

THE NETWORK NEWS

January-February 2019

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VOCAL's 2019 Annual Mental Health Recovery Conference News

It's nearly conference time again! Every year we strive to bring you the best of the peer recovery movement, for those who are brand new to recovery to leaders in the field. This event is truly member-powered and there are many ways to participate. It is a time for all of us to learn from each other and spend time among friends. Continuing Education credits will be available for Peer Recovery Support Specialists. And of course, we will dance and sing!

We welcome Savannah Hatcher, performer and mental health advocate, as our keynote. Savannah earned a Bachelor of Music in classical piano performance in 2015. Upon graduating, Savannah opened her own music studio where she gives private lessons in both piano and violin. Her album, *The String Theory*, intends to evoke images of the wonders of the universe, featuring songs about the galaxy and the proposed scientific theory of everything: string theory. The album also discusses her struggle with bipolar disorder and her advocacy of mental health awareness, as well as social commentary on a variety of topics. To learn more about Savannah, please visit her website at <https://www.savannahhatcher.com>.

The conference will be held in Harrisonburg at the Madison Hotel and Conference Center on May 20-21. We think you will be impressed by this new facility and all it has to offer. Registration will be open until April 19. Registration forms will be coming soon. Scholarships are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Check our conference page for more details, including a schedule of events to be posted in early April at <https://vocalvirginia.org/connect/vocal-conference/>.

We encourage you to apply as a workshop facilitator, host a meeting or gathering, sell your wares, or book a table to advertise your organization. Please contact Yolande Long at yolande@vocalvirginia.org.

Call for Workshop Proposals

Do you have a skill or a topic you would like to present at our upcoming Conference in May? Workshops are 1.5 hours in length and open to all topics that are useful to peers in recovery.

Please email Yolande Long: yolande@vocalvirginia.org with your workshop title, a 3-4 sentence description of it, a 3-4 sentence biography, and whether or not you will need AV access. You will receive a decision by April 1.

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

The Network News is published six times per year by the

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Email: yolande@vocalvirginia.org

Please Join Us for Dinner and Conversation in Richmond by Malaina Poore, Network Program Director

VOCAL is excited to work with The Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities for a free dinner and conversation about mental health. This is a unique experience for people in the community to eat together and participate in civil dialogue about a range of topics. I learned so much at the Table Talk that I attended and I value the conversations I had with the people I met. I cannot think of another event quite like this! In their words: “The RVA Table Talk series creates opportunities for community members to engage in challenging conversations about diversity and inclusion. Each session focuses on a specific topic, and participants have the opportunity to share stories, perspectives, and ideas regarding issues facing the community.”

Please invite your friends and neighbors to join us on April 16 at 5:30 p.m. at the Williams Mullens office, 200 South 10th Street #1600, in Richmond. This event is open to all and it is truly enriched by the diverse individuals who attend. Plus, free dinner! Registration is required. Check out their other Table Talks and learning opportunities while you are there. <https://inclusiveva.org/programs/communities/rvatabletalk/>.

Recovery Education and Creative Healing (REACH) Program

2018 was quite a year for the REACH Program! We appreciate and value your participation and collaboration. Thanks to your support we were able to introduce six Recovery Education curriculums, in 10 different locations and in 26 individual sessions!

We are currently working to finalize our program schedule for 2019 and beyond. We envision a continuation of some of the programs offered in 2018, as well as increasing the availability of WRAP® programs. To hear about these opportunities once they have been confirmed, please stay connected with us through this newsletter, the E-Digest, and our Peer Recovery Trainings webpage (<https://tinyurl.com/y9o4a776>). Contact Don or Megan at the VOCAL office with any additional questions.

“There are many ways of going forward, but only one way of standing still.”
Franklin D. Roosevelt

Information for Those Seeking to Complete 500 Hours for PRS Certification

VOCAL has been in conversation with the Virginia Board about creative ways that Peer Support Specialists can earn hours towards their certification. Up to 25% of those hours can be achieved through advocacy activities, such as Advocacy Day at the Capital or participation in VOCAL advocacy calls. We have a list of potential opportunities. Please contact Megan Sharkey at megan@vocalvirginia.org or 804-343-1777.

