

THE NETWORK NEWS

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OUR MISSION

To create a climate in Virginia where peers are empowered to understand and find their own recovery through programs that achieve:

personal transformation

community transformation

systems transformation

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Community Inclusion: What is That?

By **Ann Benner, R.E.A.C.H. Program Director**

On July 24th and 25th I had the opportunity to attend the 2017 Summer Institute of the Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion (www.tucollaborative.org) on the Temple campus in Philadelphia. I was one of a mix of peers, academicians, providers, and caseworkers gathered to learn and share about an important, newly appreciated recovery tool.

We all know the power of being labeled by others and of labeling ourselves. What if we had a society where it was understood that we all have strengths and challenges and all were welcomed for whatever we have to offer - or just for being? What if peers were actively engaged in changing stereotypes and fostering inclusion, by following our interests and goals?

We experience ourselves in the context of where we are, what we do, who we associate with. Taking people out of institutions was definitely a step in the right direction toward helping peers realize who they are as individuals. Having community with peers can be enormously healing. Taking a clubhouse or peer program group to a community event is a step forward. But what about helping to plan the event and volunteering to make it happen? Imagine what's to be gained by identifying interests and passions - and following them.

The conference was full of examples of people pursuing interests, getting jobs, learning their capacities are much greater than they had imagined, and feeling more complete as they participated on equal footing with neighbors in their community.

In one workshop participants filled out our own "Community Participation Measure" (1) which gave us feedback on areas and activities in which we would like to be more involved. The instrument then helped us identify what's important to us to be doing that we're not doing, so we can work on a plan to move forward.

Peer recovery specialists can look forward to increasing their work in this area. Matthew Federici of the Copeland Center is working with the Temple University Collaborative on a training for peer specialists to learn to help other peers be more fully part of their communities. Watch for more information!

(1) Salzer, M.S., 2010 Temple University Community Participation Measure (Temple CP) – 2010 Technical Report

VOCAL remembers Alison Hymes – Member, Advocate, Friend

It is with great sorrow that we inform you of the death of our friend, Alison Hymes. The following is an excerpt from Alison’s obituary, published in Charlottesville’s newspaper, “The Daily Progress” on August 13th.

Alison Bowman Hymes died on Saturday, August 5, 2017, in Charlottesville. She was 60. The daughter of the late Dell and Virginia Hymes, she was born on January 8, 1957, in Boston, Massachusetts, and grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Oakland, California; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she graduated from Friends Select High School in 1974. She received a BA in English from Bryn Mawr College in 1978 and an MA in Counseling Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania in 1981. She worked in Philadelphia as a mental health counselor for several years. After moving to Charlottesville in the mid-1990s, she became a dedicated and accomplished advocate for the civil rights of people with mental health disabilities. Despite facing her own mental and physical health challenges, she would eventually serve on the Virginia Mental Health Planning Council as both Secretary and President and, in 2008, on the Task Force on Civil Commitment of the Virginia Commission on Mental Health Law Reform, on which her fellow members remembered her as a relentless and eloquent advocate for the citizens of Virginia potentially subject to involuntary commitment.

She also served as the Virginia Coordinator for PsychRights: Law Project for Psychiatric Rights. In 2011 she received an award for her years of mental health advocacy at the Mental Health Peers Conference of the Virginia Organization of Consumers Asserting Leadership (VOCAL). She was active in numerous progressive political causes and followed political news avidly until shortly before the end of her life. She was also a poet, essayist, and satirist. She was a lifelong animal lover and found great joy over the years in caring for her cats Cagney and Lacey and her dogs Phoebe, Gandhi, Squeaky, and Molly.

Memorial donations may be made to On Our Own of Charlottesville or to VOCAL, Inc., mental health service organizations.

VOCAL Offers Two WRAP Facilitator Trainings

October 9th through 13th in Roanoke

This is a commuter training, to be held at the EHS office from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each day, except will finish earlier Friday afternoon.

Facilitators will be Bonnie Neighbour and Marty Grizzle

Full fee: \$700. Employer pays full fee. Sliding scale for individuals: If your income is \$1000 to \$2000 per month the cost is \$225. If your income is less than \$1000 per month the cost is \$100.

November 6th through 10th at Shalom House Retreat Center, Montpelier

Facilitators will be Bonnie Neighbour and Mike Ellyson.

Full fee: \$1500 overnight, \$1000 for commuters. Employer pays full fee. For those with income less than \$2000 the cost is \$225.

For more information on all of these training programs, please contact Ann Benner: ann@vocalvirginia.org, (804)343-1777

Go to <https://vocalvirginia.org/recovery-education/wrap-facilitator-application/> to apply if you have not already

Become an Advance Directives Facilitator

Peer-run organizations and other enthusiastic folks:

Do you want to help individuals receive the care THEY want during a mental health crisis?

