

2020 GEORGIA EVENTS

GMHCN Board Meetings
Conference Call
July 13

Board Retreat
November 5-6

Certified Peer Specialist Trainings
Cordele, July 13-23
Columbus, Sep. 21-Oct. 1
Atlanta, Dec. 7-17

Whole Health Action Management
Online, July 8-9

Georgia Peer Support Institutes
Helen, August 25-27
St. Simons Island, Nov. 11-13

5th Annual Ken Whiddon Memorial Golf Tournament
Jekyll Island Golf Club
October 24, 2020

2021 GEORGIA EVENTS

Mental Health Day at the Capitol
Atlanta, January 19

GMHCN Board Meeting
St. Simons Island
February 22

GMHCN 29th Annual Summer Conference
St. Simons Island
February 23-25

Dates and locations are being updated as we receive information from public health officials, and adapt to online delivery where appropriate.

Please visit gmhcn.org or call 800-297-6146 for more information.

THE PERSISTENCE OF WELLNESS

Our world has changed in some important ways since the first of this year, but in most ways it remains the same. We still have hopes and dreams and goals, and while the barriers to realizing those may have changed, our persistence in achieving them has not.

Beginning last fall, we were concerned about how potential budget cuts might impact behavioral health supports and services across the state. As we prepare to go to print with this issue of The Pipeline, nearly every public service is at risk of budget reduction as the State of Georgia responds to historic revenue losses and increases in unemployment. The reduction of other supports and services makes access to behavioral healthcare that much more important—as Georgia’s families and communities grapple with a changing economic landscape, it is vital that Georgia’s public behavioral health safety net remain intact.

GMHCN has been part of an unprecedented effort collaborating with other Georgia nonprofits to advocate for funding for behavioral health supports and services since budget cuts of up to 75% were proposed in a Georgia Senate subcommittee in May. The Georgia Council on Substance Abuse, the Georgia Parent Support Network, Mental Health America – Georgia, NAMI-Georgia, and others worked together to restore as much funding as possible to Georgia’s already underfunded behavioral healthcare system. We know that we have had some success, but the real impact of the cuts across the state may not be known for months.

At the same time, the coronavirus is providing GMHCN the opportunity to write a brand new chapter in its story, along with the people and communities we support. As soon as it became apparent that the traditional in-person gatherings that are the hallmark of the work we do would not be practical, we began developing alternatives.

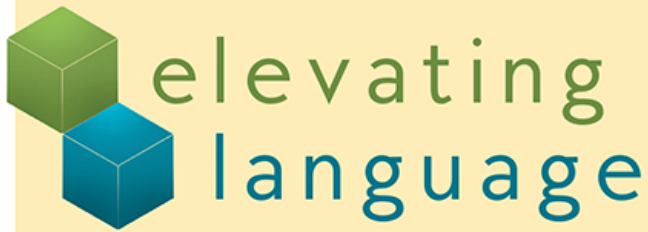
Georgia’s Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers are now providing online wellness activities and peer support seven days a week, including “The New Normal,” a peer discussion group; “Peer Connections,” a wellness activity that changes daily; and, mutual support group meetings for substance use and mental health recovery that meet daily. The Peer2Peer Warm Line has maintained continuous 24/7 operations throughout the pandemic, providing support to many first-time callers as well as peers who have not been able to access in-person wellness activities because of safety precautions at the Centers. GMHCN’s Double Trouble in Recovery meetings are also now online three times daily, seven days a week.

Whenever possible, trainings provided by GMHCN have been moved online. The first online Certified Peer Specialist Project Training and Continuing Education Forums were held online in June.

GMHCN is making preparations to resume all in-person activities as soon as it is safe to do so. The planning committee for the Annual Summer Conference is working to make our February 23-25, 2021 gathering at Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons Island as healthy and joyful as possible. Stay tuned, and stay well!



Overnight respite stays and daily wellness activities have resumed at Georgia’s Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers. Social distancing precautions are being practiced, but we are delighted to see everyone’s smiling eyes again. Please call 888-945-1414 for information on upcoming activities at the Center nearest you.



When GMHCN introduced a Recovery Message Training focused on mental health into the Certified Peer Specialist Project training, we received a lot of incredibly positive feedback. People reported feeling empowered through the process, and we learned through their experience how much opportunity there is for strengths-based language to be more purposefully included in the lives of all of Georgia's peers.

The result is *Elevating Language*, a 6-hour 360-degree experience of behavioral health language including its history, its power, and its potential. Participants leave the training not only with an advocacy tool to use in their communities, but also a deep understanding of how language can be used to decrease or increase both stigma and self-stigma.

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When GMHCN's Roslind Hayes, CPS-MH, CARES, and Chris Johnson, CPS-MH, CPS-AD, began developing the training, they decided to start from scratch and dig deeply into the history and research of how language and self-disclosure have been and can be used most effectively. In addition to William White's landmark works on substance use advocacy, they explored the work of Patrick Corrigan, John Divodio, and Samuel Gaertner, the evolution of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and the legacy of civil rights and human rights movements, to create a training that would build from historical precedents to create a forward-looking and adaptable advocacy model.

A modified version of the training was provided online through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Mental Health Technology Transfer Center in May of 2020 that was tailored to empower participants to respond to portrayals of behavioral health in COVID-19 media coverage and to advocate for behavioral health resources as agencies and organizations across the country begin responding to and anticipating budget cuts.

