

THE PIPELINE

SINCE 1991

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2021 GEORGIA EVENTS

GMHCN Board Meeting Dates

July 21, 2021
August 23, 2021

GMHCN Board Retreat

November 4 -5, 2021

Certified Peer Specialist Trainings

Training 79 Online,
July 12-22

Training 80 Online
September 20-30

Training 81 Macon,
December 6-16

Ready4Reentry Forensic Peer Mentor Trainings

July 19-23
September 13-17
Nov. 30 - Dec. 2

Peer Support IOI

Online
August 25

GMHCN 30th Annual Conference

Online
November 10

More events and training opportunities will be scheduled over the next eight weeks. Please visit gmhcn.org or visit our Facebook page for the latest information.

RECOVERY HITS THE ROAD IN GEORGIA

The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network and the Georgia Council on Substance Abuse have long been partners in promoting behavioral health recovery and reducing stigma in Georgia. That work will soon have a prominent place on Georgia's highways and byways, thanks largely to the steadfast commitment of Jeff Breedlove, Chief of Policy and Communication at the Georgia Council on Substance Abuse (GCSA) and Erick Allen, Georgia State Representative of Georgia District 40.



Jeff Breedlove, Chief of Policy and Communications, GCSA (left)
Erick Allen, Georgia State Representative, 40th District (right)

The legislation enabling Georgians to secure a *Georgia Recovers* specialty license plate was signed into law by Governor Brian Kemp at the end of Georgia's most recent legislative session, realizing a long-sought goal of GCSA Executive Director Neil Campbell and GMHCN Executive Director Sherry Jenkins Tucker, who have both encouraged visibility of Georgia's behavioral health recovery community. According to Tucker, "Until there is no stigma in Georgia, it is our duty as peers and allies to share the message of hope whenever, wherever, and however we can. The specialty plate is a unique opportunity to meet people where they are and to reinforce the message that we can and do recover."

Representative Allen, who was responsible for shepherding the legislation through Georgia's complex legislative process, explained his commitment to the *Georgia Recovers* license plate saying "Mental health and recovery are very important issues that should be given more attention. Even before my time working for DBHDD, I have seen the impact that lack of resources and support has on individuals and families. When I got elected to office I immediately began to look for ways to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and provide funding for our recovery efforts in Georgia. The *Georgia Recovers* license plate is just one of those objectives but I believe it will be the most impactful; and I look forward to continuing the work."

Breedlove explained that "the *Georgia Recovers* specialty license plate is for all who would like to show support for all recovery. This specialty plate helps break the stigma surrounding both substance use disorders and mental health concerns by acknowledging that *Recovery is Real*. Proceeds from the sale of these license plates will be divided between the two partnering agencies so they can continue to speak out and speak up! Please help support recovery by getting your *Georgia Recovers* tag today."

Production and distribution of the plates will begin once the Georgia Department of Revenue has received orders and payment for 1,000 *Georgia Recovers* plates.

HOW TO SECURE A GEORGIA RECOVERS SPECIALTY PLATE

To secure a *Georgia Recovers* specialty license plate, please visit gmhcn.org and click on the *We Do Recover* link to a Jotform order form. The process begins there by providing basic information and a \$25 manufacturing fee. The rest of the process and the costs are explained in detail there.



Covid-19 Update

GMHCN: OUR PATHWAY TO RECOVERY

Just as individuals, families, communities, nations, and the world as a whole begin the process of recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, so too will organizations like the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network. No matter how resilient an organization might be, the impact of sustained uncertainty over such a prolonged period will inevitably leave its mark, in addition to the very real consequences of the budget cuts experienced in the spring of 2020.

The good news is that thanks to the unexpected surplus of revenue the State of Georgia received in 2020, GMHCN is hopeful that the funds cut from its budget in 2020 will soon be restored, allowing the full array of direct services and trainings it provides to Georgians to be available once again. Already, a number of previously unscheduled online trainings to support Georgia's peers and Certified Peer Specialists were provided by GMHCN in May and June, including Trauma-Informed Care, Whole Health Action Management, Wellness Recovery Action Planning, and a special Wellness Recovery Action Planning for Addictions.

The GMHCN home office in Tucker has maintained minimal staffing throughout the pandemic in order to ensure essential functions of the organization continued uninterrupted, but will reopen fully after the July 4 holiday. As at the Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers, employees and visitors to the home office who have a recent positive Covid-19 test or who are experiencing symptoms will be asked to participate in activities and/or work remotely. GMHCN employees and visitors who are not fully vaccinated will be asked to wear a mask at GMHCN facilities, trainings, and events. GMHCN will continue to monitor and comply with local, state, and federal pandemic guidelines.

The GMHCN Annual Conference will be held online again in 2021 (see details below). An extraordinary amount of planning is required for the traditional in-person conference, and cancelling or rescheduling events of that scale creates hardships not just for GMHCN employees but also for the people and facilities GMHCN has developed relationships with over the many years the conference has been held. The in-person conference will be held again as soon as the GMHCN board of directors and conference planners are able to prepare confidently for a gathering that will safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of all who attend.

