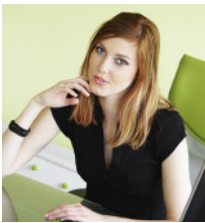


THE VOICE

Volume 1, Issue 4

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Amanda's Story: Facing the Challenges

by Alida Purmalietis

For many years Amanda held a professional position doing work she loved. She began to have difficulties after a series of traumatic events. In addition to severe depression and anxiety, doctors considered a variety of possible diagnoses such as sleep apnea and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) when addressing the changes in her cognitive functioning.

Meanwhile, Amanda lost her employment, forcing her to deplete her savings and 401k. She saw the career she had worked so hard at fade away. Her symptoms did not improve, and she eventually lost her private health insurance. At this point the financial difficulties intensified. Amanda used all available funds in her equity line of credit to pay down medical bills. Eventually her line of credit was exhausted, and she found she owed more on her house than it was worth. The house that was once paid off was now nearing foreclosure.

Amanda contacted an advocate from MHAM for help with the many challenges she faced. Amanda expressed strong reservations in contacting county social services, doctors, or other agencies that she believed could reduce her independence. When she sought help previously, options she feared most were discussed, such as group homes and guardianship. She knew she could continue to live independently with enough support.

Follow through was one of Amanda's greatest obstacles. Despite her willingness to take steps toward supports that could create greater personal and financial stability, she often failed to complete them. Fortunately Amanda had some insight into these challenges and utilized her own self-advocacy skills to locate help from those who could help her focus on certain tasks until completion.

Amanda's Story continued on page 6

mham

MHAM Launches New Website!

by Nancy Paul

MHAM is proud to announce the launch of our new website! The new site went live at the end of July. Five Technology, Inc. did an incredible job of integrating our new branding and logo designed by Amy Kirkpatrick into a much more dynamic site. We hope you'll take a moment and visit www.mentalhealthmn.org to check out the changes. Our goal in developing a new website

Website continued on page 7



The Impact of “Anti-Tax” Culture – We All Lose

by Kathleen Kelso

In March 2010 the poorest of the poor will feel the greatest impact of the anti-tax fervor that currently dominates policy decisions today. They will lose their tenuous hold on health care due to Governor Pawlenty’s decision to eliminate the General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) Program.

On average, 35,000 people who are covered by GAMC will lose basic physical and mental health care. These individuals live on less than \$7,800 a year, most are men (60%), most struggle with mental illnesses and/or chemical dependency (70%), and many have chronic physical disabilities (40%).

Others will feel the impact of this decision as well – providers of uncompensated services at hospitals, community health clinics, and community mental health centers. They stand to lose millions of dollars. The results: cost shifting to other payers, counties, and police, and possibly loss of jobs as programs close due to loss of funding.

Just two years ago, the Governor’s Mental Health Initiative began coverage for all mental health benefits under the state health care programs, including prescriptions. As we know, without basic care and medications the most vulnerable become ill, and may lose housing and become homeless.

It is assumed that about 30% of those on GAMC will qualify for medical assistance. The remaining 70% will not likely qualify for MinnesotaCare, designed as health insurance for “working poor” who can afford the monthly premiums. So what’s next for them?

Failure to act is unacceptable. The legislature reconvenes on February 4, 2010, with less than a month to pass legislation and override a likely veto. With that in mind, numerous groups and legislators are working to find alternative proposals for basic coverage including mental health before March.

Every legislator and most county commissioners are aware of this new policy, but many do not fully appreciate the devastation it will have on individuals and communities.

Please visit with your elected officials, tell them about the personal and financial consequences of this policy, and ask for their participation in finding a resolution for Minnesota.

Join the website discussion board for conversation and proposals to circumvent this crisis.



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of Minnesota **mham**

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Letter from the Executive Director



Health care reform is all the rage. It is very difficult to follow legislation with new ideas sprouting each day and new people adding their opinion. Everyone is free to have an opinion, but I'm not certain that everyone is free to conjure up all of the scary statements and untruths out there.

