

The Pipeline

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Spring 2008

Upcoming Events

GMHCN Board Meetings

Macon, GA
July 10, 2008

Decatur, GA
May 14, 2008

St. Simon's Island, GA
August 18, 2008

Pine Mountain, GA
November 6 and 7, 2008

GMHCN

Walking in Recovery Fundraiser
Decatur, GA
May 13, 2008

Trauma Informed Peer Support
Training

GMHCN
June 2-4, 2008

USPRA

33rd Annual Conference
Metro-Chicago, IL
June 16-19, 2008

CPS Training

Norcross, GA
July 14-18, 21-24, 2008
St. Simon's Island, GA
Sept. 22-26, Sept. 29-Oct. 2, 2008

GMHCN 17th Annual Conference

A Life of Our Own:
Housing, Work, Transportation,
Education & Wellness
St. Simon's Island, GA
August 19-21, 2008

DBSA 2008 National Conference

"The Power of Peers"
Norfolk, VA
September 10-14, 2008

Consumer Council Memorial
Service

Central State Hospital
Milledgeville, GA
October 5, 2008

Alternatives 2008

Adams Mark Hotel
Buffalo, NY
Oct. 29-Nov. 2, 2008

Georgia Peer Support Institute

St. Simon's Island, GA
November 12-14, 2008

Living with Mental Illness and Stigma

By Keiwanta Maims

In society, many people are institutionalized, broken, taken advantage of and discriminated against because of race, gender, disability or religion. Living with a mental illness carries a stigma. Individuals with mental illness are misdiagnosed and labeled as outcasts in their families and communities. In America, we are entitled to our own opinions about how we should be treated, and these opinions should be respected when we seek help. Spouses, families and others around us try to help, and we appreciate their support. But we are all human beings with beliefs, values and feelings. We deserve respect and can usually make decisions ourselves. Support us and understand us. We are not children and do not need to be treated as such.

The media gives the impression that violent crimes are committed because of mental illness, and that those who receive mental health treatment are dangerous. Many, like myself, are discouraged and stigmatized against. We must assert our rights as individuals and consumers. I urge you to stand for those with mental illness, speak out and be informed.

Motherhood; the change of all changes

by Shannon Brown

Now that I'm a mom to a beautiful little girl and soon to have a wonderful baby boy, my fight against stigma has changed. I see the world around my child; this critical as well as crucial environment at times will be a contributing factor in how my two children will grow up. I am even more motivated to write, talk, and teach all who will listen; mental illness is not contagious, but stigma can be.

As a person with mental illness, I am vigilant for change in the prejudice that society both produces and sometimes forces upon the sponge-like minds of children. I wonder at times what conversations will be like with my children. When they are older, what will their friends or friends' family say? I have made my choice; I will not hop on a soap box, but I will continue to educate. In doing so, I encourage other mothers as well as fathers to be part of the P.T.A., as I plan to, just as I would have anyway but in a more devoted way. Having an affliction doesn't mean that I have to allow the ignorance of others to dictate how I choose to raise my children. It need not have an affect on my wanting to encourage change. I hope and pray that the same goes for those who read and contribute to The Pipeline; speak out! People will listen. Sometimes it only takes a small voice. Sometimes many voices are strong together. We can make an impact. Good luck and good choices. As the impending election approaches, reach out to both your candidates and delegates.

Pipeline Contest Winners

This issue contains several Pipeline Contest winners. All embody the principles of hope, empowerment and recovery. First place goes to Volly Nelson for "My Recovery Story". Other winners include "Living with Mental Illness and Stigma" by Keiwanta Maims, "Motherhood, the change of all changes" by Shannon Brown, "Two poems" by Vaik Campbell, and "Friends" by Linda S. Digby. Although we will not be running the contest next issue, we welcome contributions and occasionally will pay for articles, art or poems if requested. I hope you enjoy the contributions as much as I did. —Randy Tucker, Pipeline

2008 PERMES Survey Completed

Once again the PERMES project exceeded our expectations. Almost 80 consumers of Mental Health and/or Addictive Disease services approached and encouraged other consumers to give their honest opinions about the MH/AD services they received in the last year. We completed the project in record time and well within our budget. Region 3 (Metro) was the first to finish, but all regions finished ahead of schedule and got more surveys than anticipated. Congratulations to all Team Leaders and Surveyors for a job well done!

Recovery

S Z Y S N I M A T I V M D C E
 F E B T J B D R D N Y A T I R
 M U I E I O X S A V N R H S U
 X A B V C R E C Y C O T E U T
 S N S T O I A R E S A C R M A
 D T O S B M T H Y L I M A F N
 N R R B A E F E C Y C H P C S
 E R O A O G X E T A N H Y Y Y
 I H O P V E E I W T S D O O F
 R L A M R E N A C T I V I S M
 F T Y C U U L C R I B W D V P
 O D I N M H W E M T O E O E T
 A S L M P E T S A U O A E R J
 E H O U S I N G R D K L M Y K
 B C P R A Y E R O E S F U M P

ACTIVISM	ADVOCACY	ART
ATTITUDE	BOOKS	CHARITY
COMMUNITY	DANCE	DOCTOR
EXERCISE	FAMILY	FOODS
FRIENDS	HOBBIES	HOUSING
HUMOR	MASSAGE	MOVIES
MUSIC	NATURE	PETS
POETRY	PRAYER	SLEEP
THERAPY	TRAVEL	VITAMINS

Two Poems by Tiia Vaike Campbell

Only passersby will know
 You are you and I am me.
 They can never see that you and I are one.

