



NEW DIRECTIONS

“By, for, and about consumers of behavioral health services.”

Volume 5, Issue 2

June - July 2008

In My Experience... by Moe Armstrong

(Moe has presented for USFRA, NAMI, Michigan Veterans...)



My name is Moe Armstrong. I was decorated with a Navy Commendation medal for saving a Marine under hostile fire. Articles about my medical service with Third Recon Battalion in Vietnam were published in /Leatherneck/, the magazine of the Marines. But as a medical corpsman, I had never been trained to take care of the psychiatrically wounded. My sergeant developed a mental illness and I did not know what to do. Six months later, I suffered a major psychiatric breakdown. I did not understand the full extent of what happened to me. I was separated from my unit and medically evacuated from Vietnam. My discharge from the military hospital left me alone on the streets of America.

The year was 1966. No one understood mental illness.

I did not understand my symptoms.

I was not given any after care. In those days, a person was either in the hospital or out of the hospital. The Veterans Administration got me housing and monetary benefits to live. I struggled for many years trying to understand why I was nervous and sleepless all the time. I have continued to try to understand my mental illness.

What has been worse than my own disrupted life—from agitated sleep patterns, daily nervousness, being startled by noises, and feeling stunned with mental disorientation?

continued page 3

Borderline Personality Disorder

Legislation was approved in April to increase awareness of Borderline Personality Disorder (BDP). BDP afflicts 3 million Americans and has an extremely high suicide rate. May is now known as Borderline Personality Disorder Awareness month. Legislation passed 414-0. The hope is there will be research dollars for BDP now with the recognition it will now receive. Northern Lakes CMH has worked with consumers for many years using DBT, (Dialectical Behavior Therapy) a combination of both group and individual counseling, it is an evidenced based practice (EBP).

NLCMH Recovery Council



Official Definition of Recovery Now Crafted!

April 10, 2008

The Recovery Council finalized the NLCMH Definition of Recovery at its March 2008 meeting.

Recovery is a personal journey of hope, purpose and growth. It is the process of setting our own directions in life. We accept the responsibilities of meeting challenges, using our own abilities, strengths and determination.

This definition was the result of much discussion and reflection. The Recovery Council worked very hard on this as a group and there was strong consensus to accept this statement as the working definition of recovery at NLCMH.



Hats off to the Recovery Council for showing such strength in moving this definition forward. It was sent to CEO Greg Paffhouse for approval, and is now the official NLCMH Definition of Recovery.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 The Blind Man ~ Poem/Suitcase Exhibit in Michigan
- 2 Healing Power of Happiness
- 3 Walk a Mile in My Shoes Rally
- 3 Learning Communities
- 4 MI Disability Rights Coalition *Free Classifieds*
- 4 Ongoing & Upcoming Events

The Blind Man

By Anna Marie Lawrence

George hugs the sidewalk with his cane
Constantly rapping on the cement.
He hears the morning walkers grunts
Automatic “hellos” in their rush.

He welcomes greetings with a smile
And returns a “How are you today?”
Basking in their friendship, he walks
With his cane tap-tap-tapping cement.

He doesn't see the silent stare
Others of his race quickly perceive,
Does not know the critical look,
The look away, as if he's not there.

George, the blind man, delights
In his morning walk of quick friendship,
Sees no prejudice while crossing
From one sidewalk to another.



Stu Robertshaw
Dr. Humor

THE HEALING POWER OF HAPPINESS

Consumers from all nine counties in the Northwest CMH Affiliation attended the consumer conference held at the Ralph McMullen center in Higgins Lake, hosted by New Beginnings Drop-in Center. This was the 7th affiliation conference. The conference changes locations and allows new and different consumers to assist in the organization of the conference. Everyone had a good laugh with Stu Robertshaw (Dr. Humor), who provided a great way to begin the conference. Dr Humor also wrapped up the conference with some group activities.

Ginny Girard and Shari Diskson from the MSU extension office presented some affordable ideas for home cooking as well as great information about the food pyramid.

Bonnie Smith, who presented two years ago, returned and had everybody moving, stretching and grooving after a filling lunch...a great way to wake up and revitalize before the afternoon drowsiness took a hold of participants.

In all there were approximately 90 participants at the conference this year. Laughter is a great natural treatment for all. That ails you.

West Michigan consumers decided to create their own suitcase when they saw the article about the Willard Suitcase Exhibit. Their suitcases would feature their personal recovery story. Both consumers who created their suitcase attended the affiliation consumer conference and brought theirs with them to display and share their story with others who attended the conference. West Michigan will also play host to the traveling suitcase display from the Willard Suitcase Exhibit in January 2009. Currently they are presenting to many local organizations. The display was a great treat for all who took time to listen and/or read about this project.

The Lives They Left Behind, Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic

The Willard Suitcase Exhibit

Will be at Mott Children's Health Center, Flint, MI starting May 6 running through July 1, 2008.

When Willard Psychiatric Center in New York's Finger Lakes closed in 1995, workers discovered hundreds of suitcases in the attic of an abandoned building. Many of them appeared untouched since their owners packed them decades earlier before entering the institution.

