

The Pipeline

Published 4 times per year by the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network

Volume 3

Upcoming Events

GMHCN Board Meetings
Macon, GA
July 14, 2011
St. Simon's Island, GA
August 22, 2011
Helen, GA
November 9 - 11, 2011

CPS Training
Simpsonwood Lodge
Norcross, GA
August 8 - 18, 2011
Epworth by the Sea
St. Simon's Island, GA
October 17 - 27, 2011

Georgia Peer Support Institute
Epworth by the Sea
St. Simon's Island, GA
November 15 - 17, 2011

Georgia Mental Health
Consumer Network
20th Annual Conference
"Celebrating 20 Years
Of Recovery"
Epworth by the Sea
St. Simon's Island, GA
August 23 - 25, 2011

National Association for Rights
Protection and Advocacy
2011 Annual Conference
"Turning Crisis Into
Opportunities"
Embassy Suites Philadelphia-
Airport
Philadelphia, PA
September 7 - 11, 2011

Alternatives 2011
"Creating Our Own
Communities of Wellness and
Recovery"
Caribe Royale Hotel
Orlando, FL
October 26 - 30, 2011



Cartersville PSWRC (Bartow County)

GMHCN to Open 2 New Peer Support and Wellness Respite Centers

Three and a half years after the first Peer Support and Wellness Center in Decatur Georgia, two new centers are scheduled to

open on June 30, 2011. The respite and wellness center, based on respect and acceptance, has been shown to be a very effective community support, and has allowed many consumers to avoid hospital placements. The new center just outside Cleveland, Georgia (White County) features a large house on an expansive tract and has a huge utility building suitable for many activities. It has a nice garden, and beautiful grounds. In a mountain valley between Helen and Dahlonega, it offers a natural surrounding and is close to many scenic trout streams and waterfalls. The second center is in downtown Cartersville (Bartow County), which is convenient to all manner of community resources. Directors have been hired and staff is being trained. Jayme Lynch (Director of the Decatur PSWC) will offer ongoing support and mentoring as these two new facilities are developed.

Gardening Relieves Stress and Builds Community Partnerships

(Reprinted from the Decatur Dispatch)

If stress and anxiety are regular visitors to your world, then it may be time to head out into the garden for some natural therapy. Any seasoned gardener will tell you that gardening makes you feel better, and the good news is that gardening has been shown to be beneficial to your mental health. DeKalb Community Service Board's Crossroads Peer Support Program has partnered with the Kirkwood Senior Center to plant a community garden. Caring for the garden and harvesting organic vegetables, fruits and herbs is a stress reducing activity for both staff and clients. Crossroads is a behavioral health program that facilitates re-entry into the work force for DeKalb citizens seeking competitive employment. Program Director Debra Chandler says the program is always looking for community groups to partner with and local businesses who are seeking motivated and dedicated employees. For more information, contact Debra at 404-370-7460 or visit www.dekcsb.org.



LIFELINK provides free phone services to Low Income Families

The FCC's Low Income Program of the Universal Service Fund, which is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), is designed to ensure that quality telecommunications services are available to low-income customers at just, reasonable, and affordable rates. Lifeline support reduces eligible low-income consumers' monthly charges for basic telephone service. Thanks to SafeLink, Lifeline support is now available for wireless phones. Traditionally, the Lifeline program was only available as a discount on a consumer's landline telephone bill. SafeLink Wireless was created by TracFone Wireless, Inc. when the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently approved the company to offer Lifeline -- a public assistance program that ensures telephone service is available and affordable for low-income subscribers. SafeLink Wireless applies the Universal Service Fund subsidy to an allotment of free airtime minutes and TracFone provides the wireless handset at the company's expense. Instead of receiving a subsidized monthly telephone bill for Lifeline service, SafeLink converts the total amount of discounted service into minutes each month for one year. The cell phone offers in-demand features: voicemail, text, three-way calling, call waiting, caller ID and access to 911. SafeLink phones are not paid for by taxpayers or the federal government. TracFone Wireless pays for the phones and also the cost of promoting its SafeLink program to make sure that eligible consumers know about the program. The process to qualify for Lifeline Service depends on the State you live in. In general, **you may qualify IF...** You already participate in other State or Federal assistance program such as Federal Public Housing Assistance, Food Stamps and Medicaid. **OR** Your total household income is at or below of the poverty guidelines set by your State and/or the Federal Government. **AND** No one in your household currently receives Lifeline Service through another phone carrier. You must have a valid United States Postal Address that can receive mail from the US Post Office. P.O. Boxes cannot be accepted. In addition to meeting the guidelines above you will also be required to provide proof of your participation in an assistance program, or proof of your income level. Miriam Urizar Rittmeyer, PhD, MPH, Executive Director Community Health Mission, 310 Eisenhower Dr. Bldg. #5, Savannah GA 31406 Phone (912) 692-1451

