

# The Pipeline

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Winter/Spring 2007

## Upcoming Events

GMHCN Board Meetings  
Decatur, GA  
May 9, 2007  
Macon, GA  
July 12, 2007  
St. Simon's Island, GA  
August 20, 2007  
Pine Mountain, GA  
November 1, 2007

Georgia Peer Support Institute  
Unicoi State Park  
April 10- 12, 2007

Consumer Council Meeting  
MHDDAD Region 3 Office  
Tucker, GA  
April 25, 2007

Walking in Recovery  
GMHCN Fundraiser  
Decatur, GA  
May 8, 2007

Rosyalynn Carter GA MH Forum  
Carter Center  
May 17 & 18, 2007

USPRA 32nd Annual Conference  
Orlando, FL  
May 21-24, 2007

Peer to Peer Homeless Training  
Macon, GA  
June 5-7, 2007

CPS Training  
Epworth by the Sea  
St. Simon's Island, GA  
Aug. 6-10 and 13-16, 2007;  
Oct. 22-26 and Oct. 29-Nov. 1, 2007

GMHCN 16th Annual Conference  
Epworth by the Sea  
St. Simon's Island, GA  
August 21, 22 & 23, 2007

Alternatives 2007  
St. Louis, Missouri  
October 10-14, 2007

GAPSRs Conference  
Jekyll Island, GA  
October 10-12, 2007

## March Comes in Like a Lion, Nearly kills CPS

On March 1, I was hit severely by a tornado. I was in the kitchen ironing a shirt for the next day when I saw a bulletin on the news about dangerous weather in Stewart county and moving towards Sumter county. I was looking at the bit about the storm being in the Sumter county area when I thought I heard what appeared to be a very very loud motor accompanied with high-powered wind. I turned my tv on mute and all of a sudden the walls on the east side of the house started shaking. Everything went pitch dark, and the wall exploded and the pressure knocked me across the living room, and I tried to lay on the floor and grab a hold of anything I could. Everything started flying through the living room and I started getting banged around badly. All of a sudden the WHOLE HOUSE started to ascend and twirl because the tornado had lifted my house. The floor collapsed and I went for the RIDE OF MY LIFE. As I was flying in the air with all of the debris I was trying to grab something big for safety. When I finally came to land, I was a couple of hundred yards from where I was first tossed. I reached for part of the roof and climbed down and tried to duck up under it. I was extremely frightened as I watched trees and all sorts of heavy debris zooming over my head. If I ever saw my DEATH, that was it. It was just not my time and being thrown over in an extremely large ditch probably saved me. I only had on a pair of short pants and the rain was very cold along with all of the cuts, scrapes, and bruises. I fought and got out of the wreckage and found a blanket that I have never seen before. My home, car, and trees were completely gone, and I walked bloodily to the hospital that was damaged also. They treated me, stitched me up, x-rayed me, and rolled me into a room for transport. That hospital was really in a state of emergency and chaos. Later, a bus transported me and some more patients to Crisp Regional. I WAS SO MOTIVATED TO PROTECT MYSELF IN THE PATH OF THAT TORNADO. I LOST EVERYTHING I EVER OWNED, BUT I STILL HAVE MY LIFE. Thanks for reading this and take care!

Gary Merritt, CPS  
Americus, GA

(Gary is a Team Leader for the PERMES Project and works with the Perry Wellness Center in Americus. Many of you have seen him and his shattered house on TV, following this incident. It is indeed a miracle that he survived this devastation. Join with us in offering support and wishing him the best of luck.)



16th Annual GMHCN Summer Conference August 21-23, 2007

***CONFUSED YET SURE I AM*** Arran Williams***CONFUSED YET SURE I AM***

*I am good yet I am bad  
I am love and hate  
I am pleasure and pain, pleasure and pain  
Both light and darkness show in my eyes and live within my soul  
Day, night and the weather affect me and I affect day, night and the weather  
I am aware, I think, I feel but I am oblivious, ignorant and numb  
I am a skeptic and a believer  
My actions are louder than words and my words are louder than actions  
I am bound yet unlimited  
Captive yet I am the capturer  
Free yet held  
I am known and unknown  
I am up and down, back and forth, towards and away, far out and close  
I am something within and around  
I am not him or him  
He created me and put light within and around that I am of and feel  
He put the shadows within and around which I feel I am blessed yet cursed  
Who and or what am I  
Yet I am!*