What I am certain about however, is that mental health care needs to be a part of the reform package. We have been talking recently with an increasing number of people who have no mental health services provided by their insurance. Or people who have lost their coverage when they lose their job. Having uninsured people adds to the cost of health care; it does not save money.

We know the high cost of not providing mental health care. Instead of seeing a therapist or mental health specialist, people visit the emergency room as a last resort. What could have been a reasonably inexpensive service becomes a costly visit and usually hospitalization. A minor issue turns into a life changing event. We all lose when this happens.

Please follow the health care reform discussion and get engaged to make sure mental health care is available in whatever proposals are brought forward. We must treat the whole person, not just some of the person.

I think Senator Berglin said it best, "We cannot afford to not reform health care."

Speaking of not providing health care, GAMC is slated to be eliminated in the spring. GAMC provides health care to the most fragile of Minnesotans. Currently a number of legislators are looking for an alternative to GAMC. We will be talking with them to attempt to provide a benefit set for the most needed services. Please see Kathleen Kelso's article in this newsletter. If you have any ideas feel free to contact me or join MyMHAM on our new website (www.mentalhealthmn.org) to share your thoughts on our discussion board.

We must work together to make our health care better and to include all of us.

Be kind to one another.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed".

Major NIMH Research Project to Test Approaches to Altering the Course of Schizophrenia / Recovery Act Funds Will Support First Phase of Project

— NEWS FROM NIMH

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is launching a large-scale research project to explore whether using early and aggressive treatment, individually targeted and integrating a variety of different therapeutic approaches, will reduce the symptoms and prevent the gradual deterioration of functioning that is characteristic of chronic schizophrenia.



The Recovery After an Initial Schizophrenia Episode (RAISE) project is being funded by NIMH with additional support from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). RAISE is a model example of how money from the Recovery Act can accelerate science related to public health problems and potentially benefit those citizens most in need.

“This new initiative will help us determine whether intervention that is started early, incorporates diverse treatment and rehabilitation approaches, and is sustained over time, can make it possible for more people with schizophrenia to return successfully to work and school,” said NIMH Director Thomas R. Insel, MD. “Moreover, the interventions being tested will be designed from the outset to be readily adopted in real-world health care settings and quickly put into practice.”

Despite the availability of moderately effective treatments, such as antipsychotic medications and various psychosocial interventions, people with schizophrenia often do not receive treatment until the disease is already well-established, with recurrent episodes of psychosis, resulting in costly multiple hospitalizations and disabilities that can last for decades. Periods of unemployment, homelessness, and incarceration are common, making schizophrenia a costly disease for individuals, their families, and the community at large.

RAISE will test approaches that involve intervening immediately upon first diagnosis, systematically incorporating the range of options that are now available in a more piecemeal fashion to people with schizophrenia. These options include medications, psychosocial treatments, and rehabilitation, including teaching patients and families how to manage the disease. The hope is that such a coordinated approach tailored to each individual and sustained over time may make lasting differences in the acceptability of treatment and overall function.

“Depending on the study’s outcome, RAISE could help set the stage for a paradigm shift in the way schizophrenia is treated in the United States. The ultimate goal of the initiative is to eliminate the chronic form of schizophrenia that is so costly and devastating to the individual, family members, and society as a whole,” said Robert Heinsen, PhD, acting director of the NIMH Division of Services and Intervention Research and project officer for RAISE. “This Recovery Act-supported project will hire and help train many mental health researchers and care providers for a project that is likely to help some of our most vulnerable citizens lead more productive and satisfying lives.”

For more information on this study, visit the NIMH website at www.nimh.nih.gov.

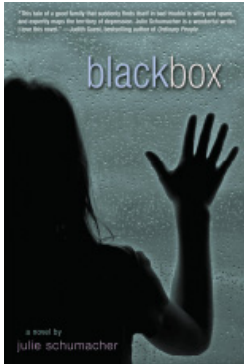
Gloria Segal Education Forum Update by Margaret O. Escabi

MHAM is turning 70 this year! In celebration of our anniversary, MHAM is hosting the 2009 Gloria Segal Education Forum. We have had two events so far, with the final event coming up in November.

