Upcoming Events

GMHCN Board Meetings
Macon, GA
July 22, 2014
St. Simons Island, GA
August 18, 2014
Macon, GA
November 6 and 7, 2014

GMHCN Annual Conference
Epworth by the Sea
St. Simons Island, GA
August 19 - 21, 2014

CPS Trainings
Albany, GA
Sept. 8 - 12; 15 - 18, 2014
Savannah, GA
Atlanta, GA
December 1 - 5; 8 - 11, 2014

Mental Health America
Annual Conference 2014
Sheraton Atlanta Hotel
Atlanta, GA
September 10 - 12, 2014

International Association of Peer Supporters
2014 National Conference
Sheraton Airport Gateway Hotel
Atlanta, GA
October 13 and 14, 2014

Alternatives 2014
Caribe Royale
Orlando, FL
October 22 - 26, 2014

Georgia Peer Support Institute
Epworth by the Sea
St. Simons Island, GA
November 11 - 13, 2014
Unicoi State Park
Helen, GA
April 21 - 23, 2015
Epworth by the Sea
St. Simons Island, GA
November 11 - 13, 2015

GMHCN 23rd Annual Summer Conference

Pack your toothbrush, get out your short pants, pack your comfortable dancing shoes—it’s time again for the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network’s Annual Summer Conference. The theme of the 23rd annual Summer Conference is The Year of the Peer. And what a year it has been for peer support and recovery! The Summer Conference is celebrating the Year of the Peer at beautiful and historic Epworth by the Sea at St. Simons Island in south Georgia. The Conference will feature two keynote speakers, including the Commissioner of the GDBHDD and there will be 24 exciting and informative workshops. There will be a consumer art show, adult behavioral health services updates, karaoke, and for those with comfortable shoes—dancing! So don’t miss this opportunity to laugh, learn and play with your peers.

Registration for the conference must be received by August 1, 2014. All questions regarding the Conference should be directed to 404-687-9487 or 1-800-297-6146 fax 404-687-0772 or Email: lynn@gmhcn.org.
Meet the CPS Project Directors!

Mariam Abdul-Aziz, CPS and Sam Rapier, CPS are the new Certified Peer Specialist Project Coordinators for the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network. They both have been in their positions since February of this year. Mariam is the CPS Certification Coordinator responsible for the testing and certification of CPS candidates. Sam is the CPS Training Coordinator responsible for the nine day CPS training. Sharing the same office, they also share many of the everyday duties involved with the CPS Project.

Peer support is not new to Mariam, she worked at the Peer Support and Wellness Center of Decatur when it first opened in 2007. Following that she has had two experiences working in peer centers; at one of the peer centers she was actually the head of the peer support program. Mariam feels that peer support is vital and she has seen it “pump life back into people.” Mariam also proudly expressed that the CPS Project is an amazing opportunity because it “helps to spread the word of recovery to people who need it.” Mariam is a person with lived experience of a mental health condition and in her words, “I have turned my challenges into one of being of service to others.” She continued that the mutuality of peer support is people sharing their experience with others resulting in peer support that transforms the lives of people.

Sam Rapier, CPS (pronounced Ră pee ā) came to the CPS Project from Viewpoint Health, a community service board designed to serve people with behavioral health challenges in Gwinnett, Rockdale and Newton counties, where he worked in peer support, as a CSI team member, and in the PSR program. A Community Support Individual provides peer support to persons in the community rather than at a health center. Sam has also worked at the Viewpoint PSR program. The PSR program, (Psychosocial Rehabilitation) strives to teach adults with behavioral health diagnoses—within classroom settings—the skills needed to enrich their lives and live meaningful days. This can involve skills needed to obtain and retain employment or maintain an apartment of their own. Sam has been in his own recovery from mental health challenges since 2006. He believes that peer support allows peers to see diversity and the opportunity to recover, rather than just seeing their doctors and treatment staff. Sam offered that working as a CPS promotes his own recovery. He is invigorated by training others because he gets to see participants in the CPS Project realize their own potential to help others—people who realize they are powerful beings and have the ability to change the world for the better. “Anyone who is in recovery from a mental health challenge or a dual-diagnosis disorder (both mental health challenge and substance abuse disorder) with a desire to be a support and advocate for others in their recovery has what is necessary to become a CPS.”