**Job Announcement**

The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network is seeking individuals with lived experience (preference given to Certified Peer Specialists) to fill several part-time positions as Peer Mentors working with consumers who are transitioning from inpatient services to living in communities of their choice. Potential candidates will need to work flexible hours and live in close proximity to the various regional hospitals located throughout Georgia. The pay rate for the position is \$10/hour. For further information contact David Kanar at 404-687-9487 or 404-271-2208. Submit letters of interest and resumes to:  
Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network,  
246 Sycamore Street, Suite 260,  
Decatur, GA 30030  
Or email to [peermentoring@gmhcn.org](mailto:peermentoring@gmhcn.org)  
Or fax to 404-687-0772.

The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network is compiling a list of all the Double Trouble in Recovery (DTR) meetings in the state of Georgia. This information will be instrumental for consumers statewide to have better access to DTR meetings. If there are any Double Trouble meetings in your area please include a contact person, their phone number, address for the meeting location, the time of day it is held and the day of the week for every DTR meeting that is in your area.

Gail Herrschaft Project Coordinator Double Trouble in Recovery, [dtr@gmhcn.org](mailto:dtr@gmhcn.org) E-mail  
Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network 404-687-9487 Office 404-687-0772 Fax

**GET IT DONE**

Your actual efforts are often much less tiring, much less draining than the anxiety with which you surround those efforts. Just imagine how much you could accomplish if you could work without the friction of your own negative thoughts.

How much time and energy do you waste, worrying that the task is too difficult or complicated, or that it's beneath your dignity? How many moments do you devote to anger, resentment and anxiety when you could be spending those moments getting the work done?

Focus on the effort, let go of your need to resist it, and give it your very best. Think of what a privilege it is that you have the opportunity to make a difference.

Rather than being annoyed at what you must do, be enthusiastic about what you can do. Rather than making yourself and others miserable about it, put your energy into getting it done in the best way you know how.

Instead of putting it off until later, thus allowing your worries and anxieties to grow stronger, go ahead and get it done. When you release the anxiety surrounding the task, you'll suddenly see that there's no reason to avoid it.

And you'll see that there's every reason to go ahead and get it done.

— Ralph Marston

## Addressing the Crisis in Mental Health Care By Randy Tucker, Pipeline Editor

In a recent investigative series for the Atlanta Journal Constitution, Alan Judd and Andy Miller reported at least 115 suspicious deaths and more than 190 substantiated cases of abuse since 2002. The newspaper uncovered 36 deaths from choking on food, vomit or foreign objects, or by breathing those substances into lungs. Another 36 died because of lack of emergency treatment or questionable medical care. At least 12 committed suicide. At least two died under physical restraint by hospital workers. At one hospital, a charge of rape remains pending against a former employee. He was released on bond June 13, 2006 and no trial date has been set. Many allegations have been made that other cases of homicide, rape and abuse were covered up or ignored by the departments charged to monitor and investigate such cases. Counties assigned to investigate criminal wrongdoing in the rare cases where the hospitals' facility police or administrators decide to notify them have not done much better. Shockingly, monitoring is still left to the institutions to investigate, without independent oversight or external advocacy. The AJC reports "Reviews by the hospitals' medical staffs of serious incidents remain secret under state law....They heavily edit hospital reports, including those describing patients' deaths from abuse or neglect." Sometimes the offenders are fired, but criminal charges are rarely filed or seriously considered. State policy apparently dictates that hospital administrators are **forbidden to request that prosecutors file charges** unless "evidence **beyond** a reasonable doubt (the standard for criminal conviction, not investigation) shows that an employee has abused a patient." Obviously it is in the best interests of administrators to keep these events secret, and this limits consumer safety. **Shouldn't this policy immediately be changed?** The "shocking" articles, I'm afraid, are the tip of the iceberg. Most consumers never complain, and many if not most, are given brief, inadequate treatment and discharged without workable after-care plans. We have known for years that using State Hospitals for "revolving door" treatment is a poor substitute for developing options within our communities, even though community treatment would be better and cheaper in the long run. Keeping people from going to the hospital should be more important than pumping more and more money into the damaged hospital system. "People with mental illness, their families and advocates **cannot tolerate** more preventable deaths," said Sharon Jenkins Tucker, Executive Director of GMHCN, in a recent press conference. "An independent citizens' panel to investigate each death could help prevent additional tragedies. **Good government operates in the sunshine**, and we should insist our vulnerable citizens receive this protection."

