

THE VOICE

Volume 2, Issue 2

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Caring Advocates Make a Difference

by Kim Lutes, MHAM Volunteer

I am extremely grateful for the advocates at MHAM. Their knowledge base and professionalism were invaluable to me as I dealt with a complicated disability insurance dispute. My illness has been difficult to manage with medications. I had worked in the health care field, but as the severity of my illness increased, I became disabled and was no longer able to be gainfully employed. I was fortunate to have a long-term disability insurance policy, which I had taken out through my employer.

The insurance company acknowledged my disability status and sent me a check every month for several years. However, in January of 2008, the insurance company began a review of my case, which went on for months. Although my psychiatrist provided them with all of the documentation they requested, and my therapist wrote them a letter with her impressions, they determined that I was capable of being gainfully employed, at least 32 hours per week. They informed me they would no longer be obligated to pay my disability. They based their determination on my ability to volunteer at my church and MHAM approx 7 hours per week. As my psychiatrist pointed out, both volunteer jobs were in sheltered settings.

Communicating with the insurance company's claims representatives was extremely

difficult for me, because I experienced them as intimidating and just plain mean. The symptoms of my illness increased significantly. I obsessed about the dispute all the time. This led to increased mood swings, suicidal thoughts, and panic attacks. My anxiety was overwhelming, leading to psychotic symptoms and the need to be transported via ambulance to the emergency room for stabilization. It was awful!

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How to Seek Help for an Eating Disorder

by Nicole Johns, Author of *Purge: Rehab Diaries*

Since publishing *Purge: Rehab Diaries* last spring, one of the questions that I am most often asked is how to seek help for an eating disorder. If you are suffering from an eating disorder, asking for help can seem like a daunting task. You might feel like you don't deserve help or that you aren't sick enough to need help. Try to ignore those thoughts; they are the eating disorder talking. Everyone deserves help and recovery from an eating disorder, no matter how sick they are or what they weigh. Asking for help is the first step in recovering from an eating disorder because by asking for help, you are breaking the silence and shame surrounding your eating disorder.



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Need Information? Start with MHAM

by Brett Dumke

Whether you are looking for information for a friend, family member, client, or yourself, MHAM can help you find credible information for your particular needs. As an outreach partner for the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), along with materials produced by MHAM, we offer over 60 different publications (fact sheets, brochures, and booklets) to choose from. Subject areas include self-advocacy, information on medications, cultural & ethnic resources, and resources for the workplace. Helpful resources about common mental illnesses, such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, disorders affecting children and teens, and other disorders are also available. These materials can be received via mail, electronically, or for pickup. Visit our website www.mentalhealthmn.org or call 612-331-6840 or 800-862-1799 for more information.



In any given year, we distribute thousands of publications at resource fairs and other community events throughout Minnesota. Our ability to provide these resource materials is critical in promoting mental health and improving the lives for people with mental illnesses. If your organization is hosting an event or fair and would like MHAM to attend, please call the Education Coordinator at 612-331-6840 or 800-862-1799 or email brettd@mentalhealthmn.org.

Public Policy Update by Benjamin Ashley-Wurtmann and Ed Eide

Mental health consumers and advocates have known that sharp reductions were coming to the services we and our clients depend on. As the session progresses, we see that these cuts could be devastating. Through unallotment and veto, the Governor has been the primary policy driver and his proposed budget does not make mental health services a priority. As Rep. Larry Hosch puts it: **“If the state is being governed like a family, some people are being asked to leave the table.”**

The important message you need to give to your legislators is that you won't be satisfied with business as usual. We are facing historic and draconian cuts to social services in Minnesota. It is not acceptable to say that there are political concerns that prevent people from coming to the table and making a better deal. Ask your elected officials: **“What have you done to come up with a real solution?”**

There is a proposed fix for General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC), but there will be cuts to county spending on social services and reductions to many of the

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*The MHAM newsletter is published five times per year, with a circulation of 4,500.
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Letter from the Executive Director



We are in tough economic times. Foundation giving is down, but slowly climbing back. Most individual giving is holding somewhat steady. MHAM has been a long-time partner with the Greater Twin Cities United Way. As they have undergone changes in their funding methods, agencies were given a new set of guidelines by which to apply for funding. Our funding was reduced 53% due to their new priorities. This is to begin later this year.

This is a significant hit for us. Right now we will not see a change in our services, but in 2011 we will have to make some very difficult decisions. Our goal is to not reduce services, but to work toward a smarter way of doing business. Last year we eliminated a full time position and reduced a full time position to a part time position in order to balance our budget.

