

LINES OF COMMUNICATION

FALL 2006

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

1211 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107

www.mhasp.org

National Professional Organization of Peer Specialists Is Created

People in recovery from psychiatric disabilities, researchers and others from around the country gathered in Philadelphia in mid-July to create a new national trade association – newly named the Peer Specialist Alliance of America (PSAA) – that will promote the emerging profession of certified peer specialist.

The participants – representing a “who’s who” of national and regional

mental health advocacy, service and research organizations – met to establish the organization (originally called the National Alliance of Peer Specialists) in response to the growing influence of the new profession of peer specialist – that is, people in recovery from psychiatric disabilities who are employed to help their peers work toward their own recovery, often in places where credentialing requirements have traditionally excluded

consumers from staff positions.

“Peer specialists offer hope because they are walking, talking examples of recovery,” said Joseph A. Rogers, president and CEO of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP), which organized the meeting and which is fostering the peer specialist initiative throughout Pennsylvania. MHASP’s Institute for Recovery and Community Integration teaches aspiring peer specialists the skills for providing peer support – such as how to help others with problem solving and goal setting – as well as serving as a model for recovery.

Georgia was the first state to make peer specialist services Medicaid-reimbursable. Larry Fricks, who helped make this happen when he headed the Georgia Division of Mental Health Office of Consumer Relations, noted that the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health

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Eric Goldstein, Montgomery County administrator for mental health, mental retardation, drug and alcohol and behavioral health, cuts the ribbon to open MHASP’s new Family and Youth Support and Advocacy Center as MHASP staff look on. Pictured (l-r) are Catherine Panzarella, director, MHASP Family and Youth Support and Advocacy Division; Francesca Vassalluzzo, the new Center’s program manager; Eric Goldstein; Center staffers Lisa Novick, Jamila Lee, Carol Stahl and Elizabeth Starks; and Joseph Rogers, MHASP president/CEO. (See story on Page 7.)

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MHASP Takes Leadership Role in Children's Behavioral Health


In February 2006, Philadelphia Mayor John Street announced the creation of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Children's Behavioral Health at a gathering of policy leaders, families, caregivers, behavioral health professionals and providers, educators, activists and advocacy groups. The commission's focus is on transforming the children's behavioral health system in Philadelphia into one that embraces the respect and dignity of youth, their families and the community, and provides high-quality services and treatment to children and youth in Philadelphia regardless of race, gender, area or income.

Staff of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP) have played a critical role in shaping the issues before the commission and working to address the underlying problems that have allowed the child-serving systems to fail Philadelphia's children in the past. Joseph Rogers, MHASP president and CEO, was appointed to serve as a commissioner, along with Dwane Dykes, PEAK program manager, and Mary Tillery, PEAK family advocate. In addition, MHASP staffers Barbara Altenburger, Eric Ashton, Gina Caruso, Joanne Flint, Julie Friedman, Kim Jackson, Janet Lonsdale, Hector Lugardo, Edie Mannion, Catherine

Panzarella, Michelle Sanchez and Francesca Vassalluzzo have each served on one of the three committees created to advise the commission on the critical issues facing youth, families, caregivers and the community around children's behavioral health services and treatment.

"Three key themes have come out of the Commission hearings," said Eric Ashton, MHASP's director of children's public policy. "These are, first, the need for a resiliency framework where professionals' primary focus is to ensure the dignity of and respect for families and children coming to them for services; second, that children's behavioral health needs are the role and responsibility of the community with assistance and support from the behavioral health care system; and, third, that services provided to children and youth must be of high quality, meet the child where he/she is and use all creative means to keep the child connected with his/her support system and in the community."

The work of the committees was completed in July, after which a team was charged with drafting a final report. This team is working with Blue Ribbon Commission representatives and examining the issues raised in the three committees, comments from the commissioners, consumer voices, stakeholder input and testimony received during 10 public hearings held throughout the city during the spring of 2006.

"It is anticipated that the Blue Ribbon Commission will release a final report the week of November 13, 2006, with an implementation plan to follow," Ashton said. The implementation plan will set out a road map for implementing the recommendations and strategies that are set forth in the final report beginning in January 2007. "Dr. [Arthur C.] Evans [director of the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Mental Retardation Services] believes this final report is a political document and not an academic document — one that can, should and will change children's behavioral health policy in Philadelphia for years to come," Ashton added. 

MHASP Expands Financial Division

Rosemary O'Rourke (pictured below) has joined the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP) in the newly created position of vice president/treasurer.

Over two decades, O'Rourke has built a successful career as a leader of community-based, non-profit mental health and healthcare provider organizations in the Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia areas.