Submissions wanted for Global Mental Health Empowerment Handbook

MFI is creating a Handbook that encourages the voice of people diagnosed with psychiatric and other mental disabilities. Submissions are welcomed from anywhere, especially from poor and developing countries. The Handbook seeks to empower mental health system users, consumers and survivors so that they may be heard more effectively by their communities, care providers, and policy makers. The MFI Handbook, with support from the international development organization CBM, also aims to inspire the reader to become involved in organizing, taking ownership of their organizations and using the framework of the disability movement MFI will print thousands of copies of the Handbook in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Arabic, and accessible formats. "MFI needs your help putting a human face to our movement," said Heather Marek, Communications Specialist with MindFreedom International who is working on the Handbook. "This is a unique opportunity to have your story touch and inspire people around the globe! We cannot guarantee that any work will be published, but we appreciate the uniqueness and creativity in our movement, and will do our best to share your work." "The Handbook will use examples of leaders taking action, holding support groups, street marches, and artistic and cultural activities," said Heather. "We want to show the diverse range of backgrounds, beliefs, challenges and successes of people with mental disability labels around the world, especially from developing countries. Mental health consumers and psychiatric survivors in poor nations can -- and do -- speak for themselves!" Submissions can take a variety of forms, so long as they can be used for print. MFI is looking for works that tell a story about people's experience with the mental health system, including overcoming human rights violations. Some examples are: personal true stories of recovery and/or activism, drawings, paintings, sketches, photos with captions and poetry. Creators whose submissions are used in the Handbook will receive a \$50 (US) stipend. MFI will give credit to all authors and artists by sharing their name, unless otherwise instructed. Works that are not used in the Handbook may still appear on the MindFreedom International website, journal, and in other publications, so there is a good chance that other work will be published beyond the Handbook, and archived. Only those published in the Handbook qualify for a stipend. Deadline is August 1, 2011. MindFreedom International, PO Box 11284, Eugene, OR 97404-34 or email at Global@MindFreedom.org.

Be a Laughter Yoga Leader! Laughter Certification Training offered July 16-17

The last issue of the Pipeline sparked much interest in Laughter Therapy. Debbie Ellison is Director of Laughter for Wellness; Laughter Coach; Certified Laughter Yoga Leader/Teacher trained by Dr. Madan Kataria, founder of Laughter Yoga; and published writer and editor. She leads laughter clubs, classes, trainings, and presentations on laughter, joyfulness, stress reduction, and healing writing for individuals, organizations, and corporations. She is offering this workshop to certify other individuals to conduct laughter groups. Individuals will learn effective leadership of laughter groups, wellness aspects of Laughter Yoga, how to use and teach laughter as a coping and life skill, how to start a laughter club and other things, including how to make money with Laughter Yoga, and promotion and marketing of laughter services. Cost of this workshop is \$295.00. You can contact Debbie at 770-843-0940 LaughterForWellness@gmail.com.