MHAM Birthday Gala: Celebrating 70 Years of Improving the Lives of People with Mental Illnesses

Save the date for the MHAM 70th Birthday Gala! **Saturday, November 14, 6:00 pm at the Ramada Plaza Minneapolis, 1330 Industrial Boulevard.** Includes dinner, a silent auction, entertainment by vocalist Christine Rosholt, and a guest speaker. Look for more information on our website.

AN UPDATE ON THE PREVIOUS TWO EVENTS IN THE FORUM:



Taking the Lid off the Black Box of Mental Illness

Author and University of Minnesota professor Julie Schumacher read from her novel *Black Box* and discussed her family's experience when her daughter was diagnosed with depression. Julie noted that people approach those with a mental illness differently than those with a visible physical illness. When her daughter was hospitalized, most friends and family members did not acknowledge the situation or inquire about her daughter the way they might about someone hospitalized for heart surgery. Because of this experience, Julie makes an effort to recognize the struggles of those with family members with mental illnesses. She believes that most people welcome offers of support when their loved one is struggling, especially when that support comes from someone who understands from experience.

Learning to Cope: Managing Stress During Tough Times

Ronald Groat, MD and inspirational speaker Pete Feigal discussed ways of coping with stress during the recession. Dr. Groat defines stress as change. He said that in addition to the people who have been laid off, those still in the workforce are facing high levels of stress as well. Middle managers, especially, face incredible amounts of stress when they are told to lay off other employees. The environment of uncertainty can create fear and stress for the entire workforce.

Pete Feigal has faced severe illnesses in his life and developed strategies to manage the accompanying stress. Pete was diagnosed with depression as a teenager and later with bipolar disorder. He refused to accept his illnesses and was hospitalized multiple times before he began treatment. He initially viewed his illnesses with a "woe is me" perspective, but slowly began to see them as a gift and an opportunity to pursue new adventures, specifically motorcycle drag racing. His racing career came to an end, however, when Pete developed multiple sclerosis. Pete searched anew for a passion he could pursue within the limits of his MS and discovered a joy for creating art. He became an award



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Gloria Segal Education Forum continued on page 6

2009 Memorial and Honor Gifts to MHAM

In Memory

Mel Braun
Ellen Joseph

Steve Cannon
Ellen Joseph

Paul DeNuccio
Susan DeNuccio

Betty Greenberg
Ellen Joseph

Leslie Carole Johnson
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Valeria Lentz
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Bruce and Bobby Nemer

Lori Charney
Bette Charney

Jean Eull's Daughter
Jean Eull

Ida Greenfield
Ellen Joseph

Kim Lutes
Mary Lutes

Wendy Machmer
Barbara Glick

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 Margaret Escabi at 612-843-4863, ext. 2.

Amanda's Story continued from page 1

Amanda relied heavily on the generosity of family and friends. However most eventually backed away. One exception was a life long friend, Michelle, who continued to help her get to appointments, search for resources, and complete paperwork. Michelle was willing to come with Amanda the first time she met with her advocate. Michelle acknowledged that there were distinct changes in Amanda's memory and ability to prioritize and complete tasks.

As a group, the advocate, Michelle, and Amanda discussed several resources and supports. Together they drafted a prioritized list of tasks. Michelle would continue to help Amanda with in-person appointments. Her advocate assisted in communication with the county for social services and her application for state funded health insurance and economic assistance.

Amanda was immediately put on General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC), which proved to be enormously helpful. She worked with a county service planner until approved for Medical Assistance (MA). She utilized foreclosure prevention strategies and worked with an attorney to apply for Social Security benefits. Her advocate helped by providing a letter of support for disability benefits and by setting up a conference call with the attorney and Amanda when needed.