An expert in non-profit financing, O'Rourke has effected improvements in mental health financing and service delivery by developing and implementing Medicaid/managed care-reimbursable initiatives and federal and private grants using state-of-the-art, evidence-based models and evaluation strategies. She developed, implemented and managed the federally funded national Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative in a public/private grant partnership

with the Washington public school system, and provided leadership for a major community-based provider of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services in Washington, Northern Virginia and Maryland. O'Rourke holds a master's degree from Temple University.

As part of the Financial Division's expansion, Steven Struck and Nicholas Andrilla have joined the MHASP staff as financial analysts in two other new positions.

Maryann Ludwig, until September MHASP's distinguished vice president of finance and chief financial officer, has left to pursue other career opportunities.



MHASP Combats Homelessness with 'Permanent Solutions'

In fall 2005, the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP) established Permanent Solutions (PS), a scattered-site, permanent housing program in Montgomery County.

Through this program, funded by the Montgomery County Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Drug and Alcohol Programs, a dozen men and women with disabilities, including serious mental illness and/or substance abuse and HIV/AIDS – and who previously existed in shelters, on the streets or in transitional settings – receive rental subsidies that provide for a one-bedroom apartment.

A key element of PS is the regular delivery of supportive services such as case management and life skills coaching around budgeting, cooking, and shopping. PS also provides transportation to stores and other locations. These supportive services attract landlords who are willing to rent to consumers despite often poor credit histories.

“Some landlords or realtors don’t accept rental subsidies, while others would like the program to co-sign the consumer’s lease, which our grant prohibits,” said PS program coordinator Maureen Daub. “However, the landlords we are currently working with are fairly understanding individuals who are look-

ing to help people. In fact, the weekly case management aspect of the program has won over some of the landlords – they appreciate that there is a structure in place to assist the consumer on a regular basis.”

To become eligible for participation in PS, consumers need a referral from their case manager or mental health worker. Proof of income, current living situation and disability are required. During the interview and intake processes, consumers’ skills are assessed. The people that come into the program have been fairly independent upon entry.

At the county level, homelessness is recognized as a serious issue and monthly meetings are held to bring together providers of services and supports, including the Permanent Housing Options Team – a subcommittee of the Montgomery County Housing Coalition – and, most recently, the PS program coordinator.

These committees are instrumental in addressing many of the issues involved in homelessness, fair housing, and the lack of affordable housing. Participants share knowledge and brainstorm around the major issues facing homeless people, and providers consider solutions; these options are later presented to the county for funding.

Once consumers have been placed, the PS program coordinator continues to track their progress and addresses concerns they may have with landlords or their apartment units.

The life skills counselor meets with each of the participants weekly to make sure they are managing their money and taking care of themselves. Participants are also linked to mainstream benefits and other services to which they may be entitled.

“As with any effective program, success in PS is an ongoing process,” said Daub. “Consumers are continually adjusting to the neighborhoods in which they live and they sometimes struggle with their responsibilities. But we are there to help them stay on track.” **LC**



ART SPIKOL

Regional Rally Draws a Crowd and Sends a Message of Recovery

The Regional Rally for Recovery Rights, organized by MHASP at Philadelphia’s City Hall on May 11, attracted about a thousand people. Its goal was to send a message that people with mental illnesses have a right to recover and to have fully funded programs and services that help them achieve that goal. Featured speaker Arthur C. Evans, director of the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Mental Retardation Services, stressed the importance of integrating people with mental illnesses into the community. “Working together, we can make sure everyone [who has mental illness] recovers,” Evans said.

Bell of Hope 2006 Largest Ever

At MHASP's Seventh Annual Bell of Hope Award Dinner and Silent Auction on May 24, 2006, former New Jersey Governor Richard J. Codey and former New Jersey First Lady Mary Jo Codey (pictured right) were presented with MHASP's Bell of Hope Award for their work in helping to counter the stigma of mental illness and for raising awareness of the importance of mental health. They were paid tribute by 2002 Bell of Hope Award recipient Estelle B. Richman, secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, and the more than 300 people in attendance at the Sheraton Society Hill Philadelphia. Kathy Orr, CBS 3's chief meteorologist, emceed.

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We C.A.R.E. Helps Residents of Notorious PCH to Find New Homes

During the final weeks before the closing of one of the region's most notorious personal care homes (PCH) in spring 2006, We C.A.R.E. (Communicate, Assist, Respond and Engage) was called into service to help the 139 residents of the St. James Retirement and Rehabilitation Center in Delaware County find new homes.