An Interview with Heather Pate, Executive Director of Robin’s Hope

Tell us about yourself, in your own words.

I am 41 and live with Dissociative Identity Disorder. I grew up in Virginia Beach and used to show jump horses as a teenager. I have a Bachelor’s Degree in Automated Manufacturing. I placed first in the nation programming a robotic arm in college. I worked for UPS as an Engineering Supervisor for 6 years before going on disability. I managed environmental compliance for them across the state of Virginia. I am now happily divorced and learning to enjoy life. I have a really great friend and roommate who is like a sister to me and we do a lot of things together. I love Christian concerts, swimming, walking, and amusement parks!

What issues are important to you?

Speaking truth, community, and building resilience. They are important because they have proven to be invaluable in my own healing. Being able to speak my truth in any part of my life is a big deal for me. I really struggle finding words to express what I have been through, what I am going through, and what I need or want in life. So when I speak my truth it is a big deal. I want to honor all those who are able or have a desire to speak their truth in whatever way that looks. I am still learning a great deal about what self-advocacy looks like and how to speak up for myself. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of community. We need to understand that we are not alone. Life is about community and sometimes community hurts. I have told people before that community is what tore me down, and community is what is bringing me back together again. One strand on a string breaks easy, but multiple strings together bring strength. A big part of resilience has to do with community. I have faced a great deal of trauma and the opposite of trauma is resilience. I want to rise up. Resilience

allows us to work through and overcome difficult situations. I am passionate about building those skills.

What inspires you? Or what do you find useful in your recovery?

Something I have found valuable in my own life is learning and finding logic in the madness. What makes me want to run when I am uncomfortable? Why do I freeze up? Why, in the past, did I just shut down and do what I was told? Why? Why? Why? It explains how I have responded in the past and it reminds me to have grace for myself. It reminds me that I am an animal also and I can learn and do things differently. It is hard, though, because I have to learn and understand the science behind it and, because I struggle to understand and remember things I have to find ways to explain it and share it with others. I try to find ways to share this stuff in a way that makes sense in my own mind that may help others understand for themselves as well. So it is a big deal to me that it makes sense to others and that it is relatable. When I see people light up and make connections for themselves, I feel like I am serving a purpose greater than myself. That tells me that there is purpose for all that I have been through and I just need to see it through.

The other part of my passion is something I am working on and growing into. I am working on speaking truth to my own experiences. Trauma awareness, training, acknowledgement, and looking beyond trauma informed care. Trauma is not something that is often really talked about. Sometimes I wonder what is so weird about me that I want to talk about it. Why am I different? I am just so tired of keeping it to myself. I am tired of wearing the mask and trying to figure out all of this on my own. It is not all talking about doom and gloom. It is not actually all about hurting people hurting other people. Sometimes hurting people hurt themselves and isolate because they are afraid of hurting someone else. Trauma in itself instills shame, vulnerability, and isolation. A lot of people in our communities do not really get it. Given the statistics I have read, 7 out of 10 Americans have faced some form of trauma. We are not alone, we just minimize it, push it down, and say others have had it worse. The statistics show this and the impact on our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual lives is devastating. It is about getting real about real issues and there are a lot of them. What does it take to start healing? It is about getting to know people for more than just what they have been through. People are starving to be heard, validated, understood, and acknowledged. I struggle with chronic pain and have

an issue with doctors. I need to feel heard, and I need to understand what is going on and why. When I have that I can move forward, but if I do not then I spiral down. I struggle to know why that's such a difficult concept. So I hope to spread that message far and wide.