The suitcases and their contents bear witness to the rich, complex lives their owners lived prior to being committed to Willard. They speak about aspirations, accomplishments, community connections, but also about loss and isolation. From the clothing and personal objects left behind, we can gain some understanding of who these people were before they disappeared behind hospital walls. We can picture their jobs and careers, see them driving cars, playing sports, studying, writing, and traveling the world. We can imagine their families and friends. But we can also see their lives coming apart due to unemployment, the death of a loved one, loneliness, poverty, or some other catastrophic event.

The suitcases and the life stories of the people who owned them raise questions that are difficult to confront. Why were these people committed to this institution, and why did so many stay for so long? How were they treated? What was it like to spend years in a mental institution, shut away from a society that wanted to distance itself from people it considered insane? Why did most of these suitcase owners live out their days at Willard? What about their friends and families? Are the circumstances today any better than they were for psychiatric patients during the first half of the 20th century?

WEST Michigan CMH has a display of two suitcases that consumers have assembled; for more information see The Healing Power of Happiness article next column.



Learning Communities

The learning communities' past two meetings were opened with celebrations/stigma busters and recovery stories. Ideas were shared for possible uses for the 1 in 5 video, some thoughts were to share it with pastoral councils, to have copies made for video stores (free rental), schools... Consumers had the chance to review the recovery resources and brainstormed how to make these available and how to inform people how to request and borrow them. Setting up a library is one thought but limited space is an issue and covering 4 office locations is also an issue. They will be listed on the Internet and a list of them will be available in the lobbies, how to distribute them needs more discussion. Additions for the resources were also being asked for. Internet access for consumers was talked about at some length after viewing the Northern Lakes website and the virtual recovery center. The virtual recovery center featured the Recovery Council's meeting minutes and the recovery statement for Northern Lakes CMH and continues to have other regular posts about recovery, including inspirational quotes every Monday and Poems and Prose every Thursday. Attendees were asked how we should inform others of the recovery statement. May's meeting covered the recent Recovery Grant applications and the goals within the grant and also allowed consumers to get the first look at the recovery towers being put in all offices with various brochures and reading material available to all. These are now in each of the office lobbies and have a wealth of Recovery information. For an activity those attending learned about the Morbidity and Mortality report about people with a mental illness dying sooner than others of preventable medical conditions. All had the chance to try an exercise to reduce their stress level with biodot feedback (small dots that change color to assist in recognizing how their body responded to the exercise.

Walk a Mile In My Shoes Rally

It was a rainy wet day for rally participants and we all felt for those on the capitol steps presenting their statement, displaying their county banner, and getting wetter with each passing minute. Eighty-three counties were represented with a statement of recovery, for the reduction of stigma and other important comments relating to the experiences of living with a mental illness or a developmental disability. Representatives to attend and speak for Northern Lakes awakened early to arrive in Lansing before lunch. Lunch was postponed until after the rally as the rainy condition made it difficult to serve and eat food while exposing it to the elements. 80 individuals from our 6 counties took that long journey, many taking the opportunity to speak with their representatives or the representative's aides. Umbrellas were everywhere in all colors and sizes.

In all over 1800 people attended the rally. Northern Lakes was well represented. All seemed to enjoy themselves regardless of the rain that persisted throughout the rally and hope that next year brings sun, sun screen and the desire for plenty of water (in a bottle) to quench the thirst of a nice spring day out-of-doors.

Many from Northern Lakes chose to visit JIMHO (Justice in Mental Health Organization) at their new location just blocks from the capitol. There were consumers from all over Michigan visiting and taking the opportunity to stop by while they were in Lansing.

In My Experience...by Moe Armstrong

Continued from page 1

The stigma and prejudice of society and even the mental health system. In some ways, stigma has taken a bigger toll on me than my psychiatric condition.

Stigma for me started while I was in the military. Mental health meant being weak-minded; strong and valiant people never broke down. I have come to believe the opposite. Mental illness is very unpredictable.

Anyone at any time can develop mental illness. Our job is to care for those who have become psychiatric casualties. We also need to be aware of the nature of the condition. High states of anxiety and depression are signs that something has shifted in the brain function. These conditions do not mean that the person is weak minded or that he needs behavioral modification techniques.

Many of us with a mental illness could become productive once we are taught to live with our psychiatric condition. We need to look at services for people who are deaf and blind. These services prepare people to live with their conditions. Stigma keeps us from getting that education. Stigma keeps us from learning and talking openly about mental illness. Americans, and especially the American military, are going to have to look at the prospect of possible widespread mental illness and recovery from the current war. We can turn people's lives around and move them to recovery; but stigma can keep us from implementing quality, recovery-oriented mental health services. My life today might be an example. I could not and cannot go back into to combat, but there is still work that I can do to help others with mental illnesses. I can help set up ongoing educational support meetings to teach about mental illnesses and how to get sane, stable safe and sober. "Each One, Reach One, Teach One" is the cornerstone of this ongoing education support meeting model. With realistic levels of recovery, it is possible to recruit and train people with mental illnesses to work in the mental health system.