In the absence of a protocol to manage such a large relocation, Preston (Nancy) Ringo, southeast regional director of Adult Residence Licensing (ARL) in the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, turned to the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP), the region's only organization that advocates for PCH consumers. Just a year before, the agency had established We C.A.R.E. to provide training, education and advocacy services, including self-advocacy workshops, to PCH residents; technical assistance to PCH providers and staff; and advocacy assessments to assure that residents receive the full array of services to which they are entitled. Ringo requested help in advocating for St. James residents and monitoring their treatment, along with ensuring that they had a choice of where they would live. Ringo also asked We C.A.R.E. to help the residents move.

At the time of Ringo's call, residents had fewer than three

weeks until St. James would be shut down. A one-month extension allowed MHASP and ARL much-needed time to work with the Delaware County government offices that represented the St. James residents, including the Delaware County Office of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and the County Office of Services for the Aging. In addition, MHASP staff from Connect/Connect by Night, ACCESS, and Do Drop In Consumer Center joined in the effort to help the residents.

"We worked with them onsite and explained to residents what their rights were regarding finances, medical services, benefits and confidentiality during the relocation process," said We C.A.R.E. program manager Lisa Faulkner. "An important step was taking them to visit other residential sites in Chester, Lackawanna, Delaware, Berks and Philadelphia counties, all the while making sure each resident understood the rules and expectations of the home so that they had a true choice in where they moved. We were able to find homes for about half the residents and it was gratifying to see the process through to the final stage by helping each of them during their moving day. The other half also found places to live; they moved into nursing homes or supported or independent living arrangements, or moved in with family members." **LC**

Congratulations

to the Bell of Hope Honorees,
former New Jersey Governor
Richard J. Codey,
the former first lady,

Mary Jo Codey and to the Board
and Staff of the Mental Health
Association of Southeastern
Pennsylvania for their dedication
and leadership in promoting mental
health services for those in need.

Department of Psychiatry
and Human Behavior
Thomas Jefferson University

Joseph Rogers Speaks at NASMHPD Meeting



At the summer 2006 Commissioners Meeting of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, MHASP president/CEO Joseph Rogers (left) speaks at a reception for Charles G. Curie (right), then administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (In August, Eric Broderick, D.D.S., M.P.H., assumed the position of acting administrator following Curie's resignation.)

Services Administration is due to release a resource kit called “Building a Foundation for Recovery – How States Can Establish Medicaid-Funded Peer Support Services and a Trained Workforce of Peers.” “Hopefully, a federally funded kit is another indicator that this peer specialist workforce is essential to system transformation and that peer specialists are ready for a recognized association with nationwide membership,” said Fricks, who participated in the July 16-17 meeting and who now heads the Appalachian Consulting Group.

Other states with Medicaid-reimbursable peer specialist services include Arizona, Iowa, Michigan, North Carolina and Washington, as well as the District of Columbia. At this writing, Pennsylvania expects its peer specialist services to be Medicaid-reimbursable beginning in October 2006.

“New York State was the first state to develop and hire peer specialists,” said Peter Ashenden, executive director of the Mental Health Empowerment Project and another meeting participant. “We are proud of this fact but heartily support the work that has been developed in other states to much further expand upon this important initiative.”

Among other participants in the meeting was a representative of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Additional representatives were from the National Mental Health Association and the NAMI STAR Center as well as sever-

al organizations run by people in recovery from psychiatric disabilities. Besides the Appalachian Consulting Group and the Mental Health Empowerment Project, these organizations included three federally funded consumer-run national technical assistance centers – CONTAC, the National Empowerment Center and the National Mental Health Consumers’ Self-Help Clearinghouse (an MHASP program) – as well as the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery and Project Return of Los Angeles. Also attending were researchers from the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and the Missouri Institute of Mental Health, as well as representatives of META Services in Phoenix, and the Mental Health Association in New Jersey, which started a statewide organization dedicated to the profession of peer specialist in 1999.


Plans are under way to incorporate the Alliance, whose board would comprise at least 75 percent peer specialists.

“Trained peers are powerful change agents and good fiscal investments for transformation to a strength-based recovery system,” Fricks said. For example, research shows that people who receive peer support services have fewer and shorter hospitalizations – which cuts costs – and an improved quality of life.

“In Arizona, where peer support has been reimbursed by Medicaid since 2001, we have trained over 600 peer

specialists and employ 225 peer specialist staff who provide over \$7 million annually in peer services,” said Meta Services CEO Gene Johnson.

“Peer specialists have been key to our transformation from a traditional mental health provider to an organization with a recovery vision and a range of recovery practices that are producing unprecedented outcomes: elimination of restraint on psychiatric inpatient units, 68 percent successful employment outcomes, and 70 percent self-sufficiency in community living,” Johnson said. “These results mean that people labeled with psychiatric disabilities develop identities and roles beyond disability and reduce their dependence on services, thereby allowing our limited behavioral health resources to be used more cost effectively and reach more people.”