The full *Elevating Language* training was provided online to Georgia's Certified Peer Specialists in a series of webinars in June 2020. According to Roslind, "We think it is important for everyone to periodically do a review of how they describe and define themselves and others. This is particularly true for Certified Peer Specialists working in clinical settings. It is natural to fall into using the same clinical language that coworkers use—frequently the language of diagnoses, of deficits, of symptoms. Participation in this training reminds us that we need to be both intentional and vigilant about the language we use. When Certified Peer Specialists use strengths-based and recovery-focused language in their work, they are not just providing a model of language for peers, but also for their colleagues. When we use the language of disease and illness, we risk being the evidence of disease and illness. When we use the language of recovery and wellness, we become the evidence of recovery and wellness." For information on hosting or participating in an Elevating Language training, please email language@gmhcn.org.



ON BEING A BLACK AMERICAN

As a child I was taught about the history of my people in this country, the middle passage, slavery, Jim Crow and the civil rights movement. I was also taught that despite her failings and short comings, America is a great country, and that I could do and be anything that I wanted. Holding both truths has been painfully difficult over the years and has felt almost impossible during the last few months. I remember seeing the black and white footage of black folks dressed in their Sunday best, peacefully protesting during the civil rights movement, being sprayed down by firehoses, attacked by police dogs, and brutally beaten with police batons. As a kid, I did not understand why or how people could be so cruel towards other people, and I still don't. The footage is no longer black and white, but the image has not changed. We continue to be discriminated against, brutalized, and killed in the streets, live and in color. The murder of George Floyd shook the world and sparked international protest. The knee on his neck, cutting off his air supply, is emblematic of the weight of systemic racism that has been on the neck of Black Americans for the past 400 years, and we can't breathe.

Roslind Hayes, June 2020

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 just never felt comfortable in my own skin. I always felt like an outsider looking through a foggy window onto my life. I was never fast enough, talented enough, or smart enough. When I discovered I was attracted to other boys instead of girls, it made the feeling of separation and being an outsider even greater, and caused me to retreat even further. The pain of being different and the resulting disconnection and loneliness finally became unbearable and I started using anything I could to escape. That led to years of self-harm, several suicide attempts, excessive alcohol and drug use, and many voluntary and involuntary stays at mental hospitals.



Jody Dodson, CPS-AD, CPS-MH

What helped you move forward?

On the suggestion of a trusted friend, I went to see the first therapist I had ever seen outside of a hospital. I will never forget him. He was a few years older than me and he had this unspoken nurturing demeanor about him. It caught me off guard at first because it was not something that I was used to. Then something powerful happened. He asked me to tell him what happened. I was shocked that someone cared about my story. I told him a little about my life and the struggles what I had faced but remained selective and guarded about what I shared. It was not until he shared his own story and recovery from mental illness and addiction that I felt a true sense of connection and was able to let down some of my defenses. His vulnerability and honesty somehow gave me the permission that I desperately needed to finally open and share my whole self with another person.

What is life like for you now?

Today my life is better than I ever could have imagined. I have been on my recovery journey from substance use for five and half years now. It has been a little over seven years since I experienced any setbacks with my mental health or battled any serious thoughts of harming myself. Because of my recovery, I can be fully present for my life. I work as the Recovery Coach Team Lead on the Certified Addiction Recovery Empowerment Specialists Warm Line with the Georgia Council on Substance Abuse where I get to support others as they forge their own paths to health and wellness. I am working towards a Bachelor's degree in Psychology at Georgia State University with hopes of becoming a counselor.

What keeps you hopeful?

The recognition and emphasis that has been placed on the unparalleled power of peer support in recent years is truly inspiring, especially when it comes to recovery support organizations. It is encouraging that more young people are being introduced to the ideas of peer support and recovery. It warms my heart that more LGBTQ youth are finding it easier to live their truth and step out of the shadows. Acceptance and support continue to grow in their communities, homes, and schools.



**THE 5TH ANNUAL KEN
WHIDDON MEMORIAL
GOLF TOURNAMENT
SATURDAY
OCTOBER 24**

Please plan to join us for this fun GMHCN benefit. All skill levels are welcome. Learn more and register at:

<https://kenwhiddonmemorial.com/>

Online Wellness @Georgia's Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers

ZOOM meeting ID:
341-153-3354

Dial-In Number
1-646-558-8656



SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. SCHEDULE ONLINE AT GMHCN.ORG.

HUMAN PROGRESS IS NEITHER AUTOMATIC NOR INEVITABLE

**EVERY STEP TOWARD THE GOAL OF JUSTICE
REQUIRES SACRIFICE, SUFFERING, AND STRUGGLE
THE TIRELESS EXERTIONS AND PASSIONATE CONCERNS
OF DEDICATED INDIVIDUALS.**

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

A note from Sherry

The seeming regularity of our lives before COVID-19 was much more comforting than we knew. While most of us awoke each day with a general idea of what the day might bring, we never really knew what was in store for us. We might be delighted to get an unexpected call from a friend we hadn't heard from in a while, or be disappointed to find a new scratch on our car, or hit a pothole. But there was always the ability to plan for better days, no matter what happened.

For many of us—and I include myself—the most challenging aspect of the pandemic is not how to get through today. I have a plan for today. I have a plan for next week. And, Heaven help us, I have a plan for next year. In order for the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network to be able to continue doing the great work we do, we must have plans in place to continue that work when, where, and how we are able to do so safely.

The most challenging aspect of the pandemic for many organizations, including the leadership team of GMHCN, is the changing and oft-times conflicting and confusing information we receive from different sources about how to best plan for the near-distant future. We do not have a crystal ball, but through decades of supporting Georgians through all sorts of crises, one day at a time, one foot in front of the other, shoulder to shoulder, we know how to get through this: We work together. We bring together our lived experience, our creativity, and our passion for the work we do, and we keep making plans for the future.

Those plans may change, but we will persist, and continue doing what we do best. Please stay safe, and stay connected. I look forward to seeing you all soon.