Do you want to promote self-determination and autonomy?

Do you want to empower your community?

Did you know that YOU can become a certified Advance Directive Facilitator now?

Virginia law changed as of July 1, 2017, allowing any individuals who complete an approved Advance Directive Facilitator program to offer one-on-one facilitation with citizens around the state. (Prior to this law change, only attorneys and health care providers were allowed to offer AD Facilitation.) See [Va. Code § 54.1-2982](#)) There are currently four state-recognized advance directive facilitator training

programs, but the Institute of Law, Psychiatry and Public Policy at the University of Virginia is the only one that addresses *mental health* advance care planning. The other programs only discuss end-of-life care planning. To learn more about the UVa/DBHDS Advance Directive Facilitator certification training, email Cynthia Elledge at Cynthia@virginia.edu.

Research has shown that the most effective Advance Directives are those that were facilitated. Having a trained individual collaborate in the process results in a much more meaningful, detailed, and appropriately completed AD form. Help empower yourself, your friends, your community be becoming an Advance Directive Facilitator.

National Wellness Week: September 10–16, 2017

SAMHSA’s Wellness Initiative focuses on helping people in recovery improve mental and physical health through positive lifestyle changes. During National Wellness Week, hundreds of organizations across the country will engage in events that promote well-being and explain SAMHSA’s Eight Dimensions of Wellness. Check out [SAMHSA’s YouTube channel](#) to learn more.

What’s Going on Around the Commonwealth...

Mental Health America of Virginia (MHAV) is celebrating 80 years of service with a dinner program on Saturday, September 23rd at the Hilton Richmond/Short Pump Hotel. Featured speaker will be Paul Gionfriddo, President and CEO of national Mental Health America, and author of *“Losing Tim: How our Health and Education Systems Failed My Son with Schizophrenia.”*

Transformational Leadership Awards will be presented to Bonnie Neighbour, who retired this year as VOCAL’s Executive Director, and to Mira Signer, who was NAMI Virginia’s Executive Director for the past 10 years. Both have been extraordinary advocates for mental health and changing public awareness in Virginia.

The program starts at 6:00 p.m. with live music, refreshments and interactive exhibits, followed at 7:00 with

the seated dinner program and concludes by 8:30. Tickets are purchased through [eventbrite](#) for \$50.

For more information about hotel rooms and the event, call: 804.257-5591

“**The Anonymous People**”, a film screening on the opioid epidemic. Group discussion with panel, hosted by 84 Main in Warsaw. September 20th, 6:30 – 9:00 p.m. RCC Warsaw Lecture Hall. For more information: 804.333-3581

Rise Phoenix Rise holds support group meetings at Parham Doctors’ Hospital (Richmond) on Tuesdays from 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. in MOBiii Room 314.

Every other Tuesday from 5:30-6:30 p.m., there are meetings at Zoomies Cat Lounge at 1704 E. Main St in Shockoe Bottom (Richmond).

For more information: <http://www.risephoenixrise.org>

Criminal Justice Summit October 18-19

The Institute for Reform & Solutions is hosting a two-day event in October to bring together community stakeholders with the express goal of fostering conversations concerning our criminal justice system and the effect it has on our community. The first event in October is designed to bring together community members, businesses, elected officials and professionals in order to discuss and identify issues affecting our community. The event will culminate in a Candidates’ Forum and the drafting of a Legislative Request Packet that will be sent to Virginia’s 2018 General Assembly. The second event to be held in March will highlight any progress we have made in judicial reform and will attract nationally recognized keynote speakers. Both events are geared towards building a better understanding of how legislation can help communities address issues that are harming individuals, families, businesses and localities alike.

The event will take place at Blue Ridge Community College, Plecker Center in Weyers Cave, VA. There will be a mental health panel and VOCAL will be present.

Recovery and Resiliency Day at Mt Rogers CSB

Mt. Rogers CSB will hold their first annual Recovery and Resiliency Day on October 10th at the Wytheville Meeting Center from 1:30pm – 4pm. Please RSVP by October 3rd by calling 276-223-3273. Look forward to Hope, Empowerment, Education and Fun! There will be live music, refreshments, recovery stories, resources, vendors and more.

Help Happens Here Referral Line

Help Happens Here is a public awareness campaign spearheaded by the Community Mental Health and Wellness Coalition. The Help Happens Here campaign connects residents of Charlottesville and surrounding areas to local providers that offer free or affordable care through the Help Happens Here website, www.helphappenshere.org, and through an information and referral line ([434-227-0641](tel:434-227-0641)). The referral line is answered Monday-Friday between the hours of 9am and 4pm, but residents can call after hours and leave a message that will be returned within one business day. All calls are confidential .