Montgomery County is the first county in Pennsylvania to employ peer specialists. Nancy Wieman, the county’s deputy administrator for mental health services, is a cheerleader for the program. “It’s helped the entire system,” she says. “These peer specialists give everybody – consumers and staff and providers – a personal vision of hope. When this is funded through Medicaid, we’ll be able to have more consumers involved as part of the everyday work of an agency, and the culture of the agency will start to change. It will become a partnership where everyone will learn from one another, all the time. And that will enable us to grow and grow.” 

Dr. Dan Gottlieb Publishes ‘Letters to Sam’

When his grandson Sam was born, Dr. Daniel Gottlieb began to write a series of letters that he hoped Sam would read later in life. He planned to cover all the important topics – dealing with your parents, handling bullies, falling in love, coping with death. What motivated him was the fear that he might not live long enough to see Sam reach adulthood: Dr. Gottlieb has quadriplegia – the result of a near-fatal automobile accident.

When Sam was 14 months old, he was diagnosed with autism. Now Dr. Gottlieb had another reason for the letters: to help Sam understand the hardships he might encounter. In this candid and moving memoir, Dr. Gottlieb, who has touched many lives as a therapist, radio host and author, relates his insightful and inspirational life lessons.

In addition to his psychotherapy practice, Dr. Gottlieb (a former Bell of Hope Award recipient) hosts “Voices in the Family,” an award-winning mental health call-in show on WHYY radio. He also writes “On Healing” – a bimonthly column in the Philadelphia Inquirer – and is the author of two books. He lectures locally and nationally on a variety of topics affecting the well-being of individuals, families and the larger community.

“Letters to Sam” is in local bookstores. For more information, visit www.drdangottlieb.com. Dr. Gottlieb is donating proceeds of the book sales to Cure Autism Now as well as other charities supporting autism research.

New Norristown Center Convenes Services for Families and Youth Under One Roof

A brand-new behavioral health center providing integrated advocacy and peer support services for Montgomery County youth and families struggling with mental illnesses and/or substance abuse opened its

doors on June 27, 2006. The Montgomery County Family and Youth Support and Advocacy Center, a program of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania (MHASP), brings together advocates and peer support specialists at 601 DeKalb Street, Suite 3, Norristown.

"The Center is part of our larger vision to bring many of our programs to family and youth in Montgomery County," said Joseph A. Rogers, MHASP president and CEO, at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. "It will provide Montgomery County residents a prime opportunity to further collaborate with families and youth and all of the child-serving systems in Montgomery County."

Such a program is vital, since families whose children need behavioral health services are often frustrated by gaps among the major child-serving systems: behavioral health, child welfare, juvenile justice, education and managed care. "It is not unusual for a young person with behavioral health challenges to need services from more than one system to support recovery," said Catherine Panzarella, director of MHASP's Family and Youth Support and Advocacy Division, under whose auspices the Center operates. "Although the child-serving systems are constantly striving to bridge those gaps, advocates are often the only supporters who will assist families irrespective of which – or how many – systems they are involved with.


"For example," she continued, "a family advocate may go to the school with parents to request educational accommodations that will support the young person's treatment *and* to the behavioral health provider to help families tailor treatment to maximize success in school. Families value having someone who will assist with the whole picture and not say, 'That is not my job.'"

Many of the advocates have firsthand experience. "Families often feel a peer can understand their frustrations better than other professionals and help them to generate solutions that are truly effective for their own family," Panzarella said.

The Center is home to the Parents Involved Network, a peer support program serving families of children with serious emotional disorders, and the Family Satisfaction Team of Montgomery County, which facilitates communication between families and the behavioral health system about what kinds of services are needed and effective. MHASP's PEAK (Parent Empowerment for Advocacy Through Knowledge) program, an award-winning education and advocacy training program for caregivers, is being piloted for Montgomery County. Future plans include incorporating other MHASP family and youth services in the Center.

The Center's services are "consumer-driven," said program manager Francesca Vassalluzzo: "The Center promotes the involvement of youth and families in all aspects of service system design, evaluation, and governance." MHASP has established similar programs in Philadelphia, Chester and Delaware counties.

Eric Goldstein, Montgomery County administrator for mental health, mental retardation, drug and alcohol and behavioral health, cut the ribbon to open the Center. "We thank Eric Goldstein for his incredible support of peer services for families," Rogers said. "Our collaboration with Montgomery County administrators in working toward resiliency and recovery has been very rewarding."

The Center can be reached at (610) 279-8511. 

SAVE THE DATE!

The Annual Board Meeting Luncheon of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania will take place Thursday, October 19, 2006, from noon to 2 p.m. at the Mendenhall Inn in Mendenhall, Pa.

For information, please call (215) 751-1800, ext. 259.



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