

# Peer Voices Now!

By Persons with Lived Mental Health Experience, for Our Community

**SPRING 2017**

A Newsletter from the Consumer Relations Program in Sonoma County California



## **WELCOME STATEMENT BY AMY**

This issue celebrates a milestone in Sonoma County –  
The Ten-Year Anniversary of the Wellness & Advocacy Center.  
It got me thinking about change and how it occurs – personally, in the  
community and systemically. Consequently, I want to devote this edition of  
*Peer Voices Now!* to the theme of **Transformation**.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

### **Why I Am An Advocate**



**by Amy Breckenridge**  
**Consumer Affairs Coordinator**

Deep and thoughtful listening was my form of bucking the system for many years. In programs and hospitals where dismissing or ignoring was the norm, listening seemed a potent and critical way to try to provide help, healing and relief or recourse. When self-determined aims were thwarted, I spoke up. When medical concerns were ignored, I attempted to get them addressed. My sense of transformation in those days boiled down to this: one person at a time – try to make a difference.

Over the last 30 years I have witnessed an arc of considerable change. There has been a proliferation of self-help groups, the growth of peer-run programs along with



Funded by Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds through a contract  
from Sonoma County Behavioral Health Division,  
administered by Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire (GIRE)



local, state and federal advocacy efforts. Social Rehabilitation concepts continue to encourage us to look at people through the lens of community membership where the idea of 'natural supports' for people ride alongside of psychiatry and medication.

Then there was the decade of "the brain" when pharmaceutical companies, doctors and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (now National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI) proclaimed mental illness to be a brain disease. Removing social determinants from this philosophy had the impact of removing a sense of guilt and shame from many families, pointed to a medical model of care, and the onus and deleterious fallout landed on the identified patient. This stigma, in the perceptions of many, had to be overcome, neutralized or re-focused in order to proceed in life. An unintended effect has been greater social isolation for individuals who have been diagnosed.

**I ask you, "What are your ideas on how to create systems transformation?"**

There is a dark shadow thrown in the trail of transformation. I call it a psychology of "otherness" – containing fear, contempt and pity – that pervades the community landscape and conversations. Health statistics show that on average the life span of those living with mental health issues is reduced by 25 years. Side effects from psychotropic medications include damage to our hearts, lungs and kidneys. Muscle rigidity, along with other uncontrollable movements, plagues many who have taken medicine long-term for mental health relief. Brutality in jails and prisons has an exceptionally devastating impact on people with mental health difficulties. Disbelief, devaluation, and a lack of understanding imbedded in a culture of mockery and

violence cause grave injury, up to and including death – whether by suicide, neglect or inflicted pain to many.

The privatization of psychiatric hospitals has led to a preference for profit over care. Some individuals seeking help and assessment have found themselves behind locked doors; unable to leave and bewildered when their honest communication was disregarded. I wonder, "Who would choose to seek help when the intentions of care providers are suspect?"

People with lived mental health experience have led the way in systems reform and transformation. While there are no longer deportation trains taking those people whose behaviors were clashing with social norms away from their families and community and being committed to Asylums, there is renewed vigor in the psychological community and legislature that people need to 'get treatment' or have treatment forced upon them.

The *Declaration of Independence* declared that all are equally eligible to preserve life and liberty, and to pursue happiness. These notions are integral to the fabric of an open society. Dignity and respect – whether at home, in the workplace, in health care or in the legal system – are best revealed when infused with the values in the *Declaration of Independence*.

This is a time I would like to see us raise our voices, gather together and decide how to best show our dissent – along with providing and suggesting solutions. I ask you, "What are your ideas on how to create systems transformation?"



## **Peer Support Specialist Training Program**

**by Kate Roberge**

### **Consumer Education Coordinator**

The Consumer Relations Program offers a course in Peer Support Specialist Training. Peer support specialists (also known as peer counselors, peer providers, peer advocates or peer navigators) are trained in a wide variety of topics, including mental health recovery, ethics, communication, boundaries and co-dependency, co-occurring disorders, crisis intervention, suicide prevention (Question, Persuade, Refer), cultural responsiveness, burnout and self-care, trauma-informed care, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, emotional literacy, and many others. Applicants to the program must have lived experience as a person with a major mental health challenge.

At the end of the course, students are assisted with finding internships at area organizations serving people with lived mental health experience. Once their internships are completed, the students are assisted in searching for employment as peer support specialists.

The next Peer Support Specialist Training class starts on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

For more information, please contact Kate Roberge at (707) 483-7425 or kroberge@gire.org.



## **Wellness and Advocacy Center - 10 Years and Counting....**

**April 2017 recollection by  
Amy Breckenridge  
Consumer Affairs Coordinator  
(previously Program Manager)**

To try to encapsulate 10 years of history at the Wellness and Advocacy Center is challenging to say the least. Yet having the good fortune to be a part of that history, I have agreed to try to paint a picture of what has transpired here.

It's 2006, one year into the Mental Health Services Act's (MHSA) first iteration and a group of peers has begun meeting to discuss how Self-Help could be expanded in our county. Interlink Self-Help Center was 10 years into its operation and evolution and "Wellness" and "Recovery" were becoming popular words in mental health circles. The idea of a Wellness Center was already in the minds of public mental health officials and that made the possibility of expanding what was already here just a tad bit easier.

'More activities' seemed to be the consensus at the Client Advisory Council (C.A.C.) meeting to discuss a Wellness Center program proposal: Gardening, Art, Career and Computer training; and expanded opportunities for social interaction, peer-led support groups, one-on-one peer support and peer self-advocacy. These activities would support the value of holistic health and would foster a sense of connection as people defined for themselves which activities would best support them in their personal journey of recovery and self-empowerment.