Creative Offerings From Members

The Love in His Voice
 (For Jack Lawson of Cary, North Carolina, a younger comfort)
 By Ann Catherine Braxton, Hampton

There are seasons when you feel
 The gentleness of youth
 Sage for tender years
 That still believe
 Everything can be okay
 And sometimes that voice
 Coming over the phone
 Is someone you watched grow
 From very young into a gentleman
 “Don’t give up,” he simply urged
 Holding me up through a vulnerable moment
 Miles away, he reminded me I was special
 More than just a friend of the family
 And every time I think of him
 The love in his voice rings true
 Telling me, yes,
 I will be okay.

Open Letter to Leadership Regarding Possible Cuts to the Mental Health Block Grant

I am writing you in regards to the proposed budget cuts to the Mental Health Block Grant issued to Virginia through the state’s application to SAMHSA. The President’s proposed budget would slash this grant and subsequently, the DBHDS budget for recovery programming by nearly 30%. The money is currently distributed amongst mental health recovery services in Community Service Boards, non-profits such as VOCAL, NAMI, and MHAV, and peer-run drop in centers throughout the state.

We know through research done in other states that re-hospitalization rates drop significantly. According to the DHHS report, *An Assessment of Innovative Models of Peer Support Services in Behavioral Health to Reduce Preventable Acute Hospitalization and Readmissions*, clients who worked with Peer Bridgers at the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services saw an overall decrease in behavioral health costs of 47.1%

Peer Recovery Specialist services are an evidence based practice and emerging profession in Virginia with a 72 hour curriculum of study and an additional 500 hours of practice to meet criteria and recognition and certification through the Board of Counseling; it is now a Medicaid billable service. The peer recovery community would like to see this momentum continue and build. It is not uncommon for those who once received services to give back by joining the staff and offering the unique understanding that comes from having lived experience.

Peer-run drop in centers provide low-barrier access to mental health assistance. There are no appointments needed, no forms to fill out, and no lengthy evaluation. Members are encouraged to engage at their own pace, whether that means connection through unstructured social time, intentional peer support, 12-step groups, or groups in goal-setting and wellness tools. Mental health peers adopt these skills to manage many aspects of life, from coping with challenges in recovery to searching for employment. Families can find support here as well, and these services are provided to the consumer at no cost.

I don't think you could name a mental health service that does so much with so little, nor is so grossly underfunded. We know where people in need appear when have nowhere else to go; they wind up in hospitals, on the streets, and in the prisons. Peer-run drop in centers offer fellowship, social skills, security, and wellness. VOCAL is here to assist these centers every step of the way. VOCAL's membership is 2,000 strong and we work with our partners, MHAV and NAMI, to train and support the Peer Recovery Specialist workforce.

The cuts to the Mental Health Block Grant will only lead to more costly services provided by the state, yet the state has the means to assist people daily to help ward off crisis and its costly implications. In the aforementioned DHHS case study, peer services were employed by Optum's Pierce County Regional Support Network and introducing regional peer services enabled them to achieve an estimated \$21,600,000 savings in excess service utilization.

You will find testimonies from across the state regarding the impact peer services have on the lives of Virginia's peer constituents, as well as the DHHS report, *An Assessment of Innovative Models of Peer Support Services in Behavioral Health to Reduce Preventable Acute Hospitalization and Readmissions*, enclosed with this letter.

We implore you to not only sustain but increase funding for peer support and recovery-based programming in Virginia. Thank you for your time and consideration of these comments in proceeding with the DBHDS budget for recovery based services for peers across the state.

Respectfully,

Deidre Johnson
Executive Director
VOCAL, Inc

Find Your Representatives

Looking for information about how to contact your elected officials about issues that are important to you? Enter your address at <http://whosmy.viriniageneralassembly.gov/> to find the answer!

Sylvia Bey and the Chesterfield Consumer Advisory Council

Chesterfield CSB has their own Consumer Advisory Council (CAC). VOCAL member Sylvia Bey has been instrumental in creating and maintaining this council. She has worked at the CSB for 8 years; prior to that she received services there for three years. This year she completed training as a Peer Recovery Support Specialist. Sylvia is also a gracious soul and spirited storyteller.

The purpose of the CAC is to give input and peer perspectives on policies and procedures at the agency. The process of starting this group was as simple as calling a meeting. There are approximately 10 council members who determine goals and activities for the group, although anyone can bring ideas. "There is no shortage of members," Sylvia says. Like all boards there is a learning curve that is different for each individual.

The CAC opted to help peers get the eye glasses, hearing aids and dental work they need. Next on the horizon is a celebration of wellness and art on October 17th.

News You Can Use

Comcast provides low-cost internet to some customers if they qualify.

<https://www.internetessentials.com>

From the Editor:

The deadline for the next issue of "The Network News" is *Monday, October 16th*.

Please submit your submissions to Yolande Long: yolande@vocalvirginia.org or mail them to: Yolande Long, 1904 Byrd Avenue, Suite 124, Richmond (23230)