

THE PIPELINE

SINCE 1991

VOLUME 2 2020-2021

2021 GEORGIA EVENTS

Mental Health Day at the Capitol
Online
January 19

Addiction Recovery Awareness Day
Online
February 4

Unmasking Children's Mental Health Mardi Gras Benefit
Online
February 16

GMHCN Board Meeting
By Phone
February 22

GMHCN Winter Conference
Online
February 24

Certified Peer Specialist Trainings
Training 77 Online,
February I-II

Training 78 Online,
May 10-20

Training 79 Atlanta,
July 12-22

Training 80 Augusta,
September 20-30

Training 81 Macon,
December 6-16

Children's Mental Health Day
May 6

GMHCN 29th Annual Summer Conference
St. Simons Island
August 24-26

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.

HOPE AND RESILIENCE IN AUGUSTA

The economic impacts of COVID-19 continue to reverberate through families and communities across the country, and appear unlikely to abate in the near future. In a June 2020 survey by the Charities Aid Foundation of America, nearly one-third of nonprofit organizations in the United States reported that they were likely to close within twelve months.

Those impacts are being felt throughout Georgia. Many organizations, including the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, have experienced significant budget cuts from their funders. While GMHCN has been able to continue the majority of its programming, the Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Center of Henry County was closed as a result of State of Georgia budget cuts. It was while GMHCN was still grieving that closure over the summer that a call was received from Augusta asking if GMHCN would be interested in establishing peer support there.

Friendship Community Center, which has provided support for adults with mental health concerns since 1976, was facing catastrophic budget cuts. A bedrock of the Augusta community found itself at an impasse like so many other organizations: At the same time its primary funders were diverting funds to COVID-19 crisis needs, it was unable to pursue many traditional fundraising strategies, or fulfill its primary mission, because of the lockdown and social distancing. Its board of directors, recognizing the critical and increasing need for community-based mental health supports, made the call. And GMHCN answered.

Sherry Jenkins Tucker, GMHCN's executive director, said "Anyone who cares about mental health in Augusta should be saddened by the loss of services at Friendship Community Center. Anytime a trusted community partner and service provider experiences this sort of interruption of services, it is felt throughout the community, but most acutely by those with the least resources to find alternatives. We are deeply humbled and honored that the leadership of Friendship Community Center identified GMHCN as an organization who could be trusted to act in the best interests of Augusta's mental health recovery community. We are actively working to secure funding to restore peer recovery and wellness supports and services as soon as possible."

Roslind Hayes, the Statewide Director of GMHCN's Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers is excited by this new opportunity, and said "Since I first began working with the Centers ten years ago, people have been asking when we would open a Center in Augusta, and to have this opportunity, even through these really unfortunate circumstances, really is just such a blessing. Every community should have an alternative to psychiatric hospitalization, and we are going to do everything we can to make respite a reality in Augusta."

Leonard Maxey, Executive Director of Friendship Community Center, is hopeful for the future of community-based peer support in Augusta, saying "We are all so thrilled that Augusta will gain such a valuable and committed resource as GMHCN at a time when the need for mental health support is unprecedented and growing."

While GMHCN is seeking funding to make the site of Friendship Community Center operational again, input from Augusta's peer community will also be sought to determine the priority of community needs, and a vision for the future.

A ribbon-cutting for the future Peer Recovery and Wellness Center is scheduled for Wednesday December 9, 2020. To ensure everyone's safety, please join us through Facebook live, where the event will be live-streamed. Visit gmhcn.org or facebook.com/GMHCN for more information.



MENTAL HEALTH DAY AT THE CAPITOL JANUARY 19, 2021 ONLINE

Register Now!

Mental Health Day at the Capitol 2021 will be unlike any previous Mental Health Day in the Georgia. Like so many other gatherings in 2020, Mental Health Day 2021 will be online. According to Sherry Jenkins Tucker, who currently serves as Chair of the Behavioral Health Services Coalition, which organizes the event each year, "When we first started envisioning our next Mental Health Day over this past summer, we were hopeful that we would be able to gather at the capitol to meet with our legislators. But the timetable of the development of the COVID-19 vaccine worked against, and despite the good news we have recently heard about vaccines, none will be widely enough available for hundreds of us to gather together safely in January. And, as so many of us have become more comfortable with the video conferencing technology over the past months, we felt it wise to move forward. We have much advocacy work to do."

The digital gathering will be hosted by the Georgia Parent Support Network, where Sue Smith and Lisa Pace organized a very successful virtual edition of Children's Mental Health Day 2020 back in May. Jean Olshefsky of Beacon Health Options, who has supported Mental Health Day in previous years, said "The Georgia Parent Support Network did a really great job presenting Children's Mental Health Day. They created an engaging and meaningful experience for participants, and I'm grateful they are willing to use that experience to lead us through Mental Health Day 2021."

The Behavioral Health Services Coalition's membership body includes over thirty Georgia organizations dedicated to increasing access to quality behavioral health supports and services in Georgia. In addition to Sherry, Sue, Lisa, and Jean, the leadership team that has been working to make Mental Health Day 2021 possible includes Jewell Gooding of Mental Health America-Georgia, Kim Jones of NAMI-Georgia, and Cynthia Wainscott, Mental Health Advocate.

Please plan to join us on January 19, 2021 from 10am-Noon for this unique advocacy opportunity, including a special performance from R2ISE Recovery. The registration link can be found on the GMHCN home page at gmhcn.org.

Save the Date!

**ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE
AUGUST 24-26, 2021
ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GEORGIA**

October 2020 marked the 30 year anniversary of the first gathering of Georgia's behavioral health community. The thirty peers who met to build a better future for Georgia could little have imagined how much we would accomplish together over the next three decades. Please plan to join us in August 2021 at Epworth-by-the-Sea for the 29th Annual Summer Conference, where we will once again join together in fellowship, lift our voices, and continue to learn and grow together. Registration will open in spring 2021. Please visit gmhcn.org, follow us on Facebook, or join our email list to be receive registration and programming updates

Register Now!

**WINTER CONFERENCE ONLINE
FEBRUARY 24, 2021, 10AM-2PM**

Staying connected is important for everyone, but for peers and Certified Peer Specialists, it is even more important that we are vigilant in avoiding loneliness, and that we continue to seek out ways to support the recovery and wellness of ourselves and others.

GMHCN is pleased to announce its first online Winter Conference, to be held February 24, 10am-2pm. Our focus this year will be "Embracing Equity." Our keynote speaker will be Roslind Hayes, who will share her personal lived experience, her experience as a behavioral health professional and advocate, and her recent experience exploring the role of race as a barrier to recovery and wellness. The event will also feature workshops and opportunities for fellowship.

Registration is open now on the GMHCN website at gmhcn.org.

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?

When I was in my active addiction, I faced many different challenges. I was at odds with my parents, my family, the law, and society. I couldn't form a real relationship with anyone because I couldn't even love myself. The only thing that got me up in the morning was the urge for my next drink, my next puff, or my next hit. I didn't think there was any other meaning to life except to get as much pleasure from it as possible, and the only way I could think to accomplish that was through getting drunk or high every chance I had.

What helped you move forward?

In January of 2014, I was arrested and charged with multiple drug felonies. Though this was not the beginning of my abstinence based recovery, I met a man in jail who had been trying to find recovery for himself for several years. This fellow peer explained to me the principles behind a 12-step program for recovery. While I didn't take any action the rest of my time spent incarcerated, the seed for recovery was planted by that peer. When I was released in November 2014, I immediately began going to a 12-step program in my hometown of Augusta. A group of guys in recovery found me there and brought me into their family of peers. They taught me how to work a program, they helped put food on my table, and they helped me get back into college. The peer support these men offered are still the foundation of my life today, and they will likely remain some of the best friends I'll ever have.

What is life like for you now?

I received my CPS-AD (CARES) in 2016, my CPS-MH in 2018, and graduated with my BS in Nonprofit Leadership in August 2020. Obtaining those certifications and my BS have provided me with meaningful goals to work towards and have taught me that I must always work to better myself so that I can be of more service to others. Today, I can go in front of anyone, anywhere and feel accomplished when detailing my recovery journey. I am able to humbly be an example that someone with substance use and mental health challenges, as well as felony convictions, can find restoration through the recovery process. I've had the honor of working for the Georgia Council on Substance Abuse and Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities to contribute to the growth and success of the many Recovery Community Organizations across Georgia.

What keeps you hopeful?

Possibilities keep me hopeful. Although I was laid off from a job I loved due to Covid-19 budget cuts, I quickly found a way to still be useful to some of the RCOs I've worked with over the last three years. I started Intelligent Recovery Strategies & Operations, LLC to offer strategic planning, grant writing, fundraising, and operations support to increase the sustainability of RCOs and help them thrive, intelligently. With support from my peers, I've been accepted into Georgia Tech's MBA program where I hope to learn more techniques to help our nonprofit RCOs increase their sustainability, so that they may survive any threats to funding and continue to help our peers!



Nick Estabrook
BS, CPS-AD, CPS-MH



GMHCN is creating regional advocacy teams to lead us through the upcoming legislative season. Much of the work is being done online and through videoconferencing, but advanced computer skills are not required to be a part of our efforts. In fact, we will need lots of people to make lots of calls to get funding restored to Georgia's peer services and trainings. If you are willing and able to participate, and can register at the link below, please do so. You can also email info@gmhc.org, or call us at 800-297-6146. Thank you for your support!

<https://www.gmhc.org/advocacy>



WE'RE HERE ALL YEAR

At the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, we recognize that many people experience heightened emotional challenges around the holidays, which is why we have special wellness activities planned at holidays throughout the year. We also know that there are many anniversaries which are unique to us as individuals—the anniversaries of traumas, grief events, and even memories of happy times with people who have passed. That is why our Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers provide support and wellness activities every day of the year, and our Peer2Peer Warm Line is open 24/7/365 to provide support over the phone.

No day is a holiday when we feel alone.

Call the Peer2Peer Warm Line at **888-945-1414** to receive peer support over the phone or learn more about Georgia's Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers.



A note from Sherry

It is so hard to believe that another year has almost passed us by. We had so many things we had planned for 2020, but we accomplished other things instead. We learned new skills. We adapted. We carried on. We stayed true to ourselves while becoming better versions of ourselves. We were, in short, resilient.

“Resilience” may well be our word of the year for 2021. At the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, we have embraced resilience like never before, and plan to maintain that embrace as we go forward. 2020 was as much about survival—in every sense of the word—as it was resilience. It seemed like a year of changing plans, extinguishing fires, and trying to catch our breath. 2020 was the year of *What will happen next?* 2021 will be the year of *What can we do next?*

For 30 years, GMHCN has been a forward-looking organization, always seeking innovative ways to support Georgia's behavioral health community. 2020 felt a little different to be sure, and put challenges before us like we have never faced. For us to be resilient as a community, it will take effort from us all. If peer support and the availability of quality mental health supports are important to you or your family, I encourage you to join our advocacy efforts, and to participate in the online Mental Health Day at the Capitol.

Wishing you safe and peaceful holidays,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sherry".