Sonoma County Behavioral Health Department (SCBHD) decided to move forward with a Wellness Center and offered this building with its beautiful grounds on



**Funded by Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds through a contract  
from Sonoma County Behavioral Health Division,  
administered by Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire (GIRE)**



Chanate Road for its setting. Many folks on the planning committee feared that the remote location would make it difficult, if not impossible, for people to access – the long bus ride, a steep hill to navigate...but in the end, the location proved to be one of the Center's greatest assets.

(SCBHD would decide to utilize their staff and a county van to offer additional transportation for those who couldn't easily access public transportation.)

During the first months and year after the Center opened in April 2007 only about 10-20 people might find their way to the Center. By the second year, however, there were 30 people each day, and now between 45 to 60 people a day utilize the Center.

The Wellness and Advocacy Center (The Center) is a peer-run, self-help program. Peer values include self-determination and self-definition, inclusion, empowerment, empathy and mutuality, to name a few. The Center has flourished due to the efforts of many people, including its staff, members, allies and hundreds of hours of volunteer contribution. Without volunteers, so much could not have occurred. Goodwill's support, guidance and support from SCBHD, and collaboration with community agencies, programs, schools and individuals round out the picture. It takes a village, as Hillary Clinton said, and I have often likened the Wellness and Advocacy Center to a community center for people with mental health difficulties. "A place where (almost) everyone knows your name."

So what have we learned over ten years of time? What has been important?

Welcome and connection: When people walk through the door, they are greeted with warm regard. Each person is welcomed and we want to connect with each person, to find out who they are, what

they want for themselves and how staff might assist in their process. With trust and connection, people are free to explore and grow – in a place with few judgments, people begin to relax and just be themselves.

The open-style art studio is a haven for artists and for reflection. People can make art or as Art Director, Naomi Murakami says, "Just sit and think-as long as you don't bother anyone else." Naomi sees art in most things. Guidance is offered when requested, but people are free to explore on their own and in their own preferred medium. The Art program has also opened venues for people to show and sell their work. There is an in-house gallery and art store and The Center artists have participated in over 40 art shows during the past ten years, including a show at the Sonoma County Museum and a show titled "Unseen" that was hosted at the Finley Center and drew a lot of attention from around the county.

Creative expression has also flourished at the Wellness and Advocacy Center. Each week since 2007, *Mind Travelers*, the same band you hear here today, has held a Wednesday music jam offering people an opportunity to listen, play, dance or sing. In fact, Wednesdays are the most crowded days at The Center and the live music seems to be a universal attractor. The *Mind Travelers* have offered a steadfast commitment to playing here and people almost always smile when we say, "It's Wednesday - and the band will be here!" Fridays there is an Open Mic and karaoke has been a popular pastime bringing out some wonderful singers along with people too hesitant to try singing anywhere else. There is now, and have been, a number of writing groups. In 2010 and 2011, the peer and self-advocacy group decided to publish a literary journal. The group researched everything, from layout to copyright, to



printing and promoting. Two volumes of the Creative Linx were self-published and Volume II is still available today, if you'd like to take one home.

During the early years, before the kitchen was transformed into Good Eats Kitchen employment training program, members and volunteers jointly prepared healthy lunches using food from the gardens, making salads, soups and casseroles. Eating healthy nutritious meals and sitting down to a healthy lunch together had been an integral part of our socialization and fellowship and has been missed by many, though snacks and coffee are still served. Three organic gardens were initially planted and have flourished. Several people, though their health was not robust, have made their way to the Wellness Center to work their garden plot, to talk together and to support each other: Friendships flourish along with the gardens!

In the Career and Computer Lab basic computer classes were held, spearheaded by Linda Matteson. I couldn't help but notice that after Linda's tenure from the lab, the demand for help and assistance had decreased greatly. People were becoming more computer literate! The Career Lab has also been a center for resource development. People applied for school, for benefits and learned what was available in the community, in addition to being able to set up email accounts and have access to computers for longer periods of time.

Socialization remains a key aspect in the life of the Wellness and Advocacy Center. Whether talking over coffee and snacks in the dining room or sitting outdoors at the picnic tables, conversations can be overheard about what each person is doing in their recovery process. Though it may appear that people are just sitting around; many a catalyst for change emerges in these simple conversations.

Seeing and greeting each other through the years, has enabled us to mark each others' growth, to support and cheer our efforts, and challenges us to grieve our losses and make repairs together. Peer Support group attendance has grown steadily and staff continue their own recovery and growth by taking peer support specialist classes or participating in staff development training which helps us all better understand each other and how to self-examine and understand what we are bringing to the dialogue. In all, it's been a very richly rewarding experience.

In 2016 we changed our mission to, "Together we are moving towards mental health recovery, in a safe, non-judgmental peer environment." I am grateful to have been part of that process.

-----  
**Celebrating**  
**Recovering Communities!**

The Consumer Relations Program hosts screenings of the social action documentary film ***Healing Voices***

This film poses the question, "What are we really talking about when we talk about mental illness?"

A powerfully, intimate look into the lives of three individuals as they describe their personal experiences with states often labeled psychosis, along with dialogue of psychiatrists and psychologists in the U.S. and worldwide, the film depicts dynamically changing views of the recovery potential for individuals who have been labeled or diagnosed as incurable.

