

# THE PIPELINE

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## 2019 EVENTS

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

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

**GMHCN Board Meetings**  
*Face-to-Face Meetings*  
St. Simons Island,  
August 19

*Board Retreat*  
November 7-8

*Conference Call*  
July 18

**Peer Workforce  
Development Conference**  
Athens,  
August 1-2

**CARES Connect**  
Atlanta, August 9  
Warner Robins,  
November 8

**Georgia Mental Health  
Consumer Network  
28th Annual Summer  
Conference**  
St. Simons Island  
August 20-22

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

**Recovery Symposium**  
Waycross,  
November 2

**Georgia Peer  
Support Institutes**  
St. Simons Island,  
November 13-15

## A PLACE TO CALL HOME IN GEORGIA

At GMHCN's 27th Annual Summer Conference in 2018, Georgia's mental health peer community identified "Affordable, Accessible, Supported Housing" as their number one priority, and not for the first time. Housing has been a challenge for our community for as long as we have been a community. One of the reasons housing may be a more pressing need for Georgia's mental health community now than at other times is because it has been steadily becoming a more pressing need for all Georgians. From 2010 to 2018, Georgia's population increased by almost a million people, an increase of 8.6%, according to the Census Bureau. Not only is Atlanta the third-fastest growing metropolitan area in the country, but six of the twenty fastest growing communities in the country are in Georgia, and housing growth—particularly affordable housing with access to the services sought by many in the mental health recovery community—has not kept up with this population growth.

According to the nonpartisan, nonprofit Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "747,100 people in 331,600 low-income Georgia households pay more than half their income for rent, often forgoing necessities, like food or medicine, to keep a roof over their heads." Throughout Georgia, families and retirees are also being displaced from their historic neighborhoods and communities as gentrification causes increases in property taxes and disrupts access to services. But these challenges have not prevented Georgia's leaders and advocates from continuing to pursue solutions to housing for Georgia's mental health recovery community.

"Safe, stable housing is a vital part of recovery," said Judy Fitzgerald, Commissioner of Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. "Through our Georgia Housing Voucher and bridge funding programs, DBHDD has become a leading state agency in funding supported housing for people with serious and persistent mental illness. Working with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, we have helped more than 5,000 individuals – 2,538 of whom were previously homeless – obtain housing since 2010. DBHDD promotes access to supported housing in combination with mental health services from our community providers. By using this *housing first but not housing only approach*, people are able to become connected to stabilizing supports in their communities and are able to embrace and maintain recovery."

Mariele Sivley, the Chair of Georgia's Supported Housing Advisory Committee, and Executive Director of the Georgia Supportive Housing Association, explains "We are at the point now where there is an understanding that housing is critical to health, and that an individual or family cannot be well if they are not stably and safely housed. Supportive housing is a cornerstone of the social determinants of health. We need perseverance to build and sustain capacity to meet housing needs, and there are many obstacles we are facing, including not only rising rents, but also criminal and credit histories, discriminatory zoning laws, stigma, and a basic lack of understanding of what supportive housing is and the role it plays in improving communities. It takes commitment to create quality supportive housing, as it combines affordable housing plus needed supports and services."

One thing is clear—innovative thinking is going to be required for the realization of long-term solutions to the shortage of affordable, accessible, supported housing in Georgia. Some of Georgia's local communities, who best understand their local housing needs and opportunities, are already exploring creative ways to address these challenges. Georgia's Behavioral Health Planning and Advisory Council recently toured the Chatham-Savannah Authority for the Homeless' tiny house project, named "The Cove at Dundee," where construction is near completion on the first phase of 24 small, affordable homes. BHPAC members were impressed not only with the quality of the design and construction of the homes, but also the civic engagement and generosity that made the project possible. BHPAC coordinator Aisha Northington said "Having a house like this would have made all the difference in my life. Just having a place to go to call home makes all the difference."

GMHCN will continue to engage whenever and wherever it can to address the housing needs of Georgia's mental health recovery community. We know how important it is to have a safe place to call home, and we want that opportunity for everyone.



