

THE PIPELINE

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UPCOMING EVENTS

GMHCN Board Meetings

Face-to-Face

St. Simons Island, GA
August 20, 2018

Cordele, GA
October 18-19, 2018

Conference Call
July 17, 2018

Georgia Peer Support Institutes

Epworth by the Sea
St. Simons Island, GA
November 14-16, 2018

2018 Certified Peer Specialist Trainings

Columbus, GA Sept. 10-20
Savannah, Oct. 15-25
Atlanta, GA Dec. 10-20

Alternatives Conference

Washington, DC
July 29-August 3, 2018

CARES Connect

August 10-11, Atlanta, GA
November 2, Macon, GA

Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network Annual Conference

St Simons Island, GA
August 21-23, 2018

Recovery Symposium

Swainsboro, GA
October 16th, 2018

THE STATE OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH A REPORT FROM THE GEORGIA MENTAL HEALTH FORUM

The Twenty-third Annual Rosalynn Carter Georgia Mental Health Forum was held at The Carter Center on May 11, 2018, and the day itself was an example of how Georgia has been able to make such tremendous progress in addressing shortfalls in its public behavioral health system over the past decade: Stakeholders from across the state, and from the many organizations that support and are supported by the behavioral health system, gathered to share information, to make connections, and to listen to one another. The progress we have made was celebrated, but there were also frank discussions about the work that is left to do, notably for housing equity and Georgia's justice-involved citizens. These conversations, carried on throughout the day by advocates, students, service providers, researchers, peers, the judiciary, and policy leaders, are part of what sets Georgia apart, and have enabled us to maintain our forward momentum.

Commissioner Judith A. Fitzgerald, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DHBD), described how over the past ten years Georgia's system has transformed from an underfunded, inconsistent, and fragmented system with poor customer service and a lack of accountability into a high-performing system that seeks out innovative ways to deliver quality services to all Georgians. Some accomplishments she noted include Georgia's low recidivism rate, large financial investment in behavioral health services, and reliable safety net. She recognized the contributions of Georgia's Certified Peer Specialist workforce to the state's success, saying "Certified Peer Specialists are integral to our system's transformation because they use their lived experiences to make it easier for other people to navigate their own recovery. In this way, Certified Peer Specialists are supporting transformation every day, both one-on-one and throughout the system."

Cynthia Wainscott, DBHDD Region1 Regional Advisory Council Member and behavioral health pioneer, also recognized the value of Georgia's expanding CPS workforce, and included Georgia's peers in her report of successes stemming from the Department of Justice ADA settlement agreement. She also reported on the more than 1,000 Georgians in supported employment, the inclusion of peers on ACT Teams, and hundreds of people moved from hospitals into community settings. She called for additional support for early intervention to relieve stresses on the crisis response system, as well as for IDD and supported housing.

The state of behavioral health in Georgia really is improving. We have made much progress, and the collaborative relationships and spirit of cooperation on display at The Carter Center are an excellent indicator that there is more progress to come.



For more information, or to view the presentations made at The Georgia Mental Health Forum, please visit www.cartercenter.org

COMING TOGETHER, MAKING CONNECTIONS, EMBRACING RECOVERY ★

THE 27TH ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE: AUGUST 21-23, 2018 ★

The Annual Summer Conference is the highlight of the year for many of us. It is truly an extraordinary opportunity—a chance for peers to join together for fun, fellowship, and personal development. We look forward to returning to Saint Simons Island each year because it gives us the opportunity to learn about what has really been happening in each other's lives. Social media has its good qualities, but nothing compares to being able to truly connect with another peer—to look one another in the eye and ask How are you? and being able to answer that same question honestly, and without fear of judgement. The Annual Summer Conference isn't just a get-together; it is a time and space for healing and wellness. ★

Some of this year's workshops and activities include a Hands on Art Workshop, Double Trouble in Recovery meetings, a Consumer Art Show, Dance, and Karaoke. RESPECT Institute graduates will tell their stories, and Georgia Peer Support Institute graduates will share their community projects. Special opportunities to learn more about CPRP Certification, and cultivating resilience through compassion will also be available.

This year's keynote speakers include Robyn Priest, Lead Project Coordinator, Peerlink National Technical Assistance Center, and Judy Fitzgerald, MSW, Commissioner, Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. Robyn has worked across the globe, spreading the good news of the success of peer support from countries as geographically and culturally diverse as Micronesia and Canada. Commissioner Fitzgerald is a faithful ally of the behavioral health community, and in her role at DBHDD has championed for an expansion of peer services in Georgia's communities. The global and local perspective of these two dynamic speakers is certain to inspire and inform us all, and reaffirm what many of us have experienced firsthand: No population is too large or too small to benefit from peer support.

Also among this year's keynote speakers is Leonard Zimmerman, the subject of the award-winning film "The HAPPY Documentary: A Small Film with a Big Smile," in which Leonard shares his experience living with grief and depression. Leonard will discuss how he used his talent as a painter and graphic designer to bring smiles to others at a time when he was experiencing behavioral health challenges himself. This is a rare treat we hope you will get to share with us.



Visit happydocmovie.com to learn more.

