

THE PIPELINE

SINCE 1991

VOLUME I, 2022-2023

2022 EVENTS

GMHCN Board Meetings
November 27

Peer Support 101 Online
December 19

Certified Peer Specialist
Training 86 Online
December 5-15

Ready4Reentry Forensic
Peer Mentor Training
November 14-18

Thanksgiving, Christmas,
and the New Year are
celebrated at each of
Georgia's five Peer
Support, Wellness, and
Respite Centers. Anyone
in or seeking mental health
recovery is welcome to
join us for a variety of food
and fellowship. For more
information call any time:
888.945.1414

2023 EVENTS

Addiction Recovery
Awareness Day
January
Freight Depot

Mental Health Day at the
Capitol
January
Freight Depot

Peer Support 101 Online
February 17

Certified Peer Specialist
Training 87
February 6-16

Certified Peer Specialist
Training 88
February 3-13

Please visit **GMHCN.org**
or our Facebook page for
the latest information on
upcoming events.

A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS IN THE STORY OF THE GEORGIA MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMER NETWORK

On August 11, 2022, GMHCN announced that Dawn A. Randolph, MPA joined the organization as Chief Finance and Revenue Officer. Dawn comes to the Network from her long career in public administration and policy in the fields of healthcare, mental health, and substance use disorders. In her new role, Randolph will lead the Network's financial and grant management as well as revenue generation. Her work for the Network began with Dawn doing a deep study of the complex methods that evolved over the years to keep the Network functioning. She has already begun to introduce processes and systems to save money, create efficiency, enhance accountability, and free up time for staff to focus on their core role with the Network, and less on administrative tasks.



Chief Finance & Revenue Officer
GMHCN

Judy Fitzgerald, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) offered her welcome by stating, "DBHDD welcomes the arrival of Dawn Randolph, whose breadth and depth of experience comes at an important time for GMHCN. The sudden passing of a great leader in the field can be unsettling, but Sherry's legacy is the resiliency and strength of the peer movement in Georgia. We are excited to know that this important organization can navigate challenging times with a skilled leader as part of the management team while the search for a new Executive Director is underway."

"Dawn's long career working with government funding at all levels allows her to bring a strong compliance and regulatory perspective to our projects, which every nonprofit needs but few have at this level. She is also trained in fundraising and highly knowledgeable in project and financial management. She came along at the perfect time" said Lynn Thogersen, emeritus financial manager for GMHCN who retired in October 2021 after 27 years with the Network. Lynn returned to work part-time after the July 11, 2022 death of GMHCN Executive Director Sherry Jenkins Tucker to ensure a strong management team is in place to safeguard the future of peer support in Georgia and the resilience of the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network.

"Dawn's vast experience in the contract work of non-profits will bolster the Network's conservative and solid financial foundation. Her knowledge of Georgia and the foundation world will provide access to new resources to support both the innovative development work GMHCN is internationally known for, and the outreach efforts to support Georgia's peers that is the heart of all we do here," said Chris Johnson, Interim Executive Director and Director of Communications at GMHCN. He went on to say "Sherry interviewed Dawn and was planning to make her an offer of employment prior to her death. The financial upheavals of the pandemic era made it essential to have someone on staff with a better understanding of all the financial tools available to us. The completion of the hiring process for Dawn is one of the least challenging tasks the management team at the Network has faced this year. We are thrilled to have Dawn on board."

A once-in-a-generation change is happening at the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network. A new leadership team, including a new leader, is being formed now to shape what the Network will be, do, and achieve for the next 5, 10 or 15 years (or more). Critical to the future success of GMHCN is the voice of Georgia's mental health recovery community. Visit <https://www.gmhc.org/advocacy> through November 27 what you want, need, or expect from a GMHCN focused on your future recovery and wellness.



I N M E M O R I A M

Sharon Jenkins Tucker, MA, CPS, ITE, known as “Sherry” to all who met her, died in her sleep on July 11, 2022, which would have been a disappointment to Sherry, an avid collector of knowledge, of experience, of novelty, of information to share with others either to inform, to warn, to encourage, or simply to amuse. For her, this Next Great Adventure (as she referred to death, in a line borrowed from Albus Dumbledore) was one she faced with as much trepidation as any of us, but one in which she would have preferred to have a notebook handy to write down her observations to pass on to us, so we could learn from her experience.