The state of Georgia is a leader in peer support. The CPS Project trained and certified its first class in 2001. Since that time, almost one thousand persons have been trained and certified as Peer Specialists through the Georgia CPS Project. Peer support is on the cutting edge of behavioral health care. It is being written into recovery-oriented support curriculums around the nation. For a map of states where CPS services are Medicaid reimbursable see the back page. In Georgia, there is also a Medicaid-reimbursable certification for persons with addictive disease diagnoses known as CARES. (Certified Addiction Recovery Empowerment Specialist) For more information about the CARES program contact the Georgia Council for Substance Abuse. To get more information about the CPS Project and get a list of training dates, locations, requirements and a CPS application, you can visit the CPS web page at www.gacps.org or call the GMHCN at 404-687-9487.
Mental Health First Aid Training

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an eight hour training offered by the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network (GMHCN). MHFA equips attendees with the knowledge to help persons with mental health needs connect to support and care. Those who take the course learn a 5-step action plan that encompasses the skills, resources, and knowledge to assist a person in crisis connect with appropriate peer, social, self-help, and professional supports.

The MHFA trainings presented by the GMHCN are unique because they are recovery based and presented by Certified Peer Specialists (CPS) who are people in recovery from behavioral health diagnoses. The consumer delivered MHFA training has been embraced by the people we have trained and they report that having a person in recovery present the training is a huge benefit because of the lived experience our trainers bring to this work.

If you would like to host a MHFA training or learn more, please feel free to contact Lori Wade at 404-687-9487 or email her at lori@gmhcn.org

Light of Peers
by Lori Wade, CPS

To many of us Light is a symbol and I believe recovery is centered around the Light.
I believe, with all my heart, that Light speaks to me through other Peers.
In solitude, I do not improve but find myself heading down a deep, dark tunnel, afraid I will never find my way out.

But if I stop to look, I see a flicker or light and relieved I start my climb out.
It starts with a flicker but with each person I encounter, their Light is added to mine making me stronger than I was before.

Where there was doubt, faith in peer support begins to grow as the Light shines stronger with each person I touch

What began as a deep, dark, tunnel turns into a healing Light being shared by each of you.

Alone I am nothing and fear the dark.
Together we shine brilliantly and carry each other through the trying times.

Alone we are barely able to see. Together our voices can light up the sky!

THANK YOU FOR SHINING TODAY!!!

Reprieve/Respite

It crushes you one afternoon in April....your Ex is roaming the streets mumbling angrily about family, suspicious scoundrels....reality to throw her into a nameless jail for sick zombies...

You haven’t had a job in years, the bills never stop , former friends preach unwanted advice, look at you from afar....

Your best friend, your dog, eyes you warily, given your erratic behavior

You crawl exhausted toward a place said to be a haven for the mentally upset, a hope for God knows what? Distance from your broken life, perhaps a companion in pain

The next day arrives calmly, you’re amazed at a day this easy

People listen, smiles real, their demands few. Slowly you see yourself acceptable despite faded jeans, quirky jewelry, rebellious thoughts. They like that you win at scrabble and don’t fuss about the food

Surely this is a dream. No. God has put you exactly where you need to be

When you return home you feel lighter, stronger, connected to a welcoming world

Tomorrow is no longer the boogy man but the chance to create beauty from failure

Just in time for Easter, you’ve found a new life

Submitted by Liz Kellogg, Respite Guest
Mental Health Peer Specialist
States where Medicaid pays for them

In 31 states, Medicaid pays for licensed peer specialists, counselors recovering from severe mental illness or substance addiction who are trained to help others with similar conditions.