Jen, Dan and Oryx share their stories from the frontlines as they self-define their experiences with mental health in ways that make sense to themselves. The film also examines the rise of the notion that mental health challenges are 'brain diseases' and points out the connection in our western medicine that says 'if there is a problem, there is a pill for that!'





**HEALING VOICES  
CAN BE SEEN  
AT THESE LOCATIONS**

**May 10**  
(Wednesday)

**Russian River Empowerment Center**  
Armstrong Woods Road, Guerneville, CA  
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

**May 12**  
(Friday)

**Wellness and Advocacy Center**  
3400 Chanate Road, Santa Rosa, CA  
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

~~~~~  
**The Power of 'Healing Voices'**  
**thoughts on the film**  
**by Oryx Cohen**  
published in The Mighty  
March 9, 2017

*"Mad Pride is a mass movement of the users of mental health services, former users and their allies. Mad Pride activists seek to reclaim terms such as 'mad,' 'nutter' and 'psycho' from misuse, such as in tabloid newspapers. Mad Pride activists seek to re-educate the general public on such subjects as the causes of mental disabilities, the experiences of those using the mental health system and the global suicide pandemic."*

One of our hopes in producing the award-winning social action documentary "Healing Voices" was that the film would lessen fear around altered or extreme states of consciousness, such as hearing voices and seeing visions, what is often called "psychosis" or "mental illness," to an extent that people would feel freer to talk about these experiences openly with family, friends and neighbors — that they would come out of the closet, so to speak — and even feel a sense of mad pride.

I have to admit I was terrified to talk about the details of my experience with my neighbors. I was brought up by two wonderful hippies who named me after an African antelope. We lived in the low-income section of town. Despite working hard at menial jobs, for the most part they did not have two pennies to rub together. As a child, I remember sometimes there was nothing to eat except tortillas and mustard.

Here I am now, lucky and privileged to have a good job and own a house in a nice neighborhood. It is also a neighborhood that is fairly close-knit. We all know each other. We have neighborhood yard sales together. We've played on the same city league basketball and softball teams together. We have a weekly poker night. But I still had visions of my neighbors finding out about my history and ostracizing me, and my family, and possibly running us right out of town.

Early in 2014, things came to a head. I had just been through an intense altered state in late 2013, what I prefer to call a vision quest, that had ultimately landed me in a hospital for a week and on high doses of heavy-duty psychiatric drugs. I knew I was sluggish and not myself, but I had no idea what I looked like from the outside. I was about to have a rude awakening.



I walked across the street to my neighbor's house, finally feeling ready to face the world and to participate in the weekly poker night. It would be good to feel connected to people again, to try and move on from the feeling of being different, of being outside, to move on from being hospitalized for a third time. However, this time, I did not feel like one of the guys joking around. I felt like the joke. They asked in a teasing way, "Are you on drugs?" "You look doped up!" Well, I was on drugs, but I didn't feel like it would be well received to talk about why and what I had just been through. I made up some excuse and left that night feeling like an outcast.

Needless to say, I was quite nervous about what my neighbors would think when we released "Healing Voices" in 2016 by holding several grassroots screenings, including several not far from where I live. My story, including my experience in 2013, is featured as part of the film. I was not out with them about a big part of my life, and yet here it was, on the big screen for everyone to see. I felt naked. And I almost didn't invite them.

Then I thought, if I can't do this, what's the point? It's one of the main reasons we made the film. The time had come for me to own my experience and have a sense of pride about it, with everyone, not just the people in my work and personal life who already know about these issues. So I invited my friends and neighbors. The ones who I had never shared deeply with, still with the very real fear that they may not want to have anything to do with me after seeing it.

To my surprise, without exception, they loved the film. The movie has brought us closer together — not the opposite. I think this is a testament to the movie. It humanizes people. Here, I could see it in my own life, in real-time: the power that film has proven to have.

A by-product of lessening the fear that can separate people, is an increased curiosity and openness to one another's experiences. That night at poker early in 2014, I had wished that my neighbors had been genuinely curious and empathetic about where I had been, and what I was currently going through. I had wished they had showed that they cared. But it seems that we are now taught in our society not be curious. That if someone is behaving differently, they need to be referred to a professional. We have lost a sense of community power around these issues. So often this leads to children being separated from parents, marriages being torn apart and yes, neighbors being ostracized from their communities.

Our vision for "Healing Voices" has always been to create a social action film. We initially released the film in April 2016 via a global, grassroots screening event. All of the initial screenings (130 in total) were produced by local, community partners. The primary goal was to mobilize the mental health community, our base, so to speak, by demonstrating how the film could be used on a community level to spark dialogue around mental health issues. We asked the question, What are we talking about when we talk about "mental illness?" Our goal is to change our conversation from one of despair and fear, to one of hope and healing.

The screening in Oakland was an example of the next step for our social action film. The first of what we are calling "Recovering Community" events. Now that we have mobilized our base, it is time to burst out of our mental health bubble, to fully emerge from the closet, because these issues touch us all. We want to change the conversation, but we also want to broaden the conversation. Because mental health issues are not a singular issue.



One of the major themes of the movie is this idea of “canaries in the coal mine.” Canaries sense danger and then sound the alarm. In my experience, this is an excellent metaphor for what happens when people experience altered or extreme states, what the doctors call “psychosis” or “mental illness.” What if instead of labeling these experiences we took a more curious approach? We might find some people are experiencing significant danger in their personal lives. This could be in the form of abuse, trauma, neglect, lack of love, poverty, the threat of poverty, the list goes on and on. The canary sounds the alarm: something is not right in my life!

Our intention in that this next global event — our “Recovering Community” screenings — is to bring as many different movements together as possible. LGBTQIA, Civil Rights, Disability Rights, Environmental Rights, Addiction Recovery, Criminal Justice, Spiritual Movements, etc., these movements are all connected. And it’s heartbreaking to me that progressive movements still have so many misconceptions about people who are labeled “mentally ill.” Even within these movements, it sometimes feels like we are the one group where it is OK to label us, to forcibly “treat” us, to lock us up. Well, while it’s time for us in the Mad Pride movement to come out of the closet, it’s also time for the so-called “normals” to not only welcome us into these great progressive movements, but back into the human family.

Before I conclude, I wanted to return to the local, to my neighborhood, because I omitted something important. There was actually one neighbor in 2014 who reached out, who made me feel more human. He noticed that I wasn’t doing well that night. He texted me and offered to take me out to lunch. At lunch, he shared about his own struggles with depression and how running

had basically saved his life. He is the reason I now jog. I am now a regular runner, thanks to him. I find it grounds me like few other things can. He was a big part of giving me the courage to share more of myself with the rest of my neighbors, and a big reason why I feel, more than ever before, connected to them and to other people.

You see, a simple act of curiosity, a simple act of kindness, can go a long way towards helping us recover a sense of community.

So I challenge the reader to truly listen to someone else’s experience. In doing so you may learn many profound things, not the least of which is that madness can be difficult and painful for sure, but also quite a beautiful and spiritual part of the human condition. You may get in touch with your own madness and realize that there is no us and them. Only us. And who knows, you may even start to feel some Mad Pride!