Eventually Amanda was approved for benefits, including back payment from the Social Security benefits she was awarded. At this stage Amanda felt an enormous sense of relief. With the newly obtained financial safety net and MA, she had a better chance of preventing the loss of her home and could focus on treatments that her current doctors recommended. This will help her ultimate goal, which is to one day find herself helping others who find themselves in similar situations.

Gloria Segal Education Forum continued from page 5

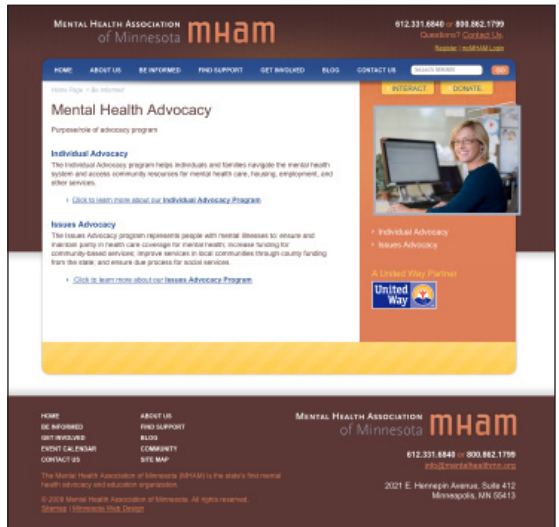
winning artist for his skill in pointillism. Unfortunately, Pete's MS is now causing him to lose his vision, and thus his artistic career. Despite this recent loss, Pete continues to be an advocate and public speaker. Pete said he remains hopeful because he has a support system of people who love and care for him.

is to be more responsive to the community and more approachable. We are also interested in connecting with Greater Minnesota, and we feel that taking advantage of this technology is one way to meet that goal.

WHAT'S NEW?

There are some new functions on the site that will make it easier for you to tell us what you think about mental health issues and for individuals from all over the state to share information and resources:

- **Blog** – We have set up a blog where we can share breaking news, information, and opinions. You can make comments and respond to what we're sharing. You'll find the blog in the menu at the top of the page or through the news feed on the home page.
- **Discussion Board** – Our new discussion board allows you to ask a question or suggest a topic for discussion with other users. Currently, there are discussions about helper dogs for people living with mental illnesses and the shortage of psychiatrists in Greater Minnesota. Visit the Discussion Board by clicking on the link in the drop down menu under Get Involved. You will need a MyMHAM account to participate.
- **MyMHAM** – This feature allows you to set up a user account. With a MyMHAM account you can make comments on the discussion board, choose to receive our newsletter, or join the Public Policy network to get alerts on upcoming legislative issues. Through MyMHAM you can opt in and out of mailings at any time.
- **Request a Presentation** – In the Education section of the site, we provide a form for organizations to request presentations. This form allows us to customize a presentation for your group and schedule a time to present.



WHERE IS THE CONTENT FROM THE OLD SITE?

Don't worry about finding information from our old site. We have transferred most of the old content to the new site, which is easier to navigate with more ways to access the information you need. You will still find a calendar of events in the community, resource lists, support groups, ways to contact your legislators, legislative updates, NIMH updates and materials, and more!

MHAM staff is learning more about site management and how people access information. We believe the site will grow and change and continue to improve. We invite you to sign up for MyMHAM and take advantage of our new discussion board and help us guide the growth of the site through your comments. If you have any problems with the new site, email info@mentalhealthmn.org or call 612-331-6840 or 800-862-1799.



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.*

There will not be a meeting on September 17, 2009.

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	2nd 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

Apple Valley	1st and 3rd Friday, 7:15pm	Audrey Weiner	651-454-8379
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 Monday, 7 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	Ken Thomas	651-484-9577
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
		Tim Witt	651-491-0133
		Carol Treague	651-735-2345

GREATER MINNESOTA

Albany	Every Monday, 6:30pm		320-845-6104
	<i>This group resumes on September 14, 2009.</i>		
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