Pictured: A Tiny House from The Cove at Dundee



## MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY MESSAGING

Earlier this year, Mental Health Recovery Messaging was added to the Certified Peer Specialist Project Training Curriculum to empower Certified Peer Specialists in their workplaces and communities. Based upon the very positive feedback the CPS Project team has received from training participants, Mental Health Recovery Messaging Training is being introduced at this year's Annual Summer Conference so that all of Georgia's peers and CPS's can have access to this resource.

Roslind Hayes, CPS, CARES, Statewide Coordinator of GMHCN's Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers, and Chris Johnson, CPS, CPS-AD, GMHCN's Director of Communications, adapted the Recovery Messaging Training (developed for the substance use recovery community by Faces and Voices of Recovery) for use by the mental health recovery community.

According to Roslind, "We've been working really hard for many years to reduce the stigma around mental health recovery, and we've been very intentional about using appropriate language, but up until now, we have not been very intentional about using the most appropriate language with the specific audience we're trying to engage with, adapting the language, making it personal, making it purposeful, and making it hopeful. We saw that happening with the Faces and Voices of Recovery training for the substance use recovery community, and we wanted to expand that success into something that would be equally successful for the mental health recovery community. It really is true that success builds success, and by focusing on our personal successes, we can quickly and effectively change the conversation from How do we deal with the mentally ill? to How can we support mental health recovery?"

Roslind and Chris both first experienced Recovery Messaging Training while attending the Certified Addiction Recovery Empowerment Specialist training offered by the Georgia Council on Substance Abuse. As an employee at GCSA, where Chris worked as the Coordinator for Recovery Community Organization Development, he provided dozens of Recovery Messaging Training workshops around the state, and observed the transformational power of the training, and he observed, "People want to be able to advocate for themselves and others, but we don't always know how. If I only have one or two minutes to introduce myself, what do I say? What is my focus? Do I share my diagnosis, my trauma, my treatment history? What helps me best achieve my advocacy goal? The lesson we learned from Recovery Messaging Training is that limited self-disclosure about specifics of what's wrong or what happened in the past, and a focus on what's working now and what keeps us hopeful for the future, is what really resonates with people, especially those who are unfamiliar with the culture of behavioral health recovery."

One question that some training participants have asked is "Does this replace RESPECT Institute training?" and Sherry Jenkins Tucker, GMHCN's Executive Director answers with a firm "No, this does not in any way replace or detract from the great work of the RESPECT Institute," adding "We see this as another tool for mental health recovery advocates in their communities. There are many times and places, such as city council or zoning meetings, where the opportunity for a full RESPECT Institute story may not exist, but where the voice of mental health recovery and wellness is needed. Mental Health Recovery Messaging Training provides the skills for peers to be able to confidently speak up for themselves and their peers anytime, anywhere. And whenever we can add to the mental health advocacy toolkit, that's a great thing."

Mental Health Recovery Messaging Training is not only for people in mental health recovery. Allies and service providers are also encouraged to attend, and learn how to more effectively advocate for us and with us.

## Top 5 Priorities

It's that time of year! As we prepare for our 28th Annual Statewide Consumer Conference that will be held August 20 – 22, 2019 at St. Simons Island, Georgia, we are asking Georgia's peers to help the GMHCN determine our priorities for the upcoming year. You can submit your priorities online through a link on the Annual Conference page at [gmhcn.org](http://gmhcn.org). The top ten priorities from across the state will be presented at the conference. Conference participants will then have the opportunity to vote to identify the five that will become the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network priorities for 2019-2020.

If you have questions, or would like a paper ballot mailed to you, please give us a call at 800-297-6146.

# 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?

In 1982, during my senior year, majoring in Studio Art at Georgia State University, I received a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, which is characterized by a withdrawal from reality. I had just begun to learn how to navigate life when I was thrust into the mental health system without the ability to figure it all out. With diminished capacity life was hard, living and health concerns cost, and money was hard to come by. Feeling and looking different caused me to withdraw from friends. I felt so alone.