~~~~~

### Survey Results:

#### **Q. What does *Mental Health Transformation* mean to you?**

##### **Raymond Velasco:**

Well at one point in my life I was really unstable. I needed to get help or find support of some kind to help me. I was in a real dark place. The doctors diagnosed me with schizophrenia. I felt as if I was mentally paralyzed. It was real hard to function.

As time went by I finally got some help and after talking to the doctors they put me on medication and within weeks I was almost totally mentally stable. The mental health team here in Santa Rosa was so good to me. I can never thank them enough or repay them for their services. Today I am happy, grateful and blessed.





## Eric Boehm:

I feel in the throes of transformation; like a helicopter hovers in such a strong wind the pilot – my mind – has a fear (unsafety, anxiety, unhinged) to land the helicopter in such a wind buffeting things to and fro, all about me. I feel no identity of or with a system, cohesive whole or framework of beliefs.

The one thing I hang my hat on is my values – I embrace compassion including for myself on this helicopter ride, cherish a sense of gratitude that I and those around me have food, clothing and shelter – have support, love and appreciation for whatever journey each one of us experience and share with one another as we feel motivated, safe, and able to do so. Thank you.

## Zaki:

In the fall of 2016, I experienced a psychotic crisis. I had been living in a manner which I could no longer recognize as my own. I held a false belief that the culture in which I was raised is inferior. I thus lived inauthentically to my core self and that led to my complete breakdown.

Through the process I rediscovered Islam and began to pray in the ritual that I had been taught as a child. I relearned the prayers in English and began praying slowly, working my way up to 5 times a day. I remember slowly I was able to hold a coherent sense of self despite the wildly despairing experiences I would suddenly find myself in.

My practice continues to this day. I no longer experience large fluctuations in experience. Slowly I am regaining vibrancy, clarity, passion, conscience, and compassion. I am grateful to my parents, my household where I had my breakdown and recovered, the peer support community both as a peer and professionally – these three groups held me in safety as I

underwent the harrowing and richly rewarding process of rediscovering myself.

## Cracked eggs

poetry  
by Kelsey Dean

At home, in my shell  
Belongings closely held  
One soft knock from a hard place  
A heaviness takes in, fears well  
What shakes like scrambled egg now  
I wonder how my yolk will endure  
Cracking away at my beloved shell  
Finding peace through the shedding cure  
Raw, bare uncovered  
A layer once strong, removed  
Now I see my egg yolk  
With yellows, red, and blues  
Foundation of brilliant color  
Settling into fecund ground,  
A quaint, lit path clears itself to me  
Growing once again, homeward bound.

## Transformation

poetry  
by Susan S. Standen  
(12/07/2014)

There is no bad time for a poem  
any more than there is for a butterfly.  
They both emerge  
from chaos within an armored shell  
they appear naked and wet  
thin wings and stringy legs  
off-balance.

When flying, some butterflies and poems  
are awkward, lacking grace--  
they rise and fall at every  
breath of wind or word.  
Others soar upward from their birthing-twig  
in a straight-line to heaven.

For these latter, lucky ones,  
no weakness mars their  
bright-veined perfection,  
no snapping bat nor editor



intercepts their flight.  
In fact, no hand can touch  
these early risers, and that is their loss.  
As for me, I cannot learn from perfection.  
Give to me that butterfly who flaps wildly in  
a cross-wind,  
that poem that seeks and stutters among  
ragged phrases.  
When I will touch these,  
I will know that I am among my own.  
And will remember that there is no bad time  
to transform.