The deadline to register for the conference is August 1, 2018. Anyone with special housing requests should register as soon as possible. For registration information, please visit gmhcn.org

A highlight of the conference each year is the identification of the peer-chosen Top Five Priorities for the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network. Peers are encouraged to have their voices heard in the selection of our top priorities by visiting the GMCHN website and completing a ballot online, or by calling the GMCHN office in Decatur to have a ballot mailed to you. All ballots must be received by August 1. We look forward to seeing you in August! ★

Georgia Peer Support Institute Information

Held twice annually:

May: Helen, GA
November: St. Simons Island, GA

Cost: Free, including travel expense reimbursement

Requirements: Lived experience with a behavioral health concern and a desire to use that experience to support others.

GEORGIA PEER SUPPORT INSTITUTE: THREE TRANSFORMATIVE DAYS

Twice each year, a group of Georgia's peers gather together for a three-day introduction to peer support at the Georgia Peer Support Institute. This free training provides attendees with the opportunity to learn more about how peers can support one another. The transformative power of sharing, of collaborative learning, of simply breaking bread together, is fully realized at each GPSI, and is an awesome opportunity for anyone considering becoming a Certified Peer Specialist. When we come together to lift each other up, our collective efforts result in individual progress that we experience as we return to our homes and communities. Forty Georgians from across the state are selected for each training. We encourage everyone with an interest in reducing stigma and empowering recovery to apply to attend a GPSI training as soon as possible. The best time to grow and be of service is now!

To learn more, visit <http://www.gmhcn.org> or email gpsi@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?

My life was totally unmanageable, and I was a mess. I was lost in what I used to call a parallel universe. I was living on the street, consumed with guilt, shame, and fear, and really confused as to what happened to my life. I was trapped in a downward spiral of despair. I was disconnected, desperate, and on so many days, unable to see any hope. Interestingly enough, in the midst of my madness through the years, there were always people who were kind and encouraging, people who could see possibility where I saw none, people who held the hope and offered support.

What helped you move forward?

I have always believed that I have angels working on my behalf, those people, those angels who spoke life to me. The women serving hot food in the church basement who would hug me and didn't care that I didn't smell so great. The folks in the rooms who welcomed me and told me to keep coming back. The woman who gave me a bed in her program, when all I had literally, was the clothes on my back. My mother, who never stopped loving me, no matter how many times I broke her heart. The therapist who helped me understand that it wasn't my fault. Connection helped me move forward.

What is life like for you now?

I love my life, and on most days I really like myself. I have great relationships with family and friends. I have a home that I share with others who are on their journey, what a great gift. I work for the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, an organization that I love. My work gives me meaning and purpose and allows me opportunity to support others. I get to see recovery in action every day. I am grateful.

What keeps you hopeful?

I know that recovery is real and I that I am a part of the change that I want to see in the world. The peers I work with every day constantly inspire me, and provide me encouragement to keep learning new ways to be of service.



Roz Hayes, CPS, CARES



GMHCN.ORG: A NEW WEBSITE FOR A NEW ERA *New Content, New Functionality, New Graphics*

A lot has changed since our current website went live in 2004, including how many people rely on the internet for resources, and how they access those resources. Our new website will reflect those changes. Our new mobile version will be a streamlined version of the desktop version, and many of the graphics and other non-essential features will be removed from the mobile version to make it more accessible to people who rely on their phones for access to the internet.

The updated site includes new content, features, and changes to navigation, with dropdown menus for both mobile and desktop versions. We've also improved the structure of our content, so you'll be able to access information more readily.

Our desktop version will include graphics featuring nature and wildlife from across the diverse Georgia communities served by GMHCN. From jellyfish and dolphins on the coast, to the birds and trees of the mountains, Georgia's natural beauty is presented in a style that is intended to reflect the creativity, energy, and thoughtfulness of our peers.

We are excited about this step forward, and hope you are, as well. New content will continue to be added over the coming months. Please send thoughts, comments, or feedback to info@gmhcn.org.

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A note from Sherry

As we approach our 27th Annual Summer Conference, I find myself reflecting back on conferences from previous years, and our peers who have moved on to other places. It isn't just our friends and colleagues who have died, such as the inestimable and dearly missed Charles Willis, that are brought to mind, but also those who have moved on from providing peer support to new careers and opportunities, whose hearts of service continue to inform their professional lives. So many of our peers are doing amazing and good things in their professional and personal lives.

We recognize that not every person who has received Certified Peer Specialist training from GMHCN is able to be employed providing peer support services, for any number of reasons. But we do believe that everyone has a voice that they can use to be of service to the behavioral health community, in whatever capacity they work or volunteer. Like the old Bob Dylan song says, we're "gonna have to serve somebody," and we continue to be inspired by the people who choose to be of service to their peers. Simply by identifying as someone living with behavioral health concerns at work, in our faith and civic communities, in our everyday lives, we are being of service by helping reduce stigma. The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network is proud to be a service organization, but I believe every company or organization has the ability to be of service—all it takes is that one person willing to take that risk, to make that extra effort, to be the voice that says *I'm the evidence*.

Whether you are able to join us at our Annual Summer Conference this August or not, please know that we are gathering to serve you, and we hope that you are serving your peers wherever, however, and whenever you can.