Sherry served as the Executive Director of the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, Inc. from 2004 until her death on July 11, 2022, during which time she grew GMHCN from four employees to over 100, all with the simple task of making the world a better place by listening to other people, treating them with dignity and respect, and helping them to identify and achieve their personal goals by focusing on their strengths, and supporting them in the development of tools and skills to manage challenges presented by mental health concerns (or anything else).

By training people in recovery from mental health concerns to use their lived experience to support others, Sherry was able to provide hope, connection, and resources to people returning to their communities from psychiatric hospitals and incarceration, and help break generational cycles of institutionalization. She shared her experience, knowledge, and successful outcomes with any and all interested in supporting peers (people living with mental health concerns). And so from Decatur to Los Angeles to Australia there are countless beneficiaries of Sherry’s curiosity and generosity.

Of the many awards she accumulated over the years, two of her most cherished were the 2010 Isaiah Uliss Advocate Award by the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (PRA) and the 2009 Clifford W. Beers Award by Mental Health America. She disliked the personal spotlight at awards ceremonies, but she relished committee work, and always stepped up when she believed she could be of value, including serving as Chair of the Behavioral Health Services Coalition and the Georgia Behavioral Health Planning and Advisory Council. In recent years the board work she loved most was serving as the chair of the Vision Committee for the Atlanta/Fulton County Center for Diversion and Services, a project fueled by hope but forecast with doom as GMHCN was in its early years, and according to her, the reason she felt so drawn to support it.

Before joining GMHCN Sherry worked for the West Virginia Mental Health Consumers’ Association and directed their Mental Health Consumer Network and the West Virginia Office of Consumer Affairs. Prior to that, she was a Behavioral Health Advocate for Legal Aid of West Virginia for nine years. She was a vocal advocate for mental health recovery resources, and served as a leader in the movement to have people in mental health recovery trained and certified to use their lived experience to support others, and to be paid for that support: Certified Peer Specialists. The Georgia Model of CPS training, as it is known internationally, and in the 37 (and counting) states where it has been implemented, was developed in Georgia under the leadership of Sherry, the Appalachian Consulting Group, and colleagues at the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, most notably Wendy Tiegreen, a steadfast champion of peer support.

Sherry had extensive experience with the recovery and wellness movement and her expertise with peer workforce development and mind/body/spirit wellness was widely recognized. Whole Health Action Management, now a standard mental health practice, can trace part of its roots back to Georgia. As GMHCN was beginning its own exploration of what Sherry called “the amazing discovery that our brains are attached to the rest of our bodies” the Health and Human Services Administration began exploring the mind/body connection, and GMHCN and HHS worked together building that early body of knowledge that informs mental health treatment across the globe today.



T H E E V I D E N C E

The globe was a place of great personal interest to Sherry—she wanted to see it all, personally. And she did see a great deal of it. Many of her favorite spots were in Mexico and the Caribbean, where she and her husband Randy spent many of their vacations and holidays together. Europe and the Middle East had their charms, but Sherry and Randy always returned to their cherished spot just around the Tropic of Cancer in the West.

While she dedicated her life to what she called “this great work we get to do,” she always remembered to have fun, to laugh, to dance, to make sure there was live music whenever and wherever she could. She loved to see and to buy crafts and art of all varieties everywhere she went, and to meet and talk to the artists and craftspeople, and express her enthusiasm for their work: She would clap at the sight of a beautifully detailed necklace in an airport kiosk, startling everyone except those who knew her. Anyone who spent enough time with Sherry grew to know that while extravagant praise costs nothing, it is incredibly valuable—especially to those who rarely receive it—and she provided encouragement whenever she could.

She particularly enjoyed mentoring other women working to build peer organizations, but rarely discussed any one particular project publicly, because she believed that everyone should receive their full measure of credit for the work they do in communities, and that asking for help, and supplying it in turn, is the lifeblood of nonprofits, and the essence of peer support.

Learning about the lives of other people—what inspired them, what they longed for, what they did for work or for fun, who taught them, what they loved, what they dreamed—there was no subject too arcane or mundane to draw and keep Sherry’s attention, because it was never arcane or mundane to her: Everyone’s story mattered to her, and she remembered most all of them. And no matter how defeated a person might appear, she never gave up hope their story would change—that they, like she, would have a happy ending. As a person who experienced homelessness, institutionalization, and significant trauma, she knew the path to wellness was not always an easy one, and that it is best, if possible, not to take it alone.