---

### **To My Father**

poetry

by Kalia Mussetter

Your two severed hands, my father,  
beautiful and heavy with the dust  
of my wings on their fingers,  
leave prints on everything I own,  
then hang like wind chimes  
behind my quiet eyes  
My blood is on your walls, my father,  
my little face is holding the fullness  
of your heartbreak—  
Your pain rose often, sweet and red  
like a petal on my cheek,  
your hand print left around my wrist  
like a lost purple glove  
The special alchemy of parenthood  
betrayed me:  
you took my love, you took your love  
and into the crucible of your own  
father's dark, cupped hands,  
holding the broken water of your  
tenderness  
you put them,  
and there they turned to pain  
How could you, how could you again,  
my only darling father,  
use the bad magic of your simple power  
to break my light,  
until my eyes became  
more like yours than brown,  
their darkness not good,  
cutting and burning, cutting and burning

The years leak by  
without you now, my father,  
and though your call is strong  
the wind and voice of life are stronger—  
leaves whispering green all around me,  
love with my name in its mouth  
laughing like fresh water

I am making a new joy now,  
better than the joy of innocence,  
and with the ample wing  
of a new sight,  
and a love that holds all pain,  
I am flying home into my own life  
without you

---

### **Angel Lights**

poetry

by Eric Boehm

Candle light hot air wafts upward,  
sends angels circling in carousel.  
Three brass angels strike two bells  
circling round and round.  
Next door, prayer, war veteran, bare fingers  
and coffee cup, porch chair sitting this  
winter's day.  
A tear drop glistened cheek faces frosty air.  
Angels circle by candle light.  
Prayer next door, hammer in hand,  
U.S. President nails frame,  
Habitat for Humanity house rising.  
Prayer, this president with cancer,  
a grandson passed before him.  
Prayer, veteran and President,  
angels dancing by candle light,  
this winter's day dawn arrival.  
Blessings — peace, harmony

---

### **A Bird Fairy Tale**

a short story

by Jon Seiberlich-Wheeler

Once Upon a time, there was a pineapple  
green cheek conure parrot who lived since  
he was a tiny chick in a pet store in Cotati.  
He lived with a baby lovebird in a glass  
aquarium with one lonely perch.



Every day, the little conure would play with the lovebird, run around the aquarium till he was tired, and take naps on the perch. People came through the pet store in a constant stream each day. Every night, everything was quiet, still, and dark. Some shoppers would bend down and admire his colors from time to time, but most people didn't notice him at all.

Until one day, a young man with a heavy heart came in search of a friend. He entered the bird room, saw the little conure, and fell into love at first sight. The little bird felt love emanating from the man's heavy heart and the conure knew at once, this was his human. The bird jumped down from his perch, ran to the edge of the aquarium, and began flapping his wings as he jumped up and down. The man smiled, and the sorrow resting on his heart began to lift. He picked the tiny bird up from the tank and petted him gently on the head. The little bird made a happy purring noise for a moment, then turned and bit the man to say, I'm holding onto you and won't let go, but you will never own me. Now take me home.

From then on, the man and bird were bonded as the best of friends. The man doted lovingly on the bird and the bird returned his affection ten-fold. They spent hours together playing every day. About once every day or two, without warning, the little bird would unexpectedly chomp his human mate with his beak, as to remind him, we are partners, I love you, but one soul may never own another.

-----  
***Transformation***  
**some thoughts**  
**by Ann Tate**

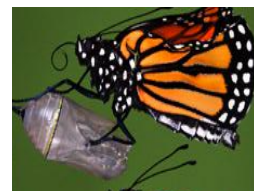
Transformation is occurring each moment of our lives. We breathe in O<sub>2</sub> and exhale CO<sub>2</sub>. While it is a myth that our bodies are replete with new cells every 7 years, much of our system does regenerate at different

rates. Then there's silly putty, remember silly putty; bounce it, stretch it, copy comics with it—rapid transformation.

Some of our emotional or feeling state changes companion physical shifts. As in the case of purposeful breathing—deliberately pacing our breath can be calming or agitating depending on the pace we choose. Other types of transformation seem to occur independently of conscious effort. I have had repeated experiences of “sharing my day” with another or in group that has led to feeling my sorrow lessen, happiness spread, or peacefulness replace anger. When I have been able to let go big tears and woeful sobs I experience renewed clarity of thought following the release.

Physical, emotional—what about spiritual or state of being? An invisible catalyst has always been present in each recognizable change of my being—I call it the presence of spirit or alternatively, love. Without connection I would not know hope, hold strength, endure uncertainty or write this article. I found my way into a recovery program and fellowship 32 years ago and the first word of “How it Works” is We. I entered the program certain some crucial element necessary for recovery was inherently lacking in me. At some point later I recognized that the core belief had been eradicated and blessed changes were occurring in my sense of well-being, worthiness and participation in my life.

Critical mass (trauma) or gradual easement (aging) into a new place may occur in any given lifetime—perhaps the next issue of Peer Voices will gather practices of how we prepare for or navigate this continual evolution.



## **A Bird Allegory** **a short story** **by Jon Seiberlich-Wheeler**

I set out, thinking, "I have had enough!"

I drove northwest for four hours and when the pavement ended, I carried on for another hour into wildness and landed at the sea. I walked over mountains along high bluffs for three days and came upon a stream where its mouth feeds the ocean. From the broad sandy beach I walked upstream for only a few moments to the first bend.

Across from me was a bank that rose several feet from the water. Stones protruded from the soil in front of me, revealed through time by a persistent current. I could see ages striated in the sand, disrupted by roots protruding from the bank, hanging in the air.

I found a cozy nook to rest on a log and sat thinking as the bright sun faded imperceptibly to the magic of twilight. Gradually, a flock of swallows joined me as I had unknowingly seated myself in their dining area.

These birds danced with agility and grace as though God herself, overcome with joy, had laughed herself into the air, to revel in the perfection of the moment. And this was true!

I moved my eyes to be with one bird. Its tiny belly was burnt orange and the underwings were white. Its entire back appeared black, but as it fluttered in the fading light, I saw shimmers of the deepest blue.

