. Smith served as Executive Director of ELP for 17 years and is a certified *Parents as Teachers* National Center Training Facilitator. Rounding out the MHALC management team is Victor Garcia, who has transitioned to the new role of Vice President, Strategic Partnerships for MHALC and Debbie Price, Vice President, Finance and Human Resources. Garcia formerly served as Division Director for the March of Dimes and has been with MHALC since 2015 – his move to Strategic Partnerships leverages his vast experience in resource and program development for the organization. Price has served as the organization’s finance and HR professional since 2007 and worked as Finance Director of KV Works, Inc., for 10 years prior to joining MHALC.

Former ELP Board President Will Glaros commended the strategic alliance of both organizations, stating, “We are creating a new entity greater than the sum of its parts – through

partnership and collaboration, we are bringing together a full spectrum of talents to extend our mission and drive change that will affect generations to come for Northwest Indiana; it's an amazing opportunity for the residents of this great region, and one I am proud to help move forward." Glaros, Managing Partner at Meyers Glaros Group, is a lifelong resident and business owner in Northwest Indiana and has assumed the position of Board Director Emeritus for Mental Health America of Lake County.

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