Obviously we are not the only entity to see the economy have an impact on funding. It feels glum at the Capitol this session. People are looking for small successes or positives over negatives – but sometimes we have to look pretty hard.

We will continue to work hard to ensure that services to people with mental illnesses are available. If state cuts happen, we will look at alternatives to keep people safe and healthy.

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To follow the legislative decisions go to our website, www.mentalhealthmn.org.

State Operated Services (SOS) of DHS is undergoing a redesign of their services. The concept is for them to reduce spending by \$17 million. This amount is half of the \$34 million allocated in 2007 that helped launch a strong array of mental health services. The SOS process and cuts has been widely debated this session with many strong words and devastating cuts in services.

As we go to press, new ideas are being brought forward in order to develop better partnerships and attempts to save services. These cuts will impact everyone throughout Minnesota. Keep your eyes on this.

At a time of cuts in services to many people, it is especially important for us to be kind to one another.



Jenna's Story: A Little Support at Just the Right Time

by Anna Raudenbush

Jenna had a therapist, psychiatrist, and a primary care doctor to help with her complicated physical and mental health issues. While she still struggled with her mental illness, she was able to cope. She had support.

When she heard her therapist was retiring, Jenna was devastated. She had worked with him for ten years and couldn't imagine starting over with someone new. Trust was difficult

for her to develop, and it had been a long time coming with her therapist. While her therapist tried to connect Jenna to a replacement, the idea of opening up to someone new was too frightening. They made an appointment, but she ended up not going.

Without support, Jenna stopped looking for help. She missed doctor appointments and stopped seeing her psychiatrist. Her prescriptions ran out, and she fell behind in her routine medical check-ups. With little reason to leave the house, she grew increasingly isolated, and her symptoms worsened. To cope with them, she began eating and gained nearly 150 pounds in five years. Ashamed of her appearance and

anxious about talking to people, she did all she could to avoid going outside.

One day Jenna got a letter from the Social Security Administration stating her case was up for review. In her 12 years of receiving disability benefits Jenna hadn't had a review before. She was worried she was being accused of fraud and feared she was going to lose her only source of income. She needed to know what a review was and what it could mean for her. Using a phone list her therapist had given her years ago, she found the number for MHAM, gathered her courage, and called.

An advocate listened to Jenna's concerns, clarified the Social Security review process, and explained the mandatory assessment she would be required to attend. Together they called Jenna's Social Security worker to find out the reasons behind the review. With a clearer sense of what she was facing and the knowledge that she wasn't facing it alone, Jenna felt relief. The advocate and Jenna agreed to check-in weekly until the mandatory assessment to discuss new developments or questions that arose.

During the next few weeks, they talked regularly. With each step in the review process, the advocate was there to offer encouragement and help problem-solve. Being able to connect to someone over the phone was less intimidating and safer for Jenna than talking in person. Though it was hard, she managed to open up and trust the advocate. She began to consider seeing a therapist again.

By the time the assessment came around, Jenna was feeling more hopeful. She had spent time preparing and practicing with the advocate and was able to get through the frightening appointment without breaking down.

A few weeks later Jenna called MHAM to follow up. After eight years she had reconnected with her primary doctor and resumed treatment for her serious health issues. Her doctor referred her to a psychologist, and Jenna's first appointment went well. Most importantly, she was re-approved for disability benefits. A little support at the right time gave Jenna the confidence to take action and make significant changes in her life.



Alphabet Soup *by Tom Johnson*

In the mental health community, we often refer to mental health services and programs by their acronyms. For many people, this can be confusing at best and intimidating at worst. In an effort to help individuals better understand what we're talking about, we will be sharing some of the more common acronyms and what they actually stand for.

Medical Care and Coverage Acronyms:

ARMHS: Adult Rehabilitation Mental Health Services
CADI: Community Alternatives for Disabled Individuals
CBHH: Community Behavioral Health Hospital
CTSS: Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports
GAMC: General Assistance Medical Care
ILS: Independent Living Skills
LOCUS: Level of Care Utilization Services
MA: Medical Assistance
MA – EPD: Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities
MHCP: Minnesota Health Care Programs
PCA: Personal Care Attendant
SMRT: State Medical Review Team

Federal Laws and Agencies Acronyms:

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act
COBRA: Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (continuation insurance coverage)
FMLA: Family and Medical Leave Act
CMMS: Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services
EEOC: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
SAMHSA: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Housing Acronyms:

CDA: Community Development Authority
GRH: Group Residential Housing
HRA: Housing Rehabilitation Authority
HUD: Housing Urban Development
MHFA: Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
PHA: Public Housing Authority

Community Service Acronyms:

ACT: Assertive Community Treatment
CAF: Combined Application Form
CM: Case Management
CPS: Certified Peer Specialist
CSP: Community Support Program
EBP: Evidence Based Practice
ICSP: Individual Community Support Plan
MHC: Mental Health Center

Disability Income Acronyms:

MSA: Minnesota Supplemental Aid
RSDI: Retirement Survivors Disability Insurance
SSA: Social Security Administration
SSI: Supplemental Security Income
SSDI: Social Security Disability Insurance

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support programs that help people maintain their independence and health. As programs like State Operated Services (SOS) and Personal Care Attendants (PCA) are changed, we are working hard to ensure that policymakers really listen to consumers. One success story for MHAM is the progress of a bill on Guardianship. If it passes as expected, it will protect the rights of consumers to have their advance health care directives respected.

For more details and to stay up to date, subscribe to our blog and policy updates. We will continue to track and respond to the many challenges Minnesotans with mental illnesses are facing in this legislative session.

2010 Memorial and Honor Gifts to MHAM

In Memory

Beatrice F. Perkins
Charles and Rebecca Perkins

Mendon F. Schutt Family
Mendon F. Schutt Family Fund

In Honor

Laurie Kramer
Eric Newman and Janice Gepner

Kim Lutes
Dianne Lutes

Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy. If you note an error or omission, please accept our apologies. You can notify us of changes by calling Nancy Paul at 612-843-4863, ext. 9.

Thank you, Volunteers!

by Benjamin Ashley-Wurtmann

National Volunteer Week is April 18-24, and we want to take a moment to say thank you to our volunteers. In 2009, we had seventeen office volunteers give a combined total of nearly 1200 hours of service. That generosity makes a big difference for MHAM and our clients. Our volunteers will continue to take calls and support our education and advocacy programs. They are also helping with the extremely busy 2010 legislative session.

If you have any questions about volunteering with MHAM, you can call 612-331-6840 or check out the website, www.mentalhealthmn.org. Thanks again to everyone who makes our work possible with a donation of their time.



Caring Advocates continued from page 1

A family member, who is an attorney, stepped in at my request and took over the communications with the claims people. My doctor spoke to the claims people at the insurance company numerous times. A mediator at the Attorney General's Office was also involved; but, still the claims people would not budge.

Finally, I talked to an advocate from MHAM. I knew the advocates would be helpful, but because I was one of the volunteers, my pride got in the way. Tom Johnson, the advocate I finally spoke with, had experience dealing with this type of dispute. He was very kind, and I didn't feel judged by him. He reviewed the case and found a significant error on the part of the insurance company. He contacted them via phone and in writing regarding the error. In addition, he coordinated the communication between all of the parties involved. The insurance people continued to resist, but with good communication skills and persistence, the issue was finally resolved. The insurance company acknowledged my disability status and agreed to continue paying my benefits. I was extremely relieved. It took me a few days to readjust. Eventually, my level of anxiety and mood swings stabilized.

Tom's knowledge base, negotiation skills, and compassion were excellent, as was his understanding of the complexity of my illness. As a volunteer at MHAM, I witness Tom day after day, showing the same combination of skills to all of his clients.



2010 Mental Health Day on the Hill

by Nancy Paul

On Tuesday, February 16, 2010, more than 500 individuals with mental illnesses, family members, mental health advocates, and providers gathered at the Minnesota Capitol to express their concerns about cuts to mental health services. Buses came from all over the state to bring people to the Capitol to participate. We gathered at Christ Lutheran Church for a briefing on the issues, including maintenance of effort, PCA services, mental health infrastructure, SOS, criminal justice issues, children's mental health, and GAMC.



At noon, we walked over to the state Capitol for a rally in the rotunda, which included statements made by Ed Eide, MHAM Executive Director; Senator Mary Olson; Sheila Dodge, the mother of a child with severe mental illness; Senator Linda Berglin; Representative Larry Hosch; Senator John Marty; and Sue Abderholden, Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI-MN). After the

rally, participants met with their representatives and senators to tell their stories and express their concerns about mental health in Minnesota.

Thank you to everyone who participated! It is important that the senators and representatives hear from all of the people they represent. Your stories and concerns let them know that real people are affected by their decisions. They need to know about the services that keep individuals healthy and living in the communities of their choice.

