

Upcoming Events

GMHCN Board Meetings
Macon, GA
July 9, 2009

Decatur, GA
May 13, 2009

St. Simon's Island, GA
August 17, 2009

Pine Mountain, GA
November 12 & 13, 2009

GA Certified Peer Specialist
Training

Norcross, GA
July 27-31;
August 3-6, 2009

St. Simon's Island, GA
October 19-23;
October 26-29, 2009

Georgia Peer Support Institute
Unicoi State Park
Helen, GA
April 1-3, 2009

Epworth by the Sea
St. Simons Island, GA
November 17-19, 2009

GMHCN
Spring Fundraiser
Decatur, GA
May 12, 2009

USPRA
34th Annual Conference
Marriott Norfolk Waterside
Norfolk, VA
June 29-July 2, 2009

GMHCN
18th Annual Conference
Peers Supporting Peers:
Head to Toe Wellness
Epworth by the Sea
St. Simon's Island, GA
August 18-20, 2009

Alternatives 2009
Omaha, NE
October 28 -November 1, 2009

For more information go to
www.gmhcnc.org

PEER INSTITUTE NEWS

Spring 2009

GPSI Grads Pass It On

All GPSI grads are expected to complete a community project based on what they learned at GPSI. It's a way to further their learning and share the hope of recovery. Herein are stories about some Grads who completed their projects.

RECOVERY AT WORK

For the last couple of months, I have been leading a group on Recovery at Work. The topics from the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) include wellness toolbox, triggers, early warning signs, and crisis plan. Group members have provided good input.

Everyone in the group agreed that in order to perform well on the job, they needed to pray, get a good night's sleep, take medications as prescribed, eat a healthy breakfast and pack a healthy lunch. Stress-relieving activities such as deep breathing and exercise also help you perform well on the job. These are many of the things that should go on your daily maintenance plan.

Most people stated that their triggers were either work overload or work 'underload'. Some said that missing a dose of their medicine could also be a trigger. Some even said that such things as tasks that they don't like can be triggers.

It is important to know your early warning signs. Most of the group felt that one of their early warning signs included such things as irritability, talking to one's self, losing one's temper, and careless mistakes on the job. Some people said that withdrawal from co-workers could also be an early warning sign. It is also important to know what your crisis plan is on the job. Most people agreed that you need to ask for extra time off of work in the event of a crisis. The American Disabilities Act requires that your employer let you come back after an approved leave of absence due to mental illness.

These are some of the many things that you need to know about a WRAP for Work. All in all, it was a great experience leading the WRAP for Work group. The group appreciated it very much.
by Kevin Schrauth, GPSI Graduate



"Greetings"

New G.P.S.I Project Coordinator

Hello Everyone, My Name is Dominique Harris, I'm a CPS from the fabulous class of July 2008 in Norcross, GA. I have recently accepted the position of GPSI Project Coordinator. I really can't tell you how excited I am at the opportunity I was given to help organize this project. As a consumer who sought such an organization & movement during all of my various stays at different hospitals and while at various CSB's and agencies, I really look forward to helping advance our cause which I believe is to carry the message of recovery and to provide the support and resources necessary for each of us to better advocate for ourselves. I want to thank the GMHCN for the vote of confidence and everyone there for the warm welcome you have shown me. I am truly the evidence of what we can be accomplished given the opportunity.

The Relationship

It seems like a miracle and I know it was. Before I knew it, there was Dolores standing before me at day-services asking my name and finding out everything about me. Well, I up and told her and that was the beginning of our relationship. Dolores has never met a stranger. That's just how she is.

It wasn't long before we became fast friends, helping each other out in any way we could. About two years into our relationship we started what can only be called 'dating' at day-services. You would be amazed at how easy it became to sneak a fast kiss or hold hands. Occasionally, we were caught and told not to do it or not to sit too close to each other. Regardless, we found ways of getting around all those roving eyes! In truth, dating at day-services was the only place we ever did any kissing or holding hands. We were told in essence to be circumspect. Maybe we should have, but we never really listened.

Unfortunately, in those days Dolores' care provider made it difficult for us to talk over the phone. It was obvious she did not want the relationship to develop, but we kept calling each other anyway. I was the one who did most of the calling. As the months and years went by, we fought acute physical illnesses, families discouraging the relationship, trips to the psychiatrist and doctor trying to see if we were in our right minds, as well as many other road blocks. It simply didn't matter because we were in love.

So there it was, I asked Dolores to marry me after 5 years of our particular kind of dating. This was in October of 2004 and we were married in The First Baptist Church of Swainsboro, Georgia. It turned out to be true, and Dolores said, "I loved you from the first glance at day-services".

By G. Coleman Odom, CPS

Moving On

by Mary Shuman, CPS

I've worked as a teacher and State employee for over 18 years, managing bouts of depression with counseling and healthy lifestyle. About five years ago my depression worsened and within a six month period I lost my job, marriage and home. I blamed the depression and thought I'd never have a "real" life again.

Family, friends, an unemployment check, and grace sustained me for a year. After a while, I found the courage to ask friends about job opportunities. I will be forever grateful to my friend Larry Fricks, who hired me to work part time on a contract for the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Addictive Diseases Consumer Relations and Recovery Section. I went from a part time contract to a full time state job. Attending GPSI blew away the weight of shame about having a mental illness. Working as a Certified Peer Specialist has fed my heart and soul and fanned the flame of hope in my spirit. Through the work of recovery and the mutual support of peers, I'm slowly rebuilding my life.