In a way, my life has gone back to where I started. I work in mental health with the same enthusiasm that I brought to my work as a medical corpsman with the Third Recon Battalion. Ongoing educational support meetings are a form of prevention. I do not have to dive into helping people who are in psychiatric crisis. Through learning about the psychiatric condition, we are learning prevention or symptom reduction. Realistic levels of recovery are possible. My life is helping others which, in turn, helps me.

By getting rid of stigma, I was free to develop a program based on education and support in the mental health care field. By getting rid of stigma, I can hold my head high like people who have lived with physical illnesses like cancer or diabetes. By getting rid of stigma, the military has the opportunity to keep psychiatric casualties as active duty like they are attempting to do with people who have physical disabilities. By looking at stigma and getting rid of it--great opportunities have room to grow.

This electronic update is written by SAMHSA's Resource Center to Address Discrimination and Stigma Associated with Mental Illness (ADS Center), a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). We invite you to share this information with your friends and colleagues who share your interest in confronting stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness and to post this information in your own newsletters or listservs.

Electronic Distribution!

Receive *New Directions* through the email. If you would like to receive *New Directions* electronically please submit your email address to Leslie.Sladek@nlcmh.org writing "New Directions" in the subject line. Your address will be used solely for distribution of *New Directions*. It will not be shared or used for any other purpose.

Contributions!

If you would like to contribute to *New Directions* please contact The Editor, Leslie Sladek, at 231 933-4907, or email Leslie.Sladek@nlcmh.org. Contributing writers: Anna Marie Lawrence



Michigan Disability Rights Coalition



Do you need special equipment to assist you in daily life, or do you have some equipment that you no longer use to assist you or a family member?

FREE Medical assistive devices is a listing for those in need and those no longer in need to find equipment that is no longer needed by someone else.

The MI Disability Rights Coalition began this classified listing and from browsing a few of the categories it is being used across the state.

<http://www.atxchange.org/v3/home.php>

Upcoming Events

- **June 3- Recipient Rights Advisory Committee 2:30 -5:00 p.m.** in Traverse City with Video conferencing available to Cadillac or Houghton Lake upon request.
- **June 11 - CAC (Consumer Advocacy Council)** 1:30 p.m. meets in Traverse City with video connection to Houghton Lake.
- **June 19 - NLCMH Board meeting** in Cadillac at 6:30 p.m.
- **July 9 – CAC (Consumer Advocacy Council)** 1:30 p.m. meets in Traverse City with Video to Houghton Lake
- **July 17 - NLCMH Board meeting** in Grayling at 6:30 p.m.
- **July - Consumer Conference in Lansing** at the Kellogg Center, MSU campus

Pictured at the right are our Roscommon representatives at the Walk Rally (before the rain!!).

- ### LEARNING COMMUNITIES
- 2nd **Tuesday** – June 10 & July 8 from 12:30-2:30 pm in Houghton Lake
 - 2nd **Wednesday** – June 11 & July 9 from 1-3:00 pm in Grayling
 - 2nd **Friday** – June 13 & July 11 from 1-3:30 pm in Cadillac
 - 3rd **Tuesday** – June 17 & July 15 from 1-3:00 pm in Traverse City

NLCMH Recovery Council

- June 27** - 1-3:00 pm in Houghton Lake
- July 25** - 1-3:00pm in Grayling

Ongoing Events

If you know of other ongoing events that could help other consumers, please contact the Editor of *New Directions*.

- **DBSA (Depressive Bipolar Support Alliance)** meets every Tuesday 7-8:00 pm Club Cadillac. Contact 775-5638.
- **Connections Recovery Support Group**, Traverse City, Fridays 1:30-3:00 pm Kandu Island (open to all with a mental illness). More information 932-1590.
- **Connections Recovery Support Group**, Houghton Lake CMH, every other Thursday starting June 12 (June 26...) 2:00 pm Contact Ernie for more information 989 366-9420.
- **Bereavement Support Group**, available to the public through MMC's Hospice and Palliative Care program. Mondays at Hospice house 6:30pm or Tuesdays at the TC Senior Center 10:00am. For more information 935-8491.
- **Support Group for Teens (13-19)**, For Bipolar disorder and Depression. This peer-led group meets every **Thursday from 3:15-5:00 pm.**, at the First Presbyterian Church, 221 East Harris St., Cadillac.
- **NAMI of Northwest MI** support meeting 2nd Monday of the month 7-8:30pm, Munson Medical Center, doctors dining room.
- **Gamblers Anonymous – NEW TIMES!** Friday from 6-7 p.m. at the Frankfort United Methodist Church, 537 Crystal Ave., (M-22), Frankfort; the e-mail address is: gafrankfort@yahoo.com Online support GambleNoMore2007@yahoogroups.com
- **Parent Support/Education group** - meeting the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month at 1:00 at Pine Rest, Traverse City Clinic. This group is collaboration between Pine Rest and the Association for Children's Mental Health (Jane Shank).



This Newsletter is produced with support from Northern Lakes Community Mental Health.