

THE PIPELINE

SINCE 1991

VOLUME 3 2018/2019

2019 EVENTS

GMHCN Board Meetings
Face-to-Face Meetings

Macon, May 16
St. Simons Island, August 19

Board Retreat
November 7-8

Conference Call
July 18

Children's Mental Health Day at the Capitol
Atlanta, May 9

2019 Certified Peer Specialist Trainings
Augusta, May 13-23
Cordele, July 15-25
Columbus, Sept. 23-Oct. 3
Atlanta, Dec. 2-12

Georgia Peer Support Institutes
Unicoi State Park, Helen, May 7-9
St. Simons Island, November 13-15

Recovery Symposium
West Side Atlanta, June 8

Alternatives Conference
Washington, D.C., July 7-11

CPS Workforce Conference
Athens
August 1-2

CARES Connect
Atlanta, August 9
Warner Robins, Nov. 8

Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network Annual Summer Conference
St. Simons Island
August 20-22

Georgia Consumer Council
Central State Hospital Memorial Ceremony, Milledgeville, October 6

PUTTING STIGMA AWAY THE 4TH ANNUAL KEN WHIDDON MEMORIAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

Memorial Day Weekend 2019 will mark the 4th Annual Ken Whiddon Memorial Golf Tournament, to be held once again at the Jekyll Island Golf Club. The first tournament, held in 2016, attracted around 20 players and raised \$1,000 for the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, and by 2018, the numbers had risen to 40 participants and \$4,000 raised. But fundraising isn't the only goal, or even the primary goal of the Tournament.



From the 2018 Ken Whiddon Memorial Golf Tournament.

According to Robert Howell of American Work, one of the founders of the Tournament, "We want to reduce stigma and raise awareness of recovery from mental illness, while also trying to grow peer participation in the event to promote wellness and recovery through the sport of golf. The success of the Tournament really lies in the direct impact it has on individual lives. The first American Work peer to participate in the Tournament had spent over thirty years in prison directly related to issues regarding his mental health. He participated in the event and built up his social skills and confidence in himself, and later won GMHCN's Peer of the Year Award and was enrolled in American Work's supported employment service. He is now working for the first time in almost 40 years and is doing great!"

The Tournament is named in honor of Ken Whiddon, one of the original founders of the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, who lived with bipolar disorder and was very ill for many years. He was hospitalized, heavily medicated, and received electric shock treatments on multiple occasions. Surviving on SSI disability, he managed to return to work and then college. After furthering his education, he became Deputy Director at the local Mental Health Center in Glynn County, Georgia, and then became executive director at the state regional office. In an effort to better serve consumers with disabilities he started his own company, Amer(ican)Work, Inc. in 1999, where he eventually employed over 400 people. He made it his mission to assist peers in finding work and improving their quality of life. He sold the company but stayed on with the new ownership to continue the work he loved doing so much, before his death in 2015. The Tournament was started by Robert Howell and Jay Willis to honor Ken's legacy, and to serve as a reminder to Georgians that "you can accomplish or obtain your goals regardless of your physical or mental health challenges."

All skill levels are welcome at the Tournament, as are families, friends, peers, and allies. Sponsorship opportunities are also available.

4th Annual Ken Whiddon Memorial Golf Tournament
To benefit the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network
Jekyll Island Golf Club
May 25, 2019, \$60 per person. (two-person teams)
www.kenwhiddonmemorial.com

Join us!
All are welcome!



THE NEXT CHAPTER OF A GEORGIA SUCCESS STORY GMHCN Begins Development of a New Forensic Peer Mentoring Training Program

In 2018, the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network applied for and received a Statewide Consumer Network Grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to develop a Georgia-specific Forensic Peer Mentoring Training Program, which will allow Georgia to expand the success in reducing recidivism. This three-year project is currently underway. In March 2019, GMHCN concluded a series of six community reentry listening sessions across the state, where we heard from Georgia's communities about what they need to improve the lives of our justice-involved citizens, including those who are returning to their communities from correctional facilities. One listening session was held in each of the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities six regions. Based on what was learned in those sessions, a curriculum for a Forensic Peer Mentor Training is now being developed, and will be implemented over the course of 2019-2021.

Lindsey Sizemore, the program director for the Forensic Peer Mentor Training Development Project grant, was impressed by the passion for and at the Community Reentry Listening Sessions, saying "The response of communities throughout the state to the listening sessions has demonstrated the real hunger not only for recovery for our returning citizens but also for our community connections. The effort put forth by our communities to make these sessions successful has received state and national attention, and rightly so—Georgians are doing an amazing job showing up for their families, friends, and communities, and advocating for themselves."

The team includes Lindsey Sizemore, Director of GMHCN's Forensic Peer Mentor Training Development Project, Gena Garner, the Director of GMHCN's Peer Mentoring Project, and George Braucht of Brauchtworks Consulting, who is bringing his decades of work with the criminal justice system and leadership in Georgia's recovery movement to his role as Curriculum Developer for the project. The team will be using the data gathered across the state to inform a Georgia-specific Forensic Peer Mentor Training that will allow for an expansion of Georgia's existing and successful Forensic Peer Mentoring program into more communities throughout the state.

According to George, "Overall, Forensic Peer Mentor services are based on mutually supportive and challenging relationships that progressively reduce the risk of re-arrest while promoting resilience and crime desistance. The program's goals are enhancing our communities' safety and health, assisting each individual in repairing harm done to victims, advocating for the fulfillment of individually-meaningful roles and responsibilities and sustaining pro-social lifestyles." The training being developed will respond to these and other goals specifically tailored to the needs of Georgia's communities.

