

# THE NETWORK NEWS

July-August 2018

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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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## From the Desk of the Executive Director, Deidre Johnson

Greetings, friends!

As the summer winds down for all of us, VOCAL staff anticipate an autumn filled with good work and new opportunities to continue to move recovery forward in the Commonwealth! We will begin to gear up for the 2019 legislative session, participate in partners' conferences, and offer more VOCAL trainings. (Please see page 2 of this newsletter for information on how you can register for those.)

I am pleased to announce a new edition to our VOCAL staff – join me in welcoming Isata Turay to the position of Executive Assistant! Isata was born and raised in Sierra Leone and immigrated to the United States in 1992. She has since become a U.S. citizen, and has lived in Richmond since 1997. She holds a Bachelor's degree in French and Political Science from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, and a certificate in International Business from Virginia Commonwealth University. She is also the proud mother of a 24-year old son, who also resides in Richmond.

You may have already met Isata, as she has been an avid volunteer with VOCAL since 2005, and was actually on hand to help with the early VOCAL conferences. Isata is an advocate for mental health rights and the rights of girls and women and may be reached at 804-343-1777 or [Isata@vocalvirginia.org](mailto:Isata@vocalvirginia.org).

The next meeting of our Board of Directors will be held on Wednesday, September 12, from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., in Richmond. This is an open meeting and we would be pleased to welcome anyone who wishes to attend. Please contact Erin Crettier: [Erin@vocalvirginia.org](mailto:Erin@vocalvirginia.org) or call the VOCAL office for more information.

## Join VOCAL, Mount Rogers CSB, and Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute for "Recovery and Resiliency"

Come together for an afternoon of hope, empowerment, education, entertainment, and fun!  
Tuesday, October 23  
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
Wytheville Meeting Center  
Wytheville, VA

Free, and open to the public, but your RSVP is required.

Contact Malaina Poore with questions: [malaina@vocalvirginia.org](mailto:malaina@vocalvirginia.org) or 804-343-1777.

**From Malaina Poore, Network Program Director**

**Unity at Alternatives**

Somehow I've ever been to the Alternatives, the nation's largest and oldest conference, until this summer. I stepped out into Union Station, that feast of sight and sound, and was promptly Lyfted to the Catholic University a few miles away. Caught in traffic, I spoke to the driver about raising daughters and he told me it has changed him as a man. I felt touched and privileged to take part in this conversation that strayed from simple small talk. I've attended three 2 day eCPR workshops in as many months (as part of a facilitator apprenticeship) and I'd like to think my listening ear is tuned in. I feel like I did as a teenager on buses and trains, open to conversation and no expert on the "right things to say." We are not clinicians and there is no script. There is listening and responding in an authentic way, but more than anything there is listening.

Needing lunch at an odd hour, I walked to Busboys and Poets, a restaurant/café/bar/bookstore/performance space which has a mission to create "a community where racial and cultural connections are consciously lifted." On the wall behind the bar these words are written: "None of us are is free until everybody is free." This phrase would resonate with me as I ate my beans and rice, and stayed with me through the entire conference. I feel excited to work alongside those with similar goals, such as disability activists. It also struck me that our work is not only in mental health empowerment, but in empowerment against oppression in its many forms.

Alternatives is a special place because they stay ahead of the mainstream curve. There were workshops on transgender health, the fat acceptance movement, and mad pride for those with multiple personalities. Wilda L. White, one of the keynote speakers on Tuesday evening, spoke about intersectionality. She said, "we will know we have succeeded when we put the most marginalized stories in the center." Not one of us is a peer alone. We are people who come from diverse backgrounds and live diverse lives. This is at the heart of our movement, I believe. The dignity of all people, regardless of status, background, or diagnosis. Now is the time for collaboration, shared struggle and shared victory.

**Words in the News**

*\*Intersectionality: the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.*

\*From the Oxford Dictionary

In short, intersectionality is a social theory about the overlapping of minority status. For instance, a person may be a female, Asian-American, and a peer. Intersectionality asserts that these identity markers (and the potential discrimination against any of these markers) do not exist independently of each other.