GMHCN's Peer Mentors have been working whenever and wherever possible in community settings throughout the pandemic, and are working with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities to return to Georgia Regional Hospitals in the very near future. GMHCN's Forensic Peer Mentors returned to work onsite in Georgia's correctional facilities on May 1, and anticipate being fully returned to Georgia's Day Reporting Centers as of July 1. Double Trouble in Recovery facilitators are in the process of returning to in-person meetings in communities across the state, but plan to continue online DTR meetings. The Certified Peer Specialist Project trainings will remain online until it is feasible to travel and gather in person.

A look back at the highlights of GMHCN's 30 years, which is available online, makes clear that the Network has been in a constant state of growth, adaptation, and innovation since its founding, and has developed resilience through that time to withstand any number of challenges. The pandemic presented a truly unprecedented and extraordinary challenge, but the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network remains ready to support Georgia through whatever comes next.

SAVE THE DATE!
DISCOVERIES OF
HOPE

GMHCN ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021
 ONLINE NOVEMBER 10, 2021, 10AM-4PM

Please plan to join the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network for the Annual Conference 2021 to be held online November 10, 2021. The day will include speakers, workshops, and learning opportunities (including Continuing Education opportunities for Certified Peer Specialists) centered around the theme *Discoveries of Hope*. Pre-Registration is open online at gmhcn.org.

Event sponsorship opportunities at multiple levels are available to our allies and partners in this work, and information may be found online or by sending an email to finance@gmhcn.org.

PRE-REGISTRATION OPEN ONLINE

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?

Before I discovered peer support, I always felt separate from others. Something was different inside me and I felt I never truly fit in anywhere. I lived with depression and PTSD since I was a young child. For the majority of my life I watched the world go on around me as if I was a spectator. I moved from place to place, from state to state, trying to find my home, a place I truly belonged. My addiction started in my teens as I tried to find ways to cope with and cover up the trauma and feelings that overwhelmed me daily. My mental health challenges and addiction challenges kept snowballing until I finally found recovery here in Georgia.



Chris Dowling
CPS-MH, WHWC

What helped you move forward?

Early in my recovery I heard about the Peer Support, Wellness and Respite Center here in Colquitt County, which was right down the street from where I was living. Everything the Center offered was so new and foreign compared to the traditional clinical mental health system I was accustomed too. It was like a breath of fresh air. Being accepted and not judged, allowed me to lower my guard and open up. The support and understanding I received played a big part in becoming the person I am today.

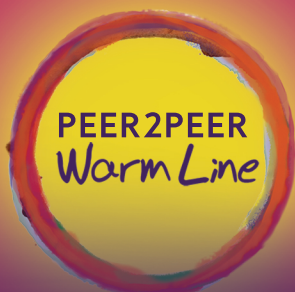
What is life like for you now?

My life today is more than what I could have seen for myself. The Center I walked into 6 years ago is the same Center where I have been blessed to work at for over 4 ½ years. I have had opportunities to be a part of some amazing trainings. I have grown into a new person. The relationship with my family has changed for the better and I have been given the space to start the healing process from a lot of the wounds of my past, which has allowed to be in a place where I can offer compassion, empathy, and support to the peers I interact with on a daily basis. Even on those days when my challenges arise I have been the tools and support I need to overcome them.

What keeps you hopeful?

Knowing that my past does not define me, that my struggles are not insurmountable. Finding purpose and using the things that I have experienced in my life to reach others. Seeing the peers around me grow right along with me. Family isn't just blood. Each person I connect with and share a piece of my life with becomes a part of my ever changing, ever evolving book called life.

PEER SUPPORT IS NOW ONLINE FOR GEORGIA



888-945-1414
24/7/365

The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network is pleased to announce that as part of its ongoing effort to provide peer support to Georgians in ways that meet their individual needs and communication preferences, peer support is now available through chat at the homepage of the Peer2Peer Warmline, www.peer2peer.center. According to Roslind Hayes, Statewide Director for Peer Support and Training, "Any time we can make that personal connection, whether it is in person at one of Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers, on the phone, or online, we have the opportunity to build those relationships, that mutuality, that is the core of peer support. I hope that people will discover the how really convenient the online chat feature is, especially for people who are in situations where they may not be able to call and speak to someone on the Warm Line, but could still use some support in that moment." Visit us online to learn more.

PEER SUPPORT FOR GEORGIA

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A note from Sherry

"Mostly sunny with a chance of scattered showers and occasional overcast skies" is not much of a forecast, but that seems to be where we are looking forward at life in the world after what we hope is the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic: We have much to be hopeful and thankful for, while we move forward with prudence and deliberation to ensure that we are doing our best to help ensure the health, safety, welfare, and wellness of the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network's staff, the peers we support, and the communities where we live and work.

Georgia was not fully prepared to meet the behavioral health needs of all its citizens even before the pandemic, particularly those living in rural areas. The scarcity of behavioral health service providers and resources in many areas of our state was illuminated by the increase in demand for behavioral health services for Georgians across all demographics throughout the pandemic.

Fortunately for us as we navigate what some are calling a "mental health pandemic," Georgia's challenges are not a lack of passion, dedication, and skills in those providing services, but rather a lack of capacity. There just are not enough of us peers and our allied professionals to provide the support Georgia needs. I hope you will join me in continuing to advocate for the expansion and strengthening of Georgia's public safety net to enhance our resilience no matter what our forecast holds.