So, what can be done? Certainly the Justice System of the Federal Government could step in and supervise our system. The crisis is big enough to warrant that, but we'd have little control over what would be best for the people of Georgia. What can WE do to help remedy this regrettable situation? Many people and organizations have expressed their outrage publicly, vehemently and vocally. People are likely to hear our voices, identify with our feelings and put the issues aside a few days later. We may feel a little better from doing this. But this alone is unlikely to change anything, unless we **join with others, suggest plans for action and keep the pressure on** until real changes are made. By all means, **write your legislative representatives, and get your friends to do likewise**. The Psychiatric Advance Directives bill met surprising resistance from some psychiatrists who apparently did not want to give consumers a chance to express their treatment choices if they were hospitalized. How many consumers care about this? Few people told their legislators how important their freedom to express preference was.

Sherry Jenkins Tucker, as Chairperson for the **Mental Health Services Coalition**, issued a statement and recommendations to the General Assembly. Part of this statement reads, "Georgia must address this situation **immediately**. People served in Georgia's mental health system must be **safe**. Community systems, which are failing to provide adequate treatment and services, must be dramatically improved. We urge the General Assembly to provide **fiscal support** for immediate protections now, and to develop plans for real solutions in a **community-based system** that takes advantage of **all** our resources, both public and private." Action items: "**To keep people SAFE now**, we call for **(1) funding of an independent Mental Health Ombudsman Office, (2) establishing a citizens' panel to review every death and allegation of abuse in state mental hospitals . . . To IMPROVE the SYSTEMS** that serve people with mental illnesses in Georgia, we call for **(1) a timely statutory legislative commission** to be appointed by the legislature... charged with ending our mental health CRISIS and assuring that every citizen of the State of Georgia has the opportunity to be a contributing member of their community, **(2) passage of a Psychiatric Advance Directive Law** to afford consumers of mental health services, when feeling well, the **right to record treatment choices** to be honored if they have a psychiatric crisis and need emergency care or hospitalization, **(3) full parity for mental health coverage** in Georgia's State Health Benefits Plan...people are healthier when this is implemented and the catastrophic rise in cost that is sometimes predicted by opponents simply does not occur."

## Georgia Mental Health

### Consumer Network

246 Sycamore Street, Suite 260

Decatur, Georgia 30030

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246 Sycamore St. Suite 260  
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404-687-9487 or 800-297-6146  
office@gmhcnc.org  
www.gmhcnc.org  
Julie Spores, President  
Sharon Jenkins Tucker,  
Executive Director

## Where Consumers can Report Problems with Mental Health Services

**Georgia Advocacy Office:** A private nonprofit that is the designated statewide protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities and mental illness in Georgia. 404-885-1234 or 1-800-537-2329. ([www.thegao.org](http://www.thegao.org))

**Georgia Crisis and Access Line:** A 24-hour statewide hotline, sponsored by the Georgia Department of Human Resources and run by Behavioral Health Link, for access to mental health, addictive disease, and behavioral health crisis services. 1-800-715-4225. ([www.mygcal.com](http://www.mygcal.com))

**Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network:** Organization of people with mental illness that promotes recovery through advocacy and education. 404-687-9487 or 1-800-297-6146. ([www.gmhcnc.org](http://www.gmhcnc.org))

**Georgia Parent Support Network:** Group that advocates for children and youth with mental illness and their families. 404-758-4500 or 1-800-832-8645. ([www.gpsn.org](http://www.gpsn.org))

**Mental Health America of Georgia (formerly the National Mental Health Association of Georgia):** Education and advocacy organization for people who have mental illness or have other mental health needs. 404-527-7175 or 1-800-933-9896. ([www.mhageorgia.org](http://www.mhageorgia.org))

**National Alliance on Mental Illness, Georgia chapter:** Grass-roots organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of people with mental illness and their families. 770-234-0855 and 1-800-728-1052. ([www.namigeorgia.org](http://www.namigeorgia.org))

<http://www.ajc.com/news/content/health/stories/2007/01/05/0107mhgroups.html>