

THE NETWORK NEWS

September-October 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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VOCAL Network
1904 Byrd Avenue, Suite 124,
Richmond, Virginia 23230

Call us at **804.343.1777**

Email: yolande@vocalvirginia.org

From the Desk of the Executive Director, Deidre Johnson

With the change in seasons, came changes in the VOCAL office. We said goodbye and best wishes to our long-time friend and colleague, Ann Benner, who retired in September from her position as REACH Program Director, which she held for over four years. Ann looks forward to enjoying more free time, though we will still see her occasionally, as she will continue to be a trainer for VOCAL.

On the flip side of our goodbye to Ann, please join me in welcoming Don Johnson to VOCAL's team! Don is VOCAL's new REACH Program Director; additionally, please join me in congratulating Megan Sharkey on her promotion to REACH Program Manager. Don and Megan will work in tandem as they continue bringing high level, innovative trainings to the Commonwealth and help further the education of our members and peers.

Don holds an Associate degree in Applied Science from Lord Fairfax Community College and is currently pursuing his BS in Sociology. He is a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, a WRAP[©] Facilitator, and a Peer Support Whole Health and Resiliency Facilitator. Don also has completed Mental Health First Aid training, is a Crisis Intervention Team instructor, sits on the Doors2Wellbeing National Youth Advisory Council as the veteran representative, and is also a member of the iNAPS Youth and Young Adult Peer Support Committee.

Before coming to VOCAL, Don served over two years as a Peer Recovery Specialist for the Program of Assertive Community Treatment team at Northwestern Community Services Board in Winchester and as Outreach Coordinator for Strength in Peers in Woodstock. A veteran of the United States Army, SGT Johnson served as a medic on posts worldwide, but most particularly was deployed to Baghdad, Iraq, in October 2007 through January 2009 with the 86th Combat Support Hospital to the famed Baghdad ER.

Fall is also a time that highlights mental health and peers. October 18 was Global Peer Support Celebration Day, October 10 was World Mental Health Day, and September was both National Recovery Month and National Suicide Prevention Month. One important way to raise awareness is by sharing your story. I invite you to send us your stories of how peer support helped your recovery; please email your stories to heather@vocalvirginia.org. Your stories will be used to educate elected officials, funders, and other stakeholders about the benefits of both recovery principles and peer support. By submitting your stories, you give VOCAL the right to use them in education and marketing materials. Please note, submissions may be edited for length and/or clarity. Thank you for sharing your recovery!



Member Spotlight: Jeff Roher

If you've been to a VOCAL conference in the last 8 years, you may recognize Jeff Roher as the man with the million-watt smile who brings the music to our annual dance party. Jeff has been in recovery since 1996 and a VOCAL member since 2007. He is also a Certified Peer Recovery Coach, Certified WRAP® Facilitator ("WRAP® is very important") who has been trained in ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training). He is currently employed by his local CSB, working in peer support. He also maintains sponsor relationships with those who seek his help in 12-step recovery.

When I ask about what kind of work he is doing at the Community Services Board he chuckles when he tells me he works with "clients." Jeff is a peer down to the core – that is not his language. He values his experiences with mental health and substance abuse challenges and sees peer support professionals as having an advantage when working with those in recovery. Jeff sees his role as reminiscent of a 12-step sponsor, able to "They can't get in as deep as I can. I can say, "here is what I've been through and here is how we might get through this together."

After Jeff finished high school he experienced his first mental breakdown. Two years later he enrolled in the US Army.

He was candid with the recruiter about his mental health history, but the recruiter "swept it under the rug," and soon he found himself in boot camp. The psychiatrist said that Jeff seemed well-enough but he should be watched out for. Eventually he was asked to leave the army for medical reasons.

Jeff says that military service and a young man's bravado and stubbornness left him with rigid worldview. There were times he felt he'd lost all hope. Leaving the army was a personal blow and still causes regret. He acknowledges there were opportunities that help was offered and not accepted. Over time, Jeff says, "life humbled me to the point I could have an open mind."

In 1996, after leaving his wife, he decided to get sober. This was a turning point. He says, "I found in the Steps what other people find in church." While he was actively working on his addictions, he saw that for him, substances were a way of coping with living with mental illness. It would be hard to say which influenced which, but Jeff is a believer that addiction and mental health often co-occur. "Recovery is the best thing that could have happened to me in my life."

Jeff returned to the workforce as a driver for the Martinsville Peer-Run Center, WeCare. Soon he was training to be a Peer Specialist. He did not have the same

faith in himself as others seemed to have in him. Robin Hairfield, WeCare's Executive Director, encouraged Jeff to learn all he could. "Robin is my mentor. She saw something in me I didn't see in myself. She helped me out a lot."