Sherry is survived by her husband, best friend, and co-conspirator in the pursuit of joy, Randy, and their dog Mila and cat Scout. She is also survived by her brother Michael J. Jenkins and his wife Pamela of Albright, WV; two nephews, Michael Kiley Jenkins and his wife Lindsey of Oakland, MD, and Mathew A. Jenkins and his wife Robyn of Pittsburgh, PA; and niece, Kara M. Jenkins Tuttle and husband Seth of Bridgeport, WV.; as well as a quartet of great nieces and nephews, including Blake Jenkins, Aiden Jenkins, Nora Tuttle, and William Tuttle; her aunt Shirley Bollinger of Albright, WV, and a whole chorus of cousins and kin from West Virginia, Ohio, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Indiana.

Her brother’s children held a special place in her heart, and she shared their accomplishments with the same pride of belonging as a parent. When planning took place for holiday events for peers shunned by their families, she would share her sincere and humble gratitude for a family that welcomed her, and celebrated her accomplishments.

Of her many titles, honorifics, and awards, ITE was Sherry’s favorite. **I’m The Evidence** that recovery works was a message that she carried wherever she went. Those of us who were honored to know her, fortunate to work with her, or simply benefitted indirectly and unknowingly from her many endeavors, we are the evidence that one person can change the world, and make it a better place. Because she did.

A version of this obituary appeared in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. It was written by Chris Johnson.



Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network
1990 Lakeside Parkway, Suite 100
Tucker, GA 30084

(Return Service Requested)

The Pipeline is funded by
DBHDD and is
published 4 times a year by the
Georgia Mental Health
Consumer Network
1990 Lakeside Pkwy., Suite 100
Tucker, GA 30084
404-687-9487 or 800-297-6146
office@gmhcن.org
www.gmhcن.org
E. Joseph Sanders, President,
GMHCN Board of Directors
Chris Johnson, Editor
and Interim Executive Director

A (final) note from Sherry

Few people outside GMHCN management knew for certain that from when I began editing *The Pipeline* in 2018 until the last issue went to press days before her death, I wrote this “A Note from Sherry” column. It was by far one of the most rewarding professional and personal assignments I have ever had, because it gave me the extraordinary opportunity to question and learn about not just Sherry’s thoughts and beliefs, but also her language, her vocabulary, the way she calibrated her word choice to her audience, the way her pointed diction sharpened and her speech slowed almost imperceptibly to ensure every word and the ideas behind the word were received with clarity. Sherry did not want her voice heard—she wanted her ideas understood. Sherry, Roz Hayes, and I spent countless hours workshopping, strategizing, planning, fine-tuning and endlessly refining (at least in theory) most every aspect of the organization on our many road trips for the Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center.

By July 2022, I could tell you with near certainty what Sherry’s opinion on any work matter would be. It was mid-2020 when she stopped editing these “Notes” of hers. That’s why when I hear people who barely knew her tell me what Sherry “would have wanted” or people who may have known her a little better say “Sherry told me... [an absurd thing Sherry would never say except to possibly elicit more details on an improbable proposal].” All of that is moot of course—Sherry had a streak of the Late Romantic in her, and a penchant for nostalgia, but her ever-present desire to do the next right thing, which included measuring ideas on their own merits—overrode her personal preferences and emotional attachments nearly every time. She might have been personally flattered by the notion her name was being used in this way, but she would have been appalled had any of us she left in leadership positions actually made business decisions based on statements that—even if reported with 100% accuracy—were made for a very different GMHCN. She knew perhaps better than anyone how quickly we would need to recalibrate operations in Tucker to keep the work we do across the state running smoothly and without interruption, and we will continue to do so.

So what would Sherry say to Georgia’s mental health recovery community, including our mental health peers, the staff at GMHCN, and our many allies and supporters who are readers of *The Pipeline*? Something about like this: “Thank you all for what you have done to make possible this great work we get to do. I value each and every one of you. I hope you get something really delicious to eat sometime soon, and don’t forget to have a piece of cake, and the next time you have an opportunity to dance, or to listen to live music, take it. I told Chris when he started working for me and wanted to stop publishing *The Pipeline* that one day he would be glad he listened to me.” And I am.