Mental Health Benefits of Laughter

Laughter for Wellness is a whole-health benefit, extremely therapeutic for depression and other mental illnesses. Laughter reduces depression, anxiety, and negative thoughts and feelings, and allows practitioners to feel more joyful, relaxed, peaceful, and productive. Clinical research shows that laughter lowers the level of stress hormones (epinephrine, cortisol, etc.) in the blood, increases hormones and neuro-peptides related to positive feelings, decreases negative thoughts and feelings, and helps people stay socially connected. Laughter enhances happiness, connection with others, forgiveness, and compassion, fostering a positive and hopeful attitude. Laughter for Wellness teaches practical techniques to deal with the stress of daily life and to use laughter as a coping skill. Many people who suffer from mental illnesses are unable to express their feelings and emotions in a healthy way. Laughter is cathartic and helps people balance and release their blocked emotions in a non-violent way. One of the most painful aspects of depression is the loss of the ability to laugh, and with it the ability to be close to others with whom one can confide his/her emotions. A playful approach to everyday things is a key factor in staying healthy. Laughter for Wellness helps people with depression, anxiety, and chronic stress-related mental and physical illnesses to reduce fear, anxiety, loneliness, and isolation, allowing them to lead more positive, productive, and joyful lives.

What is Stigma? By Kim M.

(Edited from Dalton Peer Support "Little Boxes of Recovery")

Stigma means a mark of disgrace, a spot or scar on the skin, or an identifying mark signifying a defect or inferiority. We know that just being different has and can lead to stigma. People with mental illness are stigmatized into believing that they are a stain or spot on humanity, just because other people don't understand them.

Through the years we have all heard horror stories about total disregard for human life because of perceived differences. Africans, Native Americans and Jews were killed and enslaved for being different. Even people with mental illnesses have been feared and cast away for being different and misunderstood. At a mental hospital it was discovered that thousands of graves were unnamed and unable to be identified by name. I can't imagine what it would be like to die stripped of my identity! Locked away and discarded like trash, it is awful that their families did not know or care about whatever happened to them. Even today some people think that mental patients are all supposed to be locked away—that they are murderers, crazy or less intelligent than other people.

I went to spend the night with someone several years ago and decided to tell them of my mental health issues. She responded "I guess that means we have to hide all the knives in the house!" I replied "I didn't say I was dangerous." Then my Mom told me I couldn't have a mental illness because I was smart. Needless to say, that came as a shock to me. As caring, kind, clever and smart as she is, how could she think that? That is when it dawned on me how serious the stigma was that we still face.

The truth is that we do not have childlike minds; we are not less intelligent than others, and we cannot be dismissed as "crazy". Some of us take medicine, just like people with physical problems. Yet we generally do not make fun of people with physical conditions. They take medicine and adapt their lifestyles to make sure they are as healthy as they can be; so do we. Some people still don't know that we are normal people, but with problems we have to take care of. Just like physical problems, if one lets them go they often get worse and worse.

We are professionals, artists, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts and hold all sorts of meaningful jobs. We are from every walk of life. Mental illness does not discriminate against race, religion, income, intelligence, location or anything else for that matter. We must not allow people to pretend that we are inferior because of our experiences. It's time to stand up and say we will not be treated unfairly anymore.

Don't treat me like I am Crazy

Submitted by Charles W.

If you're overly excited, you're happy;
If I'm overly excited, I'm manic.

If you imagine the phone ringing, you're stressed out;
If I imagine the phone ringing, I'm psychotic.

If you're crying and sleeping all day, you're sad and need time out;
If I'm crying and sleeping all day, I'm depressed and need to get up.

If you're afraid to leave your house at night, you're cautious;
If I'm afraid to leave my house at night, I'm paranoid.

If you speak your mind and express your opinions, you're assertive;
If I speak my mind and express my opinions, I'm aggressive.

If you don't like something and say so, you're being honest;
If I don't like something and say so, I'm being difficult.

If you get angry, you're considered upset;
If I get angry, I'm considered dangerous.

If you over-react to something, you're sensitive;
If I over-react to something, I'm out of control.

If you don't want to be around others, you're taking care of yourself;
If I don't want to be around others, I'm isolating myself and avoiding.

If you talk to strangers, you're being friendly;
If I talk to strangers, I'm being inappropriate.

If you are not told to take a pill or be hospitalized for these things, you are being respected;
If you are told to take a pill or live a life of repeated hospitalization, welcome to my world.

"Isn't it a pity how we break each other's hearts and cause each other pain? Some things take so long, but how do I explain, when not too many people can see we are all the same?" ---George Harrison

Part of my experience over thirty years

by John R.

I wanted to be/feel innocent; you made me be/feel like a Criminal.