The swallow dove from my eye level with closed wings, like a dart hurling through the air toward the surface of the water. And just before it plunged into the stream, it spread its wings wide, opened its tail, tilted its head and with the ease of flower petals falling through open fingers altered its trajectory at a right angle, rising up.

It circled the bend in the stream, dipping, diving, and rising with unfathomable deftness, outmaneuvering even the quickest flies and mosquitoes. After several minutes of aerial dance, this swallow lighted on a willow branch to rest, and for a moment we gazed into each other's eyes.

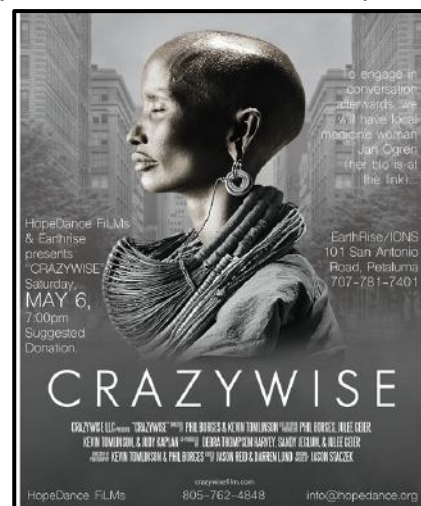
Soon it dove again toward the stream and repeated the previous flight, somehow never making the same gesture twice. I watched with a full heart as this one played with the flock and I thought, they are not just feeding, they are divine, in even their most basic task.

Before long, dinner was over and the flock began to fly home. I watched my new friend circle upward from the stream to bank height, to the canopy of the willows, upward into the sky. Though the flock departed, I remained for a few moments, remembering the one who shared a dance with me.

I set out, thinking I had had enough.

### **Crazy...or wise?** **CRAZYWISE film**

The traditional wisdom of indigenous people often contradicts Western views about a mental health crisis. The documentary **Crazywise** explores what we can learn from people around the world who have turned their psychological crisis into a positive transformative experience.



**Funded by Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds through a contract  
from Sonoma County Behavioral Health Division,  
administered by Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire (GIRE)**



**Sonoma County Screenings:**

**May 5th at 7pm**

Center for Sacred Studies  
13550 Church Street, Guerneville

**May 6 at 7pm**

EarthRise/IONS  
101 San Antonio Road, Petaluma

Call details: 805-762-4848, Bob Banner  
<http://www.hopedance.org/home/awakenings/3027-crazywise-very-important-new-documentary>

-----  
**MAY IS  
MENTAL HEALTH MONTH**

Mental Health Awareness Month (also referred to as "Mental Health Month") has been observed in May in the United States since 1949, reaching millions of people in the United States through the media, local events, and screenings.

Mental Health Awareness Month was started in the United States in 1949 by the Mental Health America organization (then known as the National Association for Mental Health). Each year in mid-March Mental Health America releases a toolkit of materials to guide preparation for outreach activities during Mental Health Awareness Month. During the month of May, Mental Health America, its affiliates, and other organizations interested in mental health conduct a number of activities which are based on a different theme each year. (Source: Wikipedia)

In Sonoma County, there are a host of activities planned to bring awareness to various areas of mental health.

**The calendar for  
Sonoma County's May is Mental Health  
Month is available at:  
[http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/  
Health/News/May-is-Mental-Health-  
Matters-Month-2017/](http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health/News/May-is-Mental-Health-Matters-Month-2017/)**

**Petaluma Peer Recovery  
Project  
by Kelsey Dean**

***Hello PPRP Members & Community!***

It's springtime and the Petaluma Peer Recovery Project is continuing to grow and blossom!



*pictured left to right: Carol West, Team Leader; Lana Zientek, Team Leader; Kelsey Dean, Peer Support Coordinator.*

We continue to do outreach in the Petaluma community, review our Groups and Activities calendar, and evolve our schedule to the needs of our members and community.

In April, we added two meaningful groups to our schedule: "Health, Wealth, and Happiness" with Fred Lambert, RN and "Learning Peer Support."

**Learning Peer Support  
Mondays and Thursdays**



**11am – 12pm**

Together we will learn the principles, philosophies, values, and techniques of *Intentional Peer Support* (primary module used was created by Shery Mead) and discuss how peer support informs us of our connections and worldviews within and beyond PPRP.

Also, we have once again expanded our team to three! We are thrilled to welcome



Carol West, our newest member of the team, as our Team Leader / Peer Support Specialist. Carol has been involved in outreach and community health in the Sonoma County area. She has completed the Community Health Worker certification from the Santa Rosa Junior College, and the Peer Support Specialist training through the Consumer Relations Program. Carol is thrilled to be back in the workforce, and has had years of training and expertise in parenting her four children.



PPRP hosts a new educational series:

# HEALTH WEALTH & HAPPINESS

**with Fred Lambert, RN**  
Community Mental Health Center, SCBH  
**Wednesdays 10:30 am – 12 pm**  
starting April 5

*NEW WEEKLY GROUP!*

Topics include: holistic wellness, mindfulness, exercise planning, mental health medication & potential side effects, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, obesity, sleep hygiene, neuroscience, and more.