Part of that learning included time spent on the VOCAL Board, first as a representative for Region 6, then as Vice President. He remembers wanting to get involved with VOCAL after meeting Bonnie Neighbour at the annual conference.

"I just like helping people," he says.

From Malaina Poore, Network Program Director

Dr. Mark Salzar presented in Danville as part of a larger training on Community Inclusion. He is a professor and researcher at Temple University. As modest as he is, I cannot resist including this sentence from his bio: "Dr. Salzar has been the Principal or Co-Principal Investigator on more than \$25 million in federally-funded research grants, has published more than 100 articles and book chapters on the delivery of effective community mental health and rehabilitation services to individuals with psychiatric disabilities, and has given more than 300 presentations on his work around the world, including Canada, Israel, England, Australia, and New Zealand." Basically, if Mark is talking, I want to listen. I felt that he really "got it" when it comes to peers and all of this makes him an amazing ally.

I would encourage you to seek out Dr. Salzar's work. For some us the topic seemed basic, community inclusion. Inclusion is different than integration. Inclusion is about living your life just as anyone else would. With the right supports work and school are achievable for all. Mark says that putting those supports in place is more than a human rights issue, but because of the harm done by poverty and inclusion, it is a medical necessity. I also learned that research shows that disability is not a reliable indicator as to whether or not a person can return to work or school. The same goes for intimate relationships and parenting. Think about it; we see people who have no type of diagnosis drop out of college, quit jobs, get divorced all the time.

In the training we also talked about times when we each felt part of community. It made me think of being an older teenager in Athens, Georgia, home to the University of Georgia. The campus was located directly across from the downtown area, and the school seemed very much a part of the community. In those pre-internet days, news about events came through the local independent paper and handmade flyers on street posts. I took advantage of UGA's resources like I was a tuition-paying student.

Everything from cheap egg sandwiches in the cafeteria to art openings to support groups.

Now, I live near Charlottesville, home to the University of Virginia. I've seen a performance there and listened to a talk or two. I often forget that we have this community resource and it feels like a separate world, accessible only to students. This is not the case. If you live near a large college, the odds are good that there are interesting and free things to do almost every day of the week, if you know how to find them.

Here are links to some of the largest schools in Virginia. A simple internet search for "community calendar," plus the name of your local college (including community colleges), should bring results. If you are looking for new ways to engage mind and spirit, or if you need to shake up your routine and get out of the house, this may be the answer you are looking for!

University of Virginia, Charlottesville

<http://www.virginia.edu/calendar>

Sample of free events in September and October:

- Faith, Spirituality, and Public Life; A Discussion with Senator Tim Kaine
- Mark Doty Reading
- Free Screening of "Suicide: The Ripple Effect"

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond

<https://events.vcu.edu/>

Sample of free events in September and October:

- Yoga at the Petersburg Public Library
- Health Disparities Roundtable
- Symphonic Wind Ensemble (\$10)

George Mason University, Fairfax

<https://www2.gmu.edu/community-events>

Sample of free events in September and October:

- Mel Parada: Rethinking Lines, an exhibition of typographic prints and paintings
- AA Open Meeting
- One Love Cultural Fest

James Madison University, Harrisonburg

<http://www.jmu.edu/events/>

Sample of free events in September and October:

- LGBT Open House
- Engagement for the Public Good Seminar
- Visiting Scholar Dr. Edward Larson, will deliver a public lecture entitled, "John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and the Catastrophic Election of 1800"
- Vievee Francis Poetry Reading

Virginia Tech, Blacksburg

<https://www.calendar.vt.edu/main.php>

Sample of free events in September and October:

- Pre-game Hokie Talk
- 7th Annual Hispanic Film Series
- Mindfulness in the Garden: Free Tai Chi Class

Words in the News

noun: neurodiversity; noun: neuro-diversity

the range of differences in individual brain function and behavioral traits, regarded as part of normal variation in the human population (used especially in the context of autistic spectrum disorders).

"his book about living with bipolar disorder is having some influence on the way people in his home country view neurodiversity"

Oxford Living Dictionary

Recovery Education Training Opportunities

VOCAL, in partnership with DBHDS and our local hosts, is working to bring five Recovery Education Programs to communities across Virginia. These include: eCPR, Community Inclusion, Trauma-Informed Peer Support, Peer Support Whole Health and Resiliency, and Pathways to Recovery Facilitator Training. 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 to the first 25 registrants, and continuing education credits are available! Don't miss out on these great opportunities!

