

THE PIPELINE

SINCE 1991

VOLUME I 2018/2019

UPCOMING EVENTS

GMHCN Board Meeting
Lake Blackshear
Cordele
October 18-19, 2018

Georgia Peer Support Institutes
Epworth by the Sea
St. Simons Island, GA
November 14-16, 2018
Unicoi State Park,
Helen, GA
May 7-9, 2019

2018 Certified Peer Specialist Trainings
Savannah, Oct. 15-25
Atlanta, Dec. 10-20

2019 Certified Peer Specialist Trainings
Macon, Feb. 4-14
Augusta, May 13-23
Columbus, July 15-25
Dublin, GA Sep. 23-Oct. 3
Atlanta, Dec. 2-12

Central State Hospital Cemetery Memorial Ceremony
Milledgeville, October 7

World Mental Health Day
October 10

Recovery Symposium
Swainsboro, GA
October 16

CARES Connect
Macon, November 2

Holiday Gatherings at Georgia's Peer Support, Wellness and Respite Centers

Indigenous Peoples Day,
October 8
Halloween, October 31
Thanksgiving Day,
November 22
Christmas Eve & Day,
December 24 & 25
New Years Eve & Day,
December 31 & January 1

Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network Annual Summer Conference
St. Simons Island, GA
August 20-22, 2019

THE GEORGIA MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMER NETWORK'S 27th ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE

Over 600 peers gathered together at the 27th Annual Summer Conference for three days of learning, growing, dancing, singing, advocating, and collaborating. This year's conference was extraordinarily hopeful. Each of the keynote speakers, including Judy Fitzgerald, MSW, Commissioner, Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities, Leonard Zimmerman, artist and happiness advocate, and Robyn Priest, Peerlink National TAC, provided a message of recovery, hope, and possibility that resonated with us and our peers. Their presentations are available online at <https://www.youtube.com/user/gmhcncn>.



Pictured here: Charles Willis Certified Peer Specialist of the Year, Jean Olshefsky, CPS, CPS-AD, and Ben Achord Peer Supporter of the Year, Karen Daniel, CPS-AD. See more at GMHCN.org

Dozens of workshops over the course of the three days provided peers the opportunity for personal growth as well as professional development. There were opportunities to learn more about the trainings available to Georgia's peers, and to increase the breadth and depth of the peer support services our peers provide. Workshops ranged from the very practical and technical, such as "Social Security and Going to Work: What You Need to Know," led by Sally Atwell, Director, Benefits Navigator WIPA Project, to "Nature's Lessons: Resiliency, Recovery, and Wellness," led by May C. Brown and Maria Mattheus of the Friendship Center Greenhouse and Gardens, where participants were encouraged to pot a plant that they were able to take home with them to integrate into their wellness plans. There was truly something for everyone at this year's conference.

Music is always in abundance at the Annual Summer Conference, but this year provided an abundance of talent and opportunity. From Regina Troupe and Friends, who opened the conference with fantastic live music, to the R2ISE Inc. Theater Group's interactive recovery experiences, to our peer's own beautiful voices at karaoke, and to our closing a sing-along with Robyn Priest leading us all in The Partridge Family's "I Think I Love You," the music lifted us up, connected us in song, and reminded us of the power of our voices, whether we are singing together or on our own: *We are never alone.*

Top 5 Priorities

Each year at our Annual Summer Conference, Georgia's peers vote on the priorities for the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network. These priorities form the basis for the initiatives we undertake on behalf of Georgia's behavioral health community.

Our Top Five Priorities for 2018-2019

1. Affordable, accessible, and supported housing
2. Increased wages for Certified Peer Specialists
3. More community programs and resources, including additional Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers
4. More Certified Peer Specialist jobs and job placement sources
5. Employment and supported employment



TRANSFORMING GEORGIA ONE STORY AT A TIME

The RESPECT Institute Embarks on a Recovery Journey of Its Own

Since the RESPECT Institute of Georgia began in August 2012, over 1,100 people have learned how to use their lived experience to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities across the state.

A RESPECT Institute is a 3 1/2 day program designed to provide 10 Individuals the skills and coaching necessary to transform their behavioral health challenges, treatment, and recovery experiences into educational and inspirational presentations. The RESPECT Institute helps participants organize, construct, and customize their personal stories so they can be delivered in diverse venues, like legislative and civic meetings, employee orientations, and adult classrooms.

According to Jen Banathy, the Project Director of the RESPECT Institute, "Organizations that host RI trainings often experience an infusion of recovery into their various programs during and after a RI training as they observe the transformation that takes place within the individuals who graduate from the training. Hope, healing and recovery are activated by the RI process, especially when Graduates share their stories in the community and become educators."

As extraordinary as the accomplishments of the RESPECT Institute are to date, there is even more coming up for Georgia's recovery community. Joel Slack, founder of the RESPECT Institute, announced at the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network's 27th Annual Summer Conference that the RESPECT Institute will be launching a new initiative, "Turbo Recovery Story Training" in 2019. This three-day training will be for RESPECT Institute graduates, and will provide them the opportunity to more fully focus on their recovery experiences in their story. The final product, a ten-minute presentation, will include one minute that describes their challenges, and nine minutes that focuses on their recovery. This is an alternative, solutions-based approach that will include strategies that have supported recovery.