## What helped you move forward?

I continued to paint as I had all my life, studying privately for many years after graduation with Joseph Perrin, a world renowned artist and head emeritus of the School of Art and Design at GSU. I also discovered the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network where I learned coping skills and found a community of people devoted to recovery with emphasis on living the best life possible, step by step toward your dreams. I took a job there and GMHCN grew into a large organization focused on peer support, wellness, and recovery as I grew with them.

## What is life like for you now?

I am now many years into recovery, and deeply involved in the creation as well as the business side of art. In 2004 the Carter Center in Atlanta invited me to give a solo art exhibit to an audience that included President Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn. Mrs. Carter now has three of my works in her collection. One is displayed at the Carter Center in Atlanta and my art donations to the Carter Center Fundraiser have brought as much as \$100,000.00 for a single painting at auction, raising a half million dollars in a few short years. With increasing media attention, interviews, documentaries and panel discussions, I've grown enormously as artist and communicator through painting and speech. I've joined with Cheri Mitchell to start a business creating and selling art. I have also written a book, the foreword written by Rosalynn Carter. It tells of how I overcame mental illness while pursuing my dreams to become the "Best Artist Ever" and how I used coping skills derived from problem solving the creation of original art to find greater meaning in my life. My book tells the story of how my art and illness coalesce - art assisting in recovery, illness teaching me about art, each helping to navigate the ebb and flow of life.

## What keeps you hopeful?

I have always known my purpose. I was born to create art. In my work I find beauty in either what I paint or how I paint it. Primarily, I bargain with artistic elements such as line, color and shape to bring about beauty and elegance of style with simplicity in design. I approach each beginning from a variety of viewpoints resulting in the use of styles as if they were different colors or shapes. Sensations grab at our emotions, making them a useful tool in maximizing the artworks impact on the viewer. But there is a place in our overly emotional heart that yields to reason. From that place I have come to understand beauty to exist in every imaginable thing. I do believe one man's trash is another man's treasure and the only difference being the perspective each takes. My purpose for creating a work of art is to celebrate beauty in those who see it and to persuade those who do not.



Jerome Lawrence



## All Recovery Meetings Are Here For Us All!

You don't have to identify as an addict or alcoholic to want to learn more about how to get well and stay well. All Recovery meetings provide a place where all pathways to recovery are welcome, including members of twelve-step groups, faith-based groups, and people in medication-assisted recovery, but there is only one purpose, and that is supporting each other on our recovery journeys. Don't have a particular pathway to recovery, or group that you're a part of? You're welcome, too. We know that every recovery journey is unique, and we will honor and support yours.

We hope you'll join us at Y'All Recovery, the All Recovery meetings that began meeting at Georgia's Peer Support, Wellness, and Respite Centers in June 2019. If you plan to be at GMHCN's Annual Summer Conference, we will be having a meeting there—just look for us on the schedule.





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*"Yes," painting by Jerome Lawrence*  
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## A note from Sherry

My favorite time of the year is almost upon us—the Annual Summer Conference, our opportunity to gather together as a community of peers to celebrate, learn, grow, laugh, share, dance, and break bread together. The conference is the heart of all that we do here at the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network. It isn't just the determination of the priorities that are voted on, which direct the work of GMHCN throughout the year, or the opportunities to interact with Georgia's behavioral health leaders. It is something much more. It is the personal connections that we build, whether reconnecting with old friends or making new ones, looking one another in the eye, shaking hands, sharing a sunrise, a sunset, a star-filled sky.

We spend so much of our time being connected through screens, apps, and emails, that it can become easy to forget the truly awesome experience of simply being in the presence of someone who supports you, and understands you. And to be surrounded by a community of peers from across the state really is an experience unlike any other. GMHCN may have its home office in Decatur, but our spiritual home is at our annual conference. It is where our passion for the work we do is rekindled, and where we find our inspiration for what we will do next. It would be easy to think of the conference as a homecoming, but it is much more than that—it is the beginning of our next journey. We hope you will be able to join us.

*Sherry*