I wanted to be/feel proud; you wanted me to feel/be ashamed.

I wanted to feel my sex drive was natural; you wanted me to feel/be a sexual deviant.

I wanted to have the right to start my family; you made me feel/be like I was breaking up the family.

I wanted to find love; you made me feel the love I wanted was not real or natural.

I wanted to feel that God loved me like everyone else; you wanted me to feel like there was no way God loved me unless I changed my orientation and practiced your beliefs.

I wanted to believe Jesus was not rich and said nothing about gays; you wanted me to feel that the savior condemned homosexuality.

I wanted to have the same rights as you; you wanted me to feel I wanted "special rights".

I wanted to live a normal life; you made it harder for the LGBT community by spreading untruths and fear about us.

I know this country is moving forward on civil rights. Marriage equality will be decided by the Supreme Court in a few years. If people can not admit they could be wrong and have no remorse about fighting us, I wonder about their humanity.

Half of life is within you but the other half is our environment, with all its laws and attitudes.

Condemning anyone as a group makes it harder for them to achieve recovery. Learning to accept others, as they are, helps everyone.

Georgia Mental Health

Consumer Network

246 Sycamore Street, Suite 260
Decatur, Georgia 30030

Volume 3

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Decatur, GA
Permit No. 344

(Return Service Requested)

The Pipeline is funded by
DBHDD and is
published 4 times a year by the
Georgia Mental Health
Consumer Network
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Decatur, Georgia 30030
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We'll all miss Bennie Parker

The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, Georgia Certified Peer Specialists, and New Horizons Behavioral Health Services mourn the death of our beloved peer, friend, mentor, and colleague Bennie Parker of Columbus, Georgia. Bennie was an active member of our community as a peer, political activist, community leader, faithful family member, outstanding spiritual leader and church member. He advocated tirelessly in Georgia to ensure inclusion for each and every one living with a mental health diagnosis. Bennie was known to secure scholarships and transportation so that peers could attend Mental Health Day at the Capitol, the NAMI Walk, and the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network's Annual Consumer Conference. His big heart, big smile and soft spoken words seemed to humble his presence in any audience. Bennie fought hard to bring about change in our community to support the process of recovery for those he supported. He will be missed and appreciated for his concern for others and his zeal in sharing with others his recovery story despite his personal health struggle. The recovery community of Georgia is better off today because of Benny's tremendous gifts of love and support. It is with heavy heart and fond memories of Benny Parker that I share this information with you. ---Charles B. Willis, CPS

Consumer Satisfaction Survey Another Success!

The 2011 CSS surveying season started on Friday, March 13 and ended on June 13, 2011, though most teams finished their jobs well ahead of this time. Each year a group of consumers (with lived experience of mental health and/or addictive disease services) travels to treatment and peer support sites all over the state, answering questions and encouraging other consumers to fill out written surveys. Over 5400 surveys were completed this year from almost all providers of DBHDD funded services. Team Leaders and surveyors were particularly effective at developing good relationships with the providers and most consumers were eager to give their opinions of the services they received. Having a voice about our experiences with the mental health system is vitally important to all of us. Reports indicate that almost all got along well with their team members and enjoyed the experience. You have reason to be proud. Congratulations on a job well done! ---Randy Tucker, 2011 CSS Director

Peer Mentor Position Available

The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network is seeking a self-identified consumer of mental health services to fill a part-time position in the state of Georgia as a Peer Mentor. This is an excellent opportunity to assist consumers who are transitioning from the East Central Regional Hospital to living self-directed lives of hope and purpose in communities of their choice. Currently, we have one position available in the following location: Augusta, GA. Potential candidate will need to work a flexible schedule and independently, have a reliable form of personal transportation, and pass a criminal background check. The Peer Mentor position is part-time (20 hours/week) pays \$10/hour. Preference will be given to Certified Peer Specialists. If interested, please submit a letter of interest and resume to Gena Brock, CPS at the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, 246 Sycamore Street, Suite 260, Decatur, GA 30030, or email to peermentoring@gmhc.org, or fax to 404-687-0772. For further information please contact Gena Brock, CPS, Statewide Peer Mentoring Project Coordinator at 1-800-297-6146 or 404-723-6018.