According to Joel, "at the conclusion of each Turbo Recovery Story presentation, the graduate will offer detailed suggestions and advice to fellow peers, behavioral health administrators and professionals, and the general public. These suggestions will not purport theories or concepts, but rather emphasize the real-life application of their suggestions" based upon their lived experience.

The success of the RESPECT Institute has led to a challenge the RESPECT Institute team works hard to overcome: popularity. There is currently a waitlist for organizations wishing to host RESPECT Institute trainings, and for individuals wishing to participate in the trainings. Anyone wishing to experience the benefits personally or within their organization or community should reach out to the RESPECT Institute team to learn how to become involved. Contact information for each of the team members is located at <https://www.gmhcn.org/respect-institute-of-georgia>.



The RESPECT Institute team (left to right): Anthony Williams, Lindsey Sizemore, Joel Slack, Jen Banathy, and Toyia Mather.

From recent RESPECT Institute Graduates:

"I received a new mission. My story is at the core of my recovery. In the RESPECT Institute, I got to the core of what was and what is going on. It gave me a new language – a language of hope and support. We empower each other and move towards brighter futures."

"The RI Team believed in me and allowed me the opportunity to do things I didn't think I could do. I let go and released the trauma and moved forward to a better future. I moved from trauma to success – I am now a success story."



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?

Prior to discovering peer support I was enrolled in nursing school pursuing an RN degree. It was a rigorous program and I found myself going back and forth to my doctor in search of the right medication to fix my ability to focus and concentrate, as well as get a good night's sleep. I knew nothing of peer support so my premise for success was finding the perfect medication, which I now know does not exist.

I disclosed to the director of nursing at the school I attended that I was living with mental health challenges and a few days before graduation I was removed from the nursing program which resulted in a period of intense anxiety and depression.



Nigel Greenaway, CPS, WHWC

What helped you move forward?

I met a certified peer specialist at my psychiatrist's office who began to offer me Peer Support as well as encouraging me to apply for the CPS training program. Upon going through the CPS training, I learned that medication was not the only solution to my challenges. My attitude and belief system were also essential to my well-being. Another factor in my recovery was working at the Peer Support and Wellness Center in Decatur, where I was exposed to so many peers who were also living recovery. This made a very big difference in my life.

What is life like for you now?

I am living a life of my choosing. There are things I enjoy tremendously such as cycling, kayaking, hiking, and skiing when I can make it happen. I'm surrounded by a support system of amazing people both family and friends and I work for a great organization.

What keeps you hopeful?

Practicing my spiritual beliefs, learning to love and trust myself and understanding that change is constant but I can always choose to react positively to my experiences.



Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network 2018 Award Recipients

There are so many people across Georgia who do so much to support the behavioral health community that it is always difficult to identify those who will be selected to be honored at the annual awards ceremony at the Annual Summer Conference. This year was no different. However, each of the recipients below has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to the wellness of Georgians, and we salute them.

Ben Achord Peer Supporter of the Year, Karen Daniel, CPS-AD

Delois Scott Peer of the Year, Thomas Ingram

Peer Support Program of the Year, Albany Peer Center (AmericanWork, Inc.)

Charles Willis Certified Peer Specialist of the Year, Jean Olshefsky, CPS, CPS-AD

Humanitarian of the Year, Shirley Smith, RN

Service Provider of the Year, Arthur Taylor, Ph.D.

Lifetime Achievement Award, Lynn Thogersen, MHA (pictured, right)



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A note from Sherry

With the Annual Summer Conference behind us, we have our new marching orders from the peers of Georgia, and one thing is abundantly clear: Our peers need access to greater economic opportunity. Three of the five priorities identified by our peers are related directly to employment. One of the remaining two (affordable, accessible, and supported housing) is indirectly related to employment—our peers are letting us know that as the economy continues to grow, some of us are being left behind. Housing costs, and the basic costs of living, are certainly growing faster than peer wages, and I will continue advocating for increased wages and additional employment opportunities for our peers across the state. Only one of the top five priorities is related to services received by peers, and that is excellent news! It means that our voices are being heard, and that while there is always room for improvement, Georgia's behavioral health service delivery is improving. Thank you to our peers whose voices have helped to shape and continue to inform the state policies that impact our lives. The work we do would not be possible without you.

I know this is the last Pipeline that will be delivered before the upcoming holiday season, so I want to take this opportunity to remind all of our peers that the holidays can be a challenging time for many. Even if the holidays are a time of unmatched joy for you, being actively aware that others may be experiencing challenges can empower you to be a real resource. Consider keeping the numbers of our Peer2Peer Warm Line, 888-945-1414, and Georgia's Crisis and Access Line, 800-715-4225, handy. Let the peers you come into contact with know that our Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers will be having Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Years celebrations, in addition to the daily support they provide. I have heard it said that loneliness kills, and even when it doesn't kill, it hurts. This holiday season, there is no reason for anyone in Georgia to feel alone. Georgia's peers are here, and ready, willing, and able to walk through this season together—in laughter, in tears, in solidarity with and in support of our peers. We are in this together.