In the past year, again within a six month period, I married a wonderful man with whom I'm creating a home and accepted a promotion to the DMHDDAD Adult Community Mental Health Section to work on Supported Employment and Housing services; a position similar to others I'd held in the past. It was a hard decision, due in part to my love of working directly with peers as GPSI Project Director, and my fear of a demanding work load. However, I personally understand the importance of employment and housing to recovery, and hope to make these supports available for more peers. I also realized that I have recovery knowledge, skills and supports (aka WRAP) that I didn't have in the past. So, I decided to follow the message that I learned and taught as the GPSI Project Director, "We can recover from the devastating effects of mental illness and move on to create meaningful lives". Deepest thanks and warmest wishes to my fellow walkers on the path to recovery!

Life, Love & Recovery Partners: Where Love, Faith and Growth Can Take You

Finding a partner for life has been very fulfilling for me, as well as great support to our recoveries. I met my wife originally when I was recovering from a relapse, and she would be the first to tell you that she was taking a chance on being interested in me romantically. It was also a time in my life when I was open to God's direction and working very hard on my recovery. While it had been some years since either of us had dated, I was at a point where I felt that it wasn't the best time for me to date, and she was understandably cautious about getting to know me. Before we went on that first date, we spent many hours talking daily, both in person and over the phone. In the past I had focused on being married by a certain age or milestone, however in reality it was always outside of my control. I do fully believe that patience, faith, and some good fortune brought us together and that our love for each other will endure. At 38, I feel that had I married earlier in life, I would have been less prepared emotionally and would not have had an adequate chance at success. I am sharing this to encourage our peers who also seek a loving relationship. I hope and pray that you will have patience, faith, and be emotionally prepared (and also prepared to grow!) when the good fortune of a potential significant other comes your way. It's not always where you find yourselves on that initial meeting, but where love, faith, and growth can take you as a team. --By Tim McDaniel, CPS

SAVE the DATE!

The next Georgia Peer Support Institute will be held at Epworth by the Sea in St. Simon's Island November 17-19 2009. Applications will be available at www.gmhcn.org and www.gacps.org or call GMHCN at 404-687-9487 by the first of September.

Talents Abound

Research has shown that expectations beget performance. And that's exactly what happens at the Georgia Peer Support Institute (GPSI) when participants are expected to complete a community project. Selected graduates of the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 GPSI showed off their community projects in a workshop at the 2008 Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network Statewide Conference.

Drawing on innate leadership abilities and inspiration from attendance at the GPSI, three grads created and facilitated peer support groups. Kevin Schrauth, chose to lead a "WRAP for Work" group. See page 1 for his report on what he and his peers learned. Kathleen White chose to lead a wellness initiative at the peer center she attends. With overflowing enthusiasm, Kathleen supported peers in researching and sharing information based on individual interests and creating peer support groups on smoking cessation, healthy eating and exercise. Antoinette Sinclair acknowledged and responded to her own desire for peer support. Using information learned at GPSI, Antoinette started two mutual peer support groups in her community. Now she and her peers benefit from an expanded support network, which is so important to recovery.

Teaching talents were discovered as graduates developed new ways of working with the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP). Robbin Sullivan used a bulletin board, envelopes and index cards to create a visual WRAP learning center for display in a peer center. Each envelope represented components of the WRAP (i.e. wellness tool box) and contained index cards with ideas (i.e. eating a healthy breakfast, journaling, etc.) that one might choose to use in their own WRAP. Keisha Mains talked about her creation of a WRAP plan specifically for healthy personal relationships. She talked about how she feels when relationships are going well; things others do that trigger her; and things she can do when she starts feeling uncomfortable in a relationship. Through her example, she illustrated that the structure of the WRAP can be adapted to support one in achieving many goals related to recovery. Christine Jackson also talked about her use of the WRAP.

Two graduates chose to focus on the power of storytelling. Daphne Dailey shared her recovery story, shamelessly speaking of some of her worst times and proudly sharing things learned on her recovery path. Mary Lou Cawthorn used her illustration, "Miracle Family Oak Tree" to talk about the challenges and successes she and family members have experienced in the recovery process. Both grads talked about the importance of hope in their lives. Mary Lou emphasized, that no matter how hard life may seem at times, that one should always hang-on to one's dreams....because they can come true!

Artistic talent was also discovered. Mark Merrifield exhibited some of his photographs and spoke about his love for photographing interesting patterns in nature. He said that photography is important to his recovery because when he's engaged in it, he's focused on something he enjoys, rather than his symptoms.



Wonda Alexander channeled her love of quilting into a symbolic tribute to the thousands of mental health consumers buried in the cemeteries at Central State Hospital (CSH). See photograph above. She used the image of an iron stake, used to mark individual graves, to represent each of the State Cemeteries. In the center of the quilt she embroidered an angel, and at the top a representation of the cemetery gates; both artworks placed in CSH's Cedar Lane Cemetery by the Georgia Consumer Council. "Recovered Dignity" refers to the dignity restored to those who were buried at CSH as well as a continuing effort to raise cemetery restoration funds.



A hearty thank you, to workshop presenters as well as the other GPSI grads who met the expectation; discovered and shared talents; and spread the message of hope and recovery.

Consumer talent abounds when expectations and desires are expressed.



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"In you I found me."

Charlene Reeves, CPS

PEER INSTITUTE NEWS SPRING 2009 *Painting by Jerome Lawrence*