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So, how do you ask for help? Start by talking to a friend, family member, or anyone else who you trust. It will probably seem scary, but you will find that people will want to help you in any way they can. You can start the conversation by saying, "I would like to talk to you about something that I am struggling with," or "I'm having a hard time with..." The person you confide in might ask how they can best help you, so you should think about what you need at this point. Do you need someone to talk to? Do you need help finding out if your insurance has mental health coverage? Take advantage of any offers of help and support that you receive; a good support system is always important, but it's especially important during the recovery process.

Talking to friends, family, and other supportive people in your life is a good way to start asking for help, but you should also think about looking for a therapist to help you work on overcoming your eating disorder. If you have health insurance with mental health coverage, you can call the benefits number on the back of your card and get the names of some therapists covered by your health insurance. If you're a college student, you might have a counseling center where you can see a therapist for little or no cost. Depending on where you live, there might be community resources such as therapists that offer a sliding-scale fee or organizations that offer free or reduced-rate counseling.

There are other options besides seeing a traditional therapist. Some people find it helpful to meet with a nutritionist, to do art therapy, bodywork, equine therapy, or group therapy. Recovering from an eating disorder is different for everyone, and there are many different options for seeking help and working toward recovery. The most important thing is to find what is most helpful in your recovery. For me, individual therapy and writing about my eating disorder helped me the most, but a 12-step program and art therapy were key factors in helping one of my friends recover. Recovery is an individual process.

Asking for help can be intimidating, but it's worth it.

*Nicole Johns received her MFA from the University of Minnesota and a BA in English from Penn State-Erie. Her eating disorder developed in high school and worsened in college. The summer after starting the MFA program, Nicole spent three months in residential treatment for her eating disorder. Nicole currently lives in Saint Paul, MN with her husband, Brady Johnson. She has been in recovery from her eating disorder since 2005. **Purge: Rehab Diaries** is her first book. www.purgerehabdiaries.com*

Support Groups

DULUTH SUPPORT GROUP FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES

1st and 3rd Thursday of each month, 5 – 7 pm, Miller Dwan Medical Center, Meeting Room 1 – 3, Lobby Level, East Side, *For more information, call MHAM at 1-800-862-1799.*

REACH FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS (ALL IN GREATER MINNESOTA)

Albert Lea	4th Thursday, 7 pm	Nancy Heidal	507-373-8090
Alexandria	3rd Monday, 7 pm	Darlene Ernst	320-846-4522
Bemidji	3rd Tuesday, 7 pm	Robin Wold	218-444-6748
Milaca	1st Tuesday, 6:30 pm	Mary Fehring	320-983-6724
St. Cloud	1st Tuesday, 6 pm	Dale Anderson	320-240-3327



DBSA SUPPORT GROUPS

For people living with depression or bipolar disorder and their family members and friends

TWIN CITIES

Dakota County/Eagan <i>(formerly Apple Valley)</i>	1st and 3rd Tuesday, 7pm	Audrey Weiner	651-454-8329
Eden Prairie	1st, 3rd, and 5th Monday, 7pm	Jonathan Moerschall	612-210-1704
Golden Valley	2nd and 4th Monday, 7 pm	Beth Bell	612-722-4185
Maple Grove	1st and 3rd Thursday, 7-9 pm	Steve Morris	952-239-4693
Minneapolis	3rd Monday, 3 pm	Steve	763-425-6505, ext. 515
Mounds View	2nd and 4th Tuesday, 7 pm	Lana	612-331-3972
St. Louis Park	2nd and 4th Thursday, 7 pm	Pam Karls	612-867-6863
St. Paul	1st, 3rd and 5th Wednesday, 7 pm	Bobby Nemer	952-938-8941
Woodbury	2nd and 4th Wednesday, 7 pm	Marjorie Sigel	651-698-0767
		Carol Treague	651-735-2345

GREATER MINNESOTA

Albany	Every Monday, 6:30pm		320-845-6104
Crosby	Every Thursday	John Pappas	218-546-6520
Rochester	1st and 3rd Monday, 5:30 pm	Sandy (daytime)	507-282-8372
	2nd, 4th and 5th Monday, 7 pm	Jonathan (evenings)	507-292-9679
St. Cloud	Every Thursday, 6 pm	Lynn Keller	320-240-3324
Walker	Every Friday, 7 pm	Beverly Brown	218-547-3905