Feel free to join the discussion, or simply come to listen. Presentations will include PowerPoint slides as well. PPRP will provide handouts and note taking materials. This course is available to the peer & peer provider community.  
*It is our health that is true wealth.*

**Where?** Petaluma Peer Recovery Project  
1360 N. McDowell Blvd. Suite A, Petaluma, CA

**Contact:** Fred Lambert, Community Mental Health Center, SCBH  
(707) 769-5270 or fred.lambert@sonoma-county.org  
Kelsey Dean, Petaluma Peer Recovery Project  
(707) 769-5299 or k4csm@juno.org

PPRP is funded by Sonoma County Department of Health Services through the voter-approved Mental Health Act (Prop.63) as a program of Goodwill – Redwood Empire.

We have also done some rearranging of the groups, namely that **TED Talks Series** will be on Wednesday afternoons, and the **Members' Meeting/Community Meetings** will now be on Thursday afternoons. Thanks in advance for accommodating these adjustments!

Finally, as May is Mental Health Month, Petaluma Peer Recovery Project and Sonoma County Behavioral Health's Community Mental Health Center are holding an event called, "Feast, Fun, & Friends!" on May 25th, from 11:30 am until 1:30 pm. We are gathering with the theme of sharing with one another, "What is

meaningful in our lives." All are welcome to join us for food, storytelling, celebration, and more. If you so desire, you're welcome to bring a small object or creation that represents something meaningful to you to either share in story, or to contribute to an art raffle.

We're looking forward to a wonderful spring: Wishing you and yours health and wellness this spring!

***We're always welcoming new members. If you'd like to stop in for a tour, you'll find us at 1360 N. McDowell Blvd. Suite A.***  
~~~~~  
**We are open Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 10 am – 3 pm**

~~~~~  
**Russian River Empowerment Center**  
**by Val Belote**

***The Empowerment Center is growing!***

The first few months of 2017 have been busy and fun; with nearly 20 completed intakes for new members and the addition of several groups and classes, as well as some staffing changes, things are hopping at the EC!

Mike Shirley left us at the end of 2016, and Program Manager Val Belote is Acting Director until further notice.

We are excited to announce that we have a talented and creative new staff member, Miller Phoenix, whom you may know as the "Soup Lady" from Clean Day. Each week she blesses us with her now-famous vegan soup that nourishes our bodies *and* our spirits! We are looking forward to learning more about food and nutrition, which will be the focus of three of our new groups: Herbs with Adria (our amazing & dedicated Program Aide), Vegan Cooking and Herb



**Funded by Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds through a contract from Sonoma County Behavioral Health Division, administered by Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire (GIRE)**



Gardening (coming in May!) Miller brings talent, compassion and vision to our center and we are excited to continue to grow our program with her as part of our team. Look for more opportunities for collaboration in the future, particularly around art, as Miller is an accomplished artist and will be focusing a lot of her time and energy on expanding our art program.

Along with art and nutrition, we're on to our next book club selection, Gifts of Imperfection by Brene' Brown, and are pleased that old favorite groups Yoga with Birdwoman, Afternoon Jam, and Community Engagement/Clean Day are still going strong.

Please stop by and see us!

Feel free to join us any Wednesday at 1pm for our weekly feast prepared by EC chef extraordinaire, Chris, and his team of sous chefs.

**We are open  
Tuesday thru Friday  
12noon – 5pm**

**Corinne Camp Action Network  
(CCAN)**

***What we've been up to  
by Vivian and Dan, members***

CCAN is a grass roots organization of folks with lived experience of mental health challenges who came together in November of 2009 to inform Sonoma County Behavior Health (SCBH) Department what we felt our priorities were for services to be funded by the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) of 2004. Since that time we have met monthly. On November 22, 2016 we met to celebrate our 7th anniversary.

**In that meeting  
we recounted our accomplishments,  
which include:**

=> participated in the creation of the Consumer Affairs Program. This program employs two peers to participate in planning and oversight in the SCBH Department, and bring peer involvement to the process. The program also is involved in the education of peers to train to work as peer providers.

=> the formation and implementation of a speakers bureau to help demystify mental health challenges in our community and empower its participants.

=> created and implemented a consumer-driven survey which showed a need for a storage program, and a directive for peers' belongings when they are hospitalized without notice.

=> participated in the proposal for the creation of a peer-run Warmline where peers can call to talk to another peer.

=> held periodic meetings where staff of SCBH, such as Director Mike Kennedy, and the Patients Rights Advocate, could meet with the peer community at large.

**We also discussed at this meeting  
some of our dreams for  
the future of CCAN.**

**These include:**

- work with local governments on a housing plan for low income people with disabilities
- start a new speakers bureau (meetings have already started)
- educate consumers just released from jail on available services
- work on expanding peer employment opportunities
- educate employers on the benefits of employing consumers
- work with transit entities to improve public transit
- documenting a history of peer recovery through interviews
- support peer generated projects with MHSA Innovation funds
- become more involved in legislative activism



**If you would like to be a part of CCAN,  
we meet the 4th Tuesday of each month.  
You can contact us at  
ccansoco@sonic.net,  
or call Dan at 707-526-9154**

On March 28, 2017 CCAN sponsored a meeting for the peer community with Susan Castillo of SCBH to discuss the MHSA and a new law called “No Place Like Home” which will dedicate money for housing. Susan informed us that MHSA funding is divided in to 3 major categories:

Community Services and Support (CSS), Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI), and Innovation (INN), whose funds have been used to create Mobil Support Team (MST), which partners with law enforcement, and the Integrated Health Team (IHT), which partners with Santa Rosa Community Health Centers. SCBH has also used MHSA funds in partnership with Burbank Housing for 4 low-income housing projects.

On July 1, 2016 the Governor signed legislation called “No Place Like Home” (NPLH). It is designed to develop permanent supportive housing for people who are in need of mental health services and are experiencing homelessness, chronic homelessness or at risk of chronic homelessness.