**"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." – Ann Frank**

**Recovery Education Training Opportunities**

VOCAL, in partnership with DBHDS and our local hosts, is working to bring six different Recovery Education Programs to communities across Virginia. These programs include: eCPR, Community Inclusion, Trauma-Informed Care, Peer Support Whole Health and Resiliency, Pathways to Recovery Facilitator Training, and SMART Recovery. To see a brief description of each of these programs, view our Recovery Trainings Program Flyer (<https://tinyurl.com/y9lgwn2s>). Stay updated on the upcoming trainings and access the registration forms via our Peer Recovery and Leadership Trainings webpage (<https://tinyurl.com/y9o4a776>). Each of these programs are free and CEUs are available.

**Upcoming Recovery Education Trainings**

September 6-7: PSWHR in Abingdon  
 September 18-19: eCPR in Chesapeake  
 September 20-21: Pathways to Recovery in Richmond  
 Plus, more to come!

Don't miss out on these great programs. Thank you to all of you who have attended so far! Please contact Megan Sharkey ([megan@vocalvirginia.org](mailto:megan@vocalvirginia.org)) or Ann Benner ([ann@vocalvirginia.org](mailto:ann@vocalvirginia.org)) with any questions related to the Recovery Education Trainings.

**From Heather Orrock, Co-OPP Program Director/Development Director**

A non-profit's Board can make or break an organization. To help ensure that your peer-run center's Board is performing at its peak, schedule the "Board Roles and Responsibilities" training today. This highly rated training is perfect for new or experienced Board members and the trainer is certified by BoardSource in Board

Education. If you would like the Co-OPP Program Director to provide training for your staff and/or Board, please contact Heather Orrock at 804-343-1777, or [heather@vocalvirginia.org](mailto:heather@vocalvirginia.org).

**Upcoming Trainings, Events, and Announcements**

**Wellness Interventions of Norfolk (The WIN Center) Hosting "Mindscapes 2.0" Art Show**

Mindscapes 2.0 is an Art Show featuring art work created by and for persons with serious mental illness and substance abuse issues.

September 29, at the Freemason Street Baptist Church  
400 East Freemason Street, Norfolk, VA 23510

5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.

Admission is \$5.00 per person, as this is a fundraiser for the WIN Center.

**SAARA Presents: "Ethical Considerations for Recovery Coaches"**

Peer Ethics Training (14 CEUs)

November 3-4

8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

SAARA Center for Recovery

2000 Mecklenburg Street

Richmond, VA

A \$200 fee includes tuition and materials; lunch is on your own.

For more information, or to register, contact Marjorie

Yates: [marjorie@saaracenter.org](mailto:marjorie@saaracenter.org)

**VPRSN Meeting in Chesapeake**

September 25

6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

Chesapeake Integrated Behavioral Healthcare

224 Great Bridge Boulevard

Chesapeake, VA 23320

For more information, please contact Erica Bullock,

VPRSN Meeting Facilitator, at 757-819-6386.

**Peer Recovery Specialist Training in Hampton**

October 20-December 22

10 weeks, Saturdays only

9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

OR

October 28-December 30

10 weeks, Sunday only 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

For more information and an application, contact Eddie

Wiggins: 757-238-1653 or [eddiewiggins@outlook.com](mailto:eddiewiggins@outlook.com).

**From Where I Sit ... Creative Offerings from Members and Friends**

**From Sue Eller, VOCAL Board Member**

At the VOCAL conference this year I bought a tote bag that says, "I Am Enough." Ever since, I've had those words knocking around in my head. They reminded me of when I thought I wasn't enough, but I have never really thought about I am enough. As a child I was never good enough, in school I was never smart enough, and as I got older I was told I didn't try hard enough.

Since my diagnosis about 18 years ago, I have accomplished a lot of things. Things I never thought would be possible. Eighteen years ago, I was like a ship lost in a storm who saw no possibility of surviving, let alone recovering. I suffered such emotional pain and thought the only way out of it was to die. There was no hope of a future.

After being hospitalized several times over several years after my diagnosis, I was referred to the local psychosocial program at the clubhouse in Abingdon, Virginia, as part of my discharge plan.

I really did not know what to expect. I can remember that first day as being very challenging and scary. A van came to pick me up at my house and took me to the clubhouse. While on the van, I was surprised to notice how "normal" everyone looked and acted. Not what I expected.

Truthfully, I didn't know what to expect. The only reference point I had was from the movie, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." If anyone has ever seen the movie, they know that people with mental health problems were shown as out of control, angry, and sometimes violent people, or they were zombies sitting around a day room, staring off into space and/or drooling. Not the best images, but fairly accurate for the day and time we were living in. I don't remember the word recovery used in the movies or in real life during that period.