Resilience is what helps us overcome difficult and overwhelming life situations so I am huge advocate of learning resiliency skills. We do not always have to talk about the tough stuff. Sometimes having fun and connecting with other people is what can help us overcome. Sometimes just talking about the topics remind us to identify them in our own lives and that can create change. I look back to a moment in my life where I was taking a WRAP class at Friends 4 Recovery and I was doing well with it until the end. Then the instructors explained that I should find someone in my life to review it with and who could help keep me accountable. I remember sinking into that chair and wanting to disappear. I was surrounded with people in my life and many of them were telling me they cared and yet I felt, for various reasons, I could not openly share my WRAP plan with any of them. I felt completely alone even though I was surrounded by people; but people that did not really know or understand me. Having one or two supportive others in our lives is the biggest resiliency skill we can have.

What kind of work do you do and what do you like about it?

My volunteer work and my passion is working with and building a program called Robin's Hope. Robin's Hope is a Trauma Recovery Center and its mission is to bring hope and resilience to those impacted by traumatic events in life. In order to do that we need to be able to get real about what trauma looks like. Many people minimize what they have faced, and therefore refuse to see that they can gain something from this. Trauma looks different for everyone. We just have to get real with it. Robin's Hope offers groups on Monday afternoons and is working to build the program so that we can expand to other days of the week and eventually get into a larger space. We have a book group that focuses on Brene Brown's work with shame and vulnerability and the power of purpose and connection. All of this interweaves into the impact of trauma and helps us talk and open up about real issues.

We offer a trauma support group up at the McShin Foundation and are looking at ways to integrate trauma support and training into the substance use world as a larger goal. I also run a trauma support

group at Friends 4 Recovery from 2:00 p.m.-3:30 p.m. almost every Friday.

I am also able to help offer trainings in a variety of areas related to trauma. I have facilitated trainings/presentations in the past for Region 4, McShin, and professionals in the field in relation to my own diagnosis and personal experience.

Robin's Hope is feeding my soul and bringing me back to life.

What are some important lessons you learned? Good teachers? Recent trainings? Awesome things you've seen or read?

Wow! I think I could go on and on with this one. Those who know me know I would not be here if it was not for certain people that entered my life, taught me valuable lessons, and stood BY me, fighting FOR me and WITH me. I could not answer this question without speaking one person's name specifically.

Laurie Beth Matthews spoke life into me long before I could truly hear it. She was a peer specialist at Friends 4 Recovery when I first came there. She ran a trauma support group and she became a really good friend. She knew very little about my diagnosis of Dissociative Identity Disorder, but she wanted to learn and she let me share what the experience was like for me. She told younger aspects of me that the story within me was worth being told. She was the first to show me the personal bill of rights (which I refused to acknowledge) and claimed I was the exception to the rule in every point on that list. She called it like she saw it, and she told me I did not deserve to be treated the way I was being treated in my marriage. She saw me fighting and living in excruciating head and back pain with no diagnosis. In the last year or two of her life she modeled living in that pain, trying to advocate, speak her truth, and bowing gracefully at the end of it. She did not live to see me grow and change into the person I am today, although I know she stands amongst the stars looking down and is proud of the person I am and the person I am becoming.

I look back, and the fundamental theme of all those I can thank in my life are those who were, or still are, my cheerleaders. One of my biggest struggles to this day is believing in myself. I have a great deal of gratitude to those people. I am grateful to those who see something in me that is bigger than I can see, and encourage me to press on. I am grateful to all those who walk alongside me when I struggle and do not dismiss or push me away.

Something I have learned comes from a poem by Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken." As a child I had to memorize it, and over the years this poem continues

to resonate with me. "For I chose the path less traveled by and that has made all the difference." Life has led me down some rough roads. Sometimes the smoothest of roads is not the road I need to take. That smooth road looks like the right one, but I would not be where I am today if it was not for the road less "traveled by."

One more lesson. The people I met at Friends 4 Recovery in 2009-2010 are people that stuck with me and believed in me when I was not even able to talk to them, but when they came back into my life it was as if we had never missed a beat. They still cared and accepted me despite struggles I faced even after years had passed. For the first time in my life I sat back and said, "Oh, this is what healthy looks like."