Georgia's existing Forensic Peer Mentoring Project was established in 2015, and based on a model developed in the northeast, provides support, linkage, and care coordination to promote the successful community reintegration of adults with behavioral health diagnoses returning to the community following incarceration. Forensic Peer Mentors are Certified Peer Specialists who have had personal lived experience with the criminal justice system and recovery. The Forensic Peer Mentor works with returning citizens/participants onsite within an assigned state correctional facility, or in a Georgia Day Reporting Center, as well as in the community after release. The Forensic Peer Mentor provides support, including linkage and assistance in developing transportation plans to community services to facilitate access to entitlements, community based behavioral health supports and other services.

Gena Garner, who leads the Peer Mentor and Forensic Peer Mentor efforts at GMHCN, said "Every prison sentence should not be a life sentence, but when we don't give our returning citizens the tools, skills, and resources they need to stay well when they return to the community, that is what happens. Forensic Peer Mentoring changes all that. I have seen over and over again how a Forensic Peer has positively, sometimes dramatically, impacted the life of a returning citizen. And when they see that happening, they want to be a part of it. Lindsey was introduced to peer support through our Forensic Peer Mentor project, and she shares frequently about her journey from inmate to project director. She is an amazing success story, but she is far from the only one. We see it happen all the time—when our returning citizens see how they are able not just to go to work, but to go to work supporting others, they step up. That's where I see the real beauty in this process."

Thanks to everyone who has joined us since we began our Community Reentry Listening Sessions in Decatur last November. Your passion for supporting Georgia's returning citizens will benefit Georgia's families and communities for years to come through the expansion of Forensic Peer Mentor services in Georgia.

Every prison sentence should not be a life sentence.

THE PATH TO WELLNESS

How we got to where we are, in our own words.

What challenges were you facing before you discovered peer support?

I always felt misunderstood and alone inside myself. Traditional recovery systems were not working for me. I was also diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, which causes depression and anxiety, and I knew I needed more.

What helped you move forward?

Becoming part of a person-centered peer support program was the best decision of my life! Great leadership and lots of support. I learned to focus on what was right with me. I was introduced to CARES and became a Certified Peer Specialist—Addictive Disease, but I wanted to be as supportive as I can to as many people as I can, so I also became a Certified Peer Specialist—Mental Health, and I'm also now a Whole Health and Wellness Coach (WHWC), and a Certified Peer Specialist—Parent. Through my recovery journey, including the trainings where I learned so much about myself, I began to feel whole and healthy on the inside. Best of all, I had a purpose.

What is life like for you now?

My life today is amazing. I am blessed to be working in this field and supporting others on their journey to a life of recovery, and making positive memories. Today I'm meeting people where they are. I'm going places and doing things I never imagined before, like serving on the board of NAMI-Savannah for three years, and now serving as Vice President. I'm taking care of myself, and I'm giving back to my community.

What keeps you hopeful?

What keeps me hopeful is that I am part of a system or movement that is making a difference. The Recovery Model works. I am the evidence. What we focus on we give power to. Today my focus is on helping others to find their light and their purpose.



Tami Smith
CPS, CPS-AD, CPS-P, WHWC
Vice-President, NAMI-Savannah



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH MATTERS:

CHAMPIONING
WELLBEING
THROUGH

PEER SUPPORT

2019

THE 28TH ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE

AUGUST 20-22, 2019

EPWORTH BY THE SEA
ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GA

THE 28TH ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE

Registration and the Call for Proposals for conference workshops are now open! GMHCN's Board of Directors selected "Behavioral Health Matters: Championing Wellbeing Through Peer Support" as the theme for the 28th Annual Summer Conference in recognition of the active role peers take in advocating for wellbeing for themselves and others.

We hope you will make plans now to join us at Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons Island, where we plan to fellowship, break bread, learn, grow, dance, sing, and make progress on our paths of recovery and wellness. As always, we will be voting on the top five priorities of GMHCN for 2019-2020, so be sure your voice is heard!

Register online or download an application at:
<https://www.gmhcn.org/annual-conference>

Conference Proposals Deadline: June 21, 2019

Conference Registration Deadline: August 1, 2019



Artwork by Terresa Ford, CPRP, CPS

People to People
by Brandon Hughes

Become something rich with inside
of you makes the value
Talk to him talk to her
We people to people on this earth
Love your existence to keep your value
Of your work before and after
When you search solve your problems
We all can see
Read the signs between you and me
We people to people on this earth
We have to love each other the worth

A note from Sherry

As we recover from our mental health concerns, it can sometimes become easy to forget the intensity of feelings we experienced at our moments of greatest distress. In fact, it can be beneficial not to revisit the anxiety, depression, fear, and loneliness that defined many of our experiences of crisis. However, whatever we were feeling, whatever our experience was, we can be certain of one thing—there is someone in our lives feeling and experiencing those things right now. It might be a family member or close friend, or it might be a stranger on the street. It might be a family sleeping in their car, or an office worker not sure how they are going to make it through the end of the day. As Certified Peer Specialists, what we might be able to relieve of their immediate challenges may be limited. As humans, as caring members of a larger community, our options open up. Our service to the mental health community is not limited to a training certification. We can be the person who shows up at the soup kitchen to cook, or who stays late to clean. We can be the person who smiles and says “Hello” to the person huddled on the street, instead of averting our eyes. We can be kind. We can be the person we needed most when we were at our lowest. This May, National Mental Health Month, I encourage each of us, including me, to reflect back to our darkest time to identify who could have supported us into the light, and to become that person.

**BE
THE
PERSON
YOU NEEDED
MOST**