Anyway, back to my story. When we got to the clubhouse we all went in and sat down at tables. I was teamed up with two ladies around my age, so I wouldn't isolate. They told me about themselves. One was a widow, a mother and a grandmother. The other lady lived in a group home and had never been married or had children. They stayed with me all day and introduced me to other members of the clubhouse, which made me feel comfortable and welcomed.

We had a morning meeting where everyone volunteered to do a job that helped them feel valued and part of the clubhouse. They also held groups, and I attended one

which was called, “Me and My Mental Illness.” It was pretty interesting. It was the first time in my journey that my diagnosis was explained to me. During the many months I participated in this group, I learned about some of the possibilities that could cause mental illness. I also learned that I came into this program with a lot of misinformation and stigma-producing thoughts about mental illness.

About a week after entering into the program at the clubhouse, a fellow came up to me and asked me if I would be interested in joining a group he did with another fellow that was called “WRAP®.” He explained that WRAP® stood for Wellness Recovery Action Plan. That was a new concept that nobody had mentioned to me before. When I heard the word recovery I decided I would like to know more. It was almost lunch time when the gentleman asked me if I would like to come to his group the following week. I was pretty skeptical and very hungry, so I agreed to come to the group in hopes that he would go away. And he did.

A week later I was sitting at the same table and that same fellow came and stood by me and said, “Are you ready to come to group? We are meeting in the library in ten minutes.” I had completely forgotten that I had promised the week before that I’d come. I felt really bad about forgetting, and he was really nice, so I went with him to the group. There were other people in the group; young to old, white, black, Hispanic, women and men. We were an odd-looking bunch but I learned that we were all different but all alike, too. Our common denominator was that we were all tired of being sick mentally and wanted to learn more about this thing they called recovery. Little did I know that that day would change the course of my life. Through the Wellness Recovery Action Plan, I learned to recognize my triggers, my symptoms, and how I could help myself stay well by using my Wellness Tools - some of which I was already using. I learned to advocate for myself, and, most important, that I was the captain of my ship which was called “life.” Was it going to be smooth sailing all the time? No, but I learned how to get through the storms, in one piece, a stronger and better person. My life began to change because of WRAP®; I started to change and people took notice. I began receiving praise and recognition for things that I was doing. For the first time in my life I felt that I had something to give and share with others. I learned that recovery was possible, and also learned that recovery is not a noun but a verb that requires action. Recovery doesn’t just happen to you. You have got to want it and then make it happen. Thanks to the people who had faith in me, I was offered more trainings and I took advantage of them. The more I learned the more I wanted to know. I took a course called Consumer Empowerment Leadership Training (CELT) and met some really wonderful trainers. I learned how to

become empowered, and learned how to lead.

I was then offered WRAP® Facilitator training where I would teach others how to create their own WRAP® plans and then Advanced WRAP® Facilitator training where I learned to teach others to be WRAP® facilitators. I felt that paying it forward and giving back was a way to say thank you to everyone who had helped me. But I wasn’t finished. I took the Leadership Empowerment Advocacy Program (LEAP) course, which taught people to stand up for themselves and to advocate for others. The members of the class learned how to give speeches so they could go to local government officials, attend budget hearings, and advocate for what was needed in our district to help others experience recovery.

Last but not least, I took the training to become a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS). It was awesome! I learned how to take everything I had learned over the years plus my life experiences and help others on their path to recovery. I also took training to become a Peer Recovery Specialist Trainer so I could train others to help others.

My greatest lesson in this whole journey has been that I realized for the first time in my life I was not on this journey alone. My family and my friends supported me in my everyday life when I could barely put one foot in front of the other. I was encouraged to take my time, and things would get better. And they did. My friends, acquaintances, and people I didn’t even know have supported my education and my dreams for the future, and they are still supporting me in everything I do. Through their support, I learned that I am enough. Not once did I hear a negative word when I wanted to move forward and try something new. I found that if you do the best that you can in your life then that is enough. It might be getting out of bed in the morning and facing another day.

Am I done? No! My dream, along with several others’ in our area, is to have a peer run drop in center for people to come to in the evenings and on the weekends. There they can just be themselves and can find the support they need to become all that they can be. Where they can learn that “they are enough.”

### From the Newsletter Editor

The deadline for the September-October issue of the “Network News” is Monday, October 1, 2018. Please send all contributions VOCAL’s office or email Yolande Long at [yolande@vocalvirginia.org](mailto:yolande@vocalvirginia.org).