Emotional CPR (eCPR) is the training that stands out the most for me. It's powerful and one that I want to pursue more if a possibility presents itself. eCPR resonates deeply in me. There is something powerful when you can connect with someone beyond words. It reminds me that connection is much of what we are missing in our world today and is a big part of what we need.

Who are you today that you wouldn't have known yourself to be if you hadn't walked your exact history?

I look back to around 2002, right before being diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder while I was working for UPS as a Plant Engineering Supervisor. I was overseeing environmental compliance in Virginia. I was 24 years old, recently married, had just purchased my first house, and was earning good money. I was living a life based on expectations from the world around me., but I did not know me. So I began to take the hard journey of learning who I was and who I am. When I met Laurie Matthews I knew she had something I wanted, but I felt like that was not possible. Now, not only is that possible, but I believe it is what was meant to be. The trials I have faced are now testimony and the misery is a message. I see a person who is stronger today than she has ever been. I see a person who is still learning who she is and is fine being real about that. Learning to give voice to the struggles faced and overcoming. A person that has up-hills and downhills like the next person, but is trying to grow through the process. A person trying to be real and not hide behind the mask of having it all together. This is a person I never expected to see and I am honored to stand tall amongst others brave enough to do the same. I see an average person still just struggling to get by because, let's face it, life can be tough. My mental health

diagnosis is still a part of my life and now I face chronic back pain. It is what it is and I am learning to be better through it. I may not know much, but I do know now that I am more me than I ever was, and I have found my tribe.

What do you wish the world knew about mental health challenges?

I wish I had a way to let the world in on my head. I still have a lot of arguments in my head and it reminds me of where we are in the world today. He said this, she said that, that person is judging, that person is being mean, that person is hurting. I want to be loved, I want to yell and scream “stay away from me, you cannot hurt me.” I see this in the world today. Week after week I go to therapy and I work hard on myself. I look at the world today and think, "Why am I being asked to do something that society cannot do themselves?" Then I remember I'm coming from a different perspective. It is not all cookies and cream in my head, but I need people to believe me and I need people who care enough to try and understand and “get me.” For people to not think I am crazy or that I am making something up. That what I share or speak about is real to me. Dare I say I have a right to a sliver of this planet because I am here? I think we all need that. I am not my trauma, my past, my diagnosis, or my challenges. I am ME and I am enough!

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

Music lyrics have a way of reaching my soul and one song particularly has resonated with me for a long time and really pushed me to go along and follow through with Robin’s Hope. That song is “Do Something” by Matthew West. It is challenging me to do something in this world. The other is “Go Light Your World” by Kathy Tricoli. I want others to know they are not alone in this world despite how isolated they may feel. That none of us ever know what is just beyond the river bend and the only way to find out is to be present. There are people that ignited a candle within me and those who have fanned the flame. I humbly carry my candle with others, do my part, and one by one we go light the world.

Words in the News

stakeholder
noun
a person with an interest or concern in something, especially a business.
Example: VOCAL is invited to meetings with Community Service Boards to represent the stakeholder viewpoint,

because as peers we have a “stake” in the services the CSB provides.

Upcoming Trainings, Events, and Announcements

Hope Fiendz Live Music Concert

Enjoy some great music and food in celebration of recovery stories and songs from real people.
March 23 from 5:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.
Westover Station
5047 Forest Hill Avenue
Richmond, VA 23225

SAARA of the Peninsula Workshop Day

March 30 from 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
"Motivational Interviewing for Peer Providers" (6 CEUs)
"Ethics Governing the Peer Profession" (6 CEUs)
Hampton-Newport News CSB
300 Medical Drive
Hampton 23666
Contact Alethea Lambert at 757-696-1661 or Frederika Jones at 757-810-5528 for more information.

Anger Management/Pathways to Recovery at 84 East

Every Thursday
10:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
7603 Hospital Drive
Gloucester, 23061
804-210-1619

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

Don't give anyone a part of you
Instead
Give them a piece of themselves
-make them whole
By Erin Slayton

From the Newsletter Editor

The deadline for the March-April issue of the “Network News” is March 28, 2019.