SCBH is in the process of developing a new 3-year MHSA plan. SCBH is envisioning to 1) maintain and enhance existing MHSA’s system of care, 2) build MHSA reserves, and 3) prepare a strategic response to No Place Like Home funding request (RFP).

As a part of this 3-year plan, SCBH has developed a survey to gather input from community stakeholders on services currently offered, desired services, and concerns from people living with mental health challenges in under-served populations.

~~~~~  
**Peer Warmline Connection  
of Sonoma County  
by Heather Jerde  
Program Coordinator**

The Peer Warmline provides confidential telephone support for people who live with mental health challenges. It is peer run, and provides an opportunity to connect with other recovering persons who can empathize from their own personal experience.

The Warmline offers support to people who may be facing difficulties and can collaborate in finding solutions and ways to cope, and connect them with other resources in the community. It can be an empowering experience for both callers and the peer support operators alike.

Volunteering on the Warmline has provided an opportunity for many to learn peer support skills and pass on what has worked for them in their own recovery. We welcome volunteers and offer training.

The Warmline is now well into its third year of operation, and has been a great success. In the past year there have been an average of 150 calls per month. We have regular callers who are using the Warmline as an integral part of their support system and recovery. We have helped many break out of isolation and provided support to them in facing their challenges.

Those who are interested in a volunteer position can contact Heather Jerde at 707-565-7809.

Or, if you just need to talk, please give us a call.

**The Warmline takes calls on  
Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays  
5:30 – 9:30pm**

**>>> 707.565.4466 <<<**





## Interlink Self-Help Center



**Interlink Presents:**  
Introduction to Peer Support



**May's Topic:**  
"Body Awareness and Healing"

Tuesdays and Thursdays  
10:30 am to 11:30 am

A new series of classes is being offered at Interlink Self-Help Center using handouts, videos, research and conversation on a variety of topics. We will be exploring the world of mental health recovery and how our recovery journeys can be of help to others.

### Topics will include:

- Physical needs
- Effective healing
- Coping with illness
- Symptoms
- Guided Imagery
- Life Changes
- Meditation

For further information,  
please contact Lori Frinzell: (707) 546-4481  
or lfrinzell@gire.org

## Monthly Client Forum at Interlink

### Nurturing Joy with Dr. Kozart

Please join us as Dr. Kozart leads us in conversation and exploration of the notion of joy. We will be talking about what joy means to us, how joy can be an important element of sustainable recovery, mindfulness, moderation, and more.

Please join the conversation!

Presenter: **Michael Kozart, MD, PhD**  
Sonoma County Behavioral Health  
Department Medical Director

**Friday, May 12th, 2017**  
**1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

*\*\*Refreshments will be served\*\**

Interlink Self-Help Center  
1033 Fourth Street Santa Rosa  
www.interlinkselfhelpcenter.org  
(707) 546-4481

## The Wellness and Advocacy Center

Wellness & Advocacy Center  
3400 Chanate Road,  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

### *upcoming events*

**FIRST**

**FRIDAY**

**FORUMS**

**"INTERCONNECTEDNESS  
OF ALL THINGS "**

**PEER, PROVIDER & COMMUNITY EVENT**

**12noon-1:30pm**

**Bring your own lunch**



Funded by Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds through a contract  
from Sonoma County Behavioral Health Division,  
administered by Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire (GIRE)



## June 2

### From Co-Dependence to Inter-Dependence

Dr. Michael. Kozart

Co-dependence is becoming a very popular term among therapeutic and self-help circles. For good reason: co-dependence ravages relationships which could otherwise have been fruitful and profoundly beautiful. Join us as we explore in detail what causes co-dependence, how to stop it, and how to move towards inter-dependence. Inter-dependence is the holy grail of relationships: authentic, fruitful, and capable of sowing and reaping repeated returns upon investment. Interdependent relationships grow for a lifetime.

## July 7

### Advocating for Medication Choice

Dr. Gary Bravo

In the year 2013, seventy six million people used psychiatric medications. Of the seventy six million, how many had a choice as to whether or not medication was right for them? One of the principles of the peer recovery movement is self-direction, the freedom to choose and direct the course of one's recovery path. Psychiatry often prohibits this basic right; join us as we discuss the importance of choosing whether or not medication is right for you. In peer circles, we've come to understand that the simple act of making a choice for oneself is extremely important.



## **An Invitation . . .**

**Monday, May 15, 2017**

**11:00 a.m. – noon**

**Wellness & Advocacy Center**

Learn how people can continue to receive their SSI cash benefits when they have accrued assets over the \$2000 limit by using newly enacted A.B.L.E. Accounts.

presented by

**Social Security Advocate**

**Michael Thomas**

from Disability Rights California



**Please R.S.V.P. to Amy  
at 707-483-7413 to ensure a seat and  
handouts for everyone!**

(Cosponsored by  
the Consumer Relations Program)

## **Editor's Note**

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the contents of this CRP Newsletter.

I (Amy Breckenridge) hope that you enjoyed this newsletter and will consider making a submission. Our next issue will be in August 2017 and I hope your voice will be included. It is my intent to provide a written forum for the full diversity of peer voices in Sonoma County.

If you are interested in helping to produce the newsletter, or in submitting an article, news item or art form, or have any suggestions, please contact me, Amy, by email at [ABreckenridge@gire.org](mailto:ABreckenridge@gire.org) or call me at 707-483-7413.



**Funded by Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds through a contract  
from Sonoma County Behavioral Health Division,  
administered by Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire (GIRE)**