As winter arrives, so does the cold snow.
 Ice everywhere sparkling in the sunshine,
 Dripping in the air as the sun goes down on sleepless towns.
 Answer to no one as morning shapes the earth.
 Look to the mountains from a distance;
 Beneath still waters lies deep briar near the river's edge.
 Take your basket, bonnet and blankets
 And we'll watch the clouds roll in.

Friends by Linda S. Digby, CPS

May your days be filled with Roses,
 May your life be filled with Joy,
 When a sparrow flies over your Husetop,
 May your heart look Above.
 May you have the holy peace of a pure white Dove.
 When a butterfly flies around your Garden near,
 May you have a lifelong Journey,
 Filled with Joy and Cheer.
 And when you hear a Redbird
 Whistling you a Tune,
 May you be in good Health,
 Very, very soon.

My Recovery Story By Volly L. Nelson

I was born blind. I lost my light perception at 17. A lot of people say I can't advocate for myself, because I have a mental illness; I say you can, if you put your mind to it and you really try and motivate yourself to do it; nobody is going to advocate for you.

My recovery story begins in 1996. When I first started Pineland Mental Health, I had no idea that I had a mental health diagnosis. I thought that I was normal just like everyone else. However, from 1991-1996 I was sexually abused during the time I lived in a state school for the blind. And at the age of 18 I was taken away from the school. I then enrolled into Pineland Mental Health. While I was there, a strange thing began to happen; I found out that I had a mental health diagnosis, known as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Once I found that out, I began to have suicidal thoughts and depression. All that led to more and more difficult problems for me to deal with. I then knew that it was time for me to find a church somewhere. I really enjoyed going to South Side Church of Christ in Macon. It really lifted my spirits up. I left Macon in 1996 and went to public school. I made a lot of friends. However, when I finished high school, I knew I had to find a job somewhere, but this was difficult. After 8 years, I finally graduated from Pineland Mental Health. I was able to handle it for about 4 years, but after that I relapsed. I was admitted to Georgia Regional Hospital in Savannah Georgia, stayed there for about a week and was released. Then I enrolled back into my local psychiatric rehabilitation services (PSR). When I first started day treatment it was not easy. I was new, and I did not know very much about the mental health system. When I started peer support though in 1999, all that suddenly changed. "It's as if I were walking on the moon for the first time."

I used to get angry all the time. I would walk off when I was mad. But now I just verbalize my anger. A Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) worked with me on that, and became a very good friend of mine. That pretty much sums up my recovery story; I'm happy to say that I'm still in recovery.

I recently started a volunteer job as a Braille teacher, teaching a blind person who did not know Braille. I'm thankful for my recovery. "I am truly a walking miracle."

Peer Support and Wellness Center



444 Sycamore Drive, Decatur, GA 30030

Open Tuesday-Saturday 10am-6pm

www.gmhc.org/wellnesscenter (404) 371-1414

A Project of the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network

WarmLine 888-945-1414 Peer support over the phone is now offered twenty-four hours a day for resources and support for anyone who calls. It is not a crisis or emergency service, you speak with peers who provide empathetic listening and conversation.

What is the Alternative?

For all of us at the Peer Support and Wellness Center, it is a kind of cocoon for caterpillars who want to butterfly out into the community and spread our wings. Peers are all healthy relationship fledglings who want a safe haven to develop skills that will build a better world for everyone.

How can we do this? It's our hope to learn a whole new way of building relationships. We want this because we know first hand that addiction and depression and trauma are the result of big feelings between people that have made a disconnect. In the mental health world this is called crisis. In the world of peer support, however this "crisis" is known as an opportunity for fundamental change. That is change in the ways we perceive others, ourselves and even reality itself.

For this hope to be realized we need tools. To build community there must be tools to work with. At the Peer Support and Wellness Center we have the tool of Intentional Peer Support, which is a new way of communicating that frees us from wanting to take refuge in addictive behaviors. As we negotiate our boundaries and learn to take care of the relationship and not the person we learn to nurture, for the first time, a healthy dynamic between equal partners.