Upcoming Dates

November 9: Trauma-Informed Peer Support in Virginia Beach

November 29-30: Pathways to Recovery Facilitator Training in Charlottesville
 November 30: Trauma-Informed Peer Support in Wytheville
 December 4-5: Peer Support Whole Health and Resiliency in Roanoke
 December 6-7: Trauma-Informed Peer Support in Richmond
 December 13-14: Peer Support Whole Health and Resiliency in Virginia Beach

For more information, contact Megan Sharkey at 804-343-1777 or megan@vocalvirginia.org.

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

Do You Shop at Kroger?

Please be sure to link your rewards card to VOCAL (account #JY336). The more you shop at Kroger and use your rewards card, the more money VOCAL will earn! This support helps achieve a peer-driven mental health system in the state of Virginia. Thank you!

Upcoming Trainings, Events, and Announcements

Trauma Informed and Resiliency Workshop

Monday, November 5 and 12
 5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
 NAMI VA Office
 1904 Byrd Avenue, Second Floor
 Richmond, VA 23230
 Hosted by Living Proof Outreach, and Co-Hosted by Be the Change Consultants Services
<http://www.livingproofoutreach.com/register/>

Inspired List Journaling

November 18
 6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
 4542 Blue Ridge Boulevard
 Blue Ridge, VA 24064 (located inside Serenity Counseling and Wellness Center)
 \$45 fee
 For more information, contact: 540-793-4081 or www.letsinspirepeersupport.com

SpiritWorks Announces Second Recovery Center in Warrenton (Fauquier County)

SpiritWorks-Warrenton offers groups, meetings, and activities for individuals and families in recovery, as well

as a Recovery Inside the Walls program for the Fauquier County Detention Center. Chris Connell serves as the Program Manager for the Warrenton Center. For more information, go to: <http://www.spiritworksfoundation.org/>

Holiday Blues Support Group

Every Monday from October 22-December 5
 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
 James City County Library
 7770 Croaker Road
 Williamsburg, VA 23188

Every Friday from October 26-November 30
 4:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m.
 4871 Longhill Road
 Williamsburg, VA 23188

These groups are for service members, veterans and their families. For more information, contact Siera: siera@beaconinstitute.onmicrosoft.com.

Virginia Peer Recovery Specialist Network Meeting: Professional Development and Networking for Virginia's Peer Recovery Specialists

Fredericksburg
 November 21
 10:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m.
 For more information, go to: <http://virginiapeerspecialistnetwork.org/meetings/>

Living Proof Outreach Thanksgiving “HomeAgain Shelter” Giveaway

Monday, November 19
 5:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m.
 2 East Main Street
 Richmond, VA 23219

Help Living Proof Outreach fill baskets for those currently housed in the shelter. Assist Living Proof Outreach with the purchase of 13 items for each basket, or a dinner item. You are invited to join LPO to present the baskets and serve dinner.

For more information, call Living Proof Outreach at 804-503-6489

PRS Training in 2019

Tuesdays, January 8-March 12
 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
 1014 Amherst Street.

Winchester, VA 22601
 For further information, contact Bryon Johnson at 540-325-6000 or bjohnson@nwcsb.com

"Reinforcing Our Roots: Designing Our Future"

International Association of Peer Supporters (INAPS) Conference
 DoubleTree by Hilton Hotels at the entrance to Universal Studios
 Orlando, FL
 December 3-5
 Register [here](#)

Free WRAP® Class in Blue Ridge

November 5, 12, 19
 December 3, 10, 17, 18
 6:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
 Serenity Counseling and Wellness Center
 4542 Blue Ridge Blvd
 Blue Ridge VA, 24064
 For more information, contact Tanya Coffey at www.letsinspirepeersupport.com or 540-793-4081.

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

**Come Home with Me
 by Ann Catherine Braxton, Hampton**

Come home with me
 So you can see my room
 It's filled with love and poetry
 The pages are my loom

I don't have a gaming system
 Or a hearth for fire
 But I haven't missed them
 I have music to inspire
 We can enjoy the shade
 Swap what's good in current news
 We'll drink cold lemonade
 And be each other's Muse

When it's time to part
 Because daylight is growing thin
 We'll hug and kiss goodbye
 And you can always come back again

From the Newsletter Editor

For months now I have shared office space with Malaina Poore, and have several times read some things she has

hanging on her bulletin board. The following has caught my eye many times over, and I thought I would share it with you now.

The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz

1. **BE IMPECCABLE WITH YOUR WORD**
 Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.
2. **DON'T TAKE ANYTHING PERSONALLY**
 Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.
3. **DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS**
 Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.
4. **ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST**
 Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgement, self-abuse, and regret.

The deadline for the November-December issue of the "Network News" is Monday, November 26, 2018. Please mail all contributions to the VOCAL office, or email Yolande Long at yolande@vocalvirginia.org. You may also reach her by calling the VOCAL office: 804-343-1777.