It is our relationship to each other that is our springboard into the larger community. Learning as we grow up with one another, we present an alternative to the isolation of the "hospital"

Tuesday

1:00-2:00

*Trauma Informed
Peer Support*

David Kanar, CPS

2:00-3:00

Double Trouble

Gail Herrschaft, CPS

4:00-5:00

*Writers/Creativity
Group*

Becca Morales, CPS

Wednesday

1:00-2:00

*Computer Skills
Training*

Josh Lowry, CPS

2:00-3:00

Talking the Taboo

Maureen Mayer, CPS

3:00-6:00

CPS Study Group

Future CPSs

Thursday

1:00-3:00

*Social Group
Activities*

Waltina Watson, CPS

3:00-4:00

Fabulous Life

Dionne Tillis, CPS

4:00-5:00

Listen To Me

Dionne Tillis, CPS

Friday

1:00-2:00

*Computer Skills
Training*

Josh Lowry, CPS

2:00-3:00

WRAP planning

Charles Willis, CPS

3:00-6:00

*Cooking/Baking/
Nutrition*

Becca Morales, CPS

& Donna Sylva, CPS

Saturday

11:00-12:00

*Horticulture
Therapy*

Terry G.

1:00-2:00

Tai Chi

Jayne Lynch, CPS

2:00-3:00

Creative Café

Linda Neiheisel, CPS

3:00-4:00

*Negotiating Peer
Relationships*

Linda Neiheisel, CPS

4:00-5:00

AromaTherapy

Becca Morales, CPS

5:00-6:00

Sacred Space

Jayne Lynch, CPS

environment where we are totally invalidated and at best physically controlled by drugs and locked doors.

As an alternative to psychiatric hospitalization, we offer respite in the form of three beds that peers can use for times when they need to feel safe in a place where they can know that they will be free from judgment and labeling.

Safety can be redefined at the Peer Support and Wellness Center as a commitment to sit with the discomfort of challenge as we break our old patterns and bear the pain of awareness. Thankfully, we do not have to do this alone.

We hold each other up and have each others backs as we struggle to recover our dignity from a system that dehumanized us all in the name of "normalization." And I guess its about time for us to heal ourselves and purge our heavy load of systemic shame that rears its ugly head in the form of stigma.

Our vision of the Peer Support and Wellness Center is a place to go out from, not to come into. It is a place where healthy habits and mindsets trickle out into the world as we learn together.

All things considered, we are becoming a family. Why is something as simple as that such a radical alternative? We will never know.

—Linda Neiheisel, CPS

**Georgia Mental Health
Consumer Network**
246 Sycamore Street, Suite 260
Decatur, Georgia 30030
(Return Service Requested)

Spring 2008

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"VoteHealthcare.org" Bus

Vote Healthcare.org Bus comes to GMHCN Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network had the honor of kicking off (first day they would drive the bus) the "Pledge to Vote Healthcare" bus mission to gather pledges and register voters to remind voters and legislators about the importance of healthcare as an election year issue. The bus will travel across several states, and interested people can ride along as they spread the word. The bus is a mobile information center, and 14 GMHCN members and staff heard an excellent presentation by Kathie McClure. She reminded us that over half of all bankruptcy is caused by medical debt and that we are paying more for services and insurance than ever before. They pointed out that the CEO of Merck Pharmaceuticals made almost 20 million dollars and Merck stock rose 30% while consumer costs skyrocketed last year. Many people can't afford health care insurance and have to make choices each month whether to buy food or necessary medications. If you share this concern, you can join the bandwagon, speak up about your issues, learn more about healthcare issues or take a pledge to vote healthcare by contacting www.votehealthcare.org, or writing to them at P.O. Box 95128, Atlanta, GA, 30347.

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GMHCN Job Announcements

Statewide Double Trouble in Recovery is hiring facilitators to work in the areas served by 5 of the 7 state regional hospitals (Rome, Columbus, Savannah, Augusta and Thomasville). The positions are part-time and pay \$10.00/hour. Qualified applicants must be in recovery from addictive disease and mental illness diagnoses (preference will be given to CPSs), working an active 12 step program, substance free for 2 or more years, have reliable transportation, be self-motivated, willing to work flexible hours, and can pass a criminal background check. Interested parties need to send a letter of interest and a resume to Gena Brock, CPS, Statewide DTR Coordinator, Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, 246 Sycamore Street, Suite 260, Decatur, GA 30030 or fax to 404-687-0772 or email to brockgena53@yahoo.com. Any questions please call Gena at 800-297-6146 or 404-723-6018.

The Peer Mentoring Project is seeking self-identified consumers of mental health services to fill several part-time positions throughout the state of Georgia as Peer Mentors. This is an excellent opportunity to assist consumers who are transitioning from a Georgia regional Hospital to living self-directed lives of hope and purpose in communities of their choice. Currently, we have one position available in each of the following locations: Augusta, Savannah, and Thomasville. Potential candidates will need to work flexible schedules, work independently, have a reliable form of personal transportation, and pass a criminal background check. The Peer Mentor position is part-time (20 hours/week) at \$10/hour. Preference will be given to Certified Peer Specialists. Submit letters of interest and resumes to David Kanar at the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, 246 Sycamore St., Suite 260, Decatur, GA 30030, or email to peermentoring@gmhcn.org, or fax to 404-687-0772. For further information please contact David Kanar at 1-800-297-6146 or 404-271-2208.