



{Capital Connection

A PUBLICATION OF THE CONSUMER LEADERSHIP FORUM

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Consumer Leadership Forum

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this meeting is to unite our best efforts as mental health consumers to reshape/reform/reinvent the D.C. mental health system.

We will not expect the meeting to be a place where we resolve our personal issues but will support each other and network as desirable / possible outside the meeting.

While gathered as a group, we will focus on the vision of the type of mental health system we want to create and the process for getting there.

Samuel Awosika: Beacon of Recovery and Hope

Leah Harris caught up with Mr. Samuel Awosika, Consumer Advocate with the DC Department of Mental Health Community Services Agency on 1250 U St. NW.

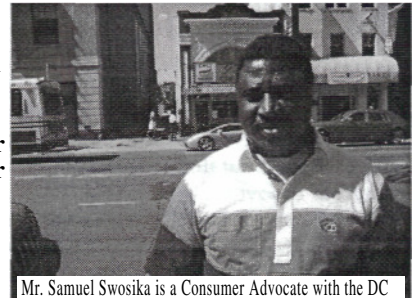
LH: Can you please tell me a little bit about your story of recovery and how you came to be in your current position at the DC CSA?

SA: I'm not ashamed at all to talk about my story, because I know that it was only through Grace and the blessing of God that I was able to make it through. To come from Africa, to have spent three years in college, and then to get sick—it was devastating to find myself at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. I was there for about two years.

In my recovery, my church played a major role. My family played a major role. Volunteering for organizations such as NAMI helped my recovery as well. I was privileged to receive grants and the chance to travel to many conferences. From there, my healing just took off.

I believe in prayer. I believe that prayer and my church and my family and the well-wishes of others played a major role in my recovery. A lot of good people came to my rescue. For example, when I came into the mental health system, I was extremely paranoid and agitated. I was in my early 30s. And my psychiatrist happens to know a little tiny bit about Africa. She is from India herself. She knows that male Africans normally don't like to take medicine, and that we don't tend to seek help until something really really bad happens. So she pulled me to the side and she said, "Look, I know your culture. You don't like to take medicine. I know that you don't want to be here at the hospital. But, at this time you are not well, based on what you have told me. Let me help you. I'm not going to give you any medicine if you don't want it, but if you do, I am going to start off very, very low. I'm never going to shovel any medicine into you." And because of that, I was able to open up to her because she came to my level and expressed to me that she was willing to help me on my terms. She wasn't going to push anything on me. Because of that I was able to talk to her about everything that was bothering me.

Coming out of St. Elizabeth's, I began to volunteer with organizations like the State Mental Health Planning Council, a group of concerned citizens, consumers and other professionals that meet on a regular basis, which advises the Director of DMH and the Mayor as to what is going on in the mental health system. I was privileged to travel to many states to present the block grant funds, which allowed DC to receive federal funds. I once served as the Vice Chair for the State Mental Health Planning Council. In 2000-2001, the DC Commission on Mental Health came to the conclusion that there needs to be a paradigm shift in how we deliver services. When the DC CSA was created, they had a clerical position open. Because of my experience, I was able to secure a clerical position with the DC DMH. From that point on, I began to serve in a different role. In 2001, I was appointed to establish the Office of Consumer Affairs at the DC CSA. (con't on p.2)



Mr. Samuel Swosika is a Consumer Advocate with the DC CSA's Department of Consumer Affairs.

Samuel fiwosika (con't from p. 1)

LH: What role has work played in your recovery?

SA: Employment is the cornerstone in mental health recovery. Not only does it provide you resources, but it allows you to take your mind away from the negative thoughts and from your illness. Especially if you are doing something that you love to do. This is especially true for people with mental health issues, you need to find something that you really, really love. Don't let anyone say that you cannot do it. You can do it. It's a matter of being connected to people who believe in you, who have the patience enough to help you and to bring out the best in you. All of us have something to offer. Employment has played a crucial role in my recovery...even though at one point in your illness you may not be ready. You can volunteer, you can do internships and apprenticeships. You don't have to have a full-time job. You can have a part-time job. The point is that these experiences will help you tremendously, with the combination of employment, housing, medication, treatment. You need all these aspects to help you with your recovery. It's a holistic approach.

A support system is extremely important. A social life, being connected to your community. Your mosque or your church. It's so important to connect yourself to an organization of your peers who believe in you. Those are the people who are going to help you. It's about people that make you feel comfortable and let you be yourself. Then you are ready to do great things. Here in DC we have access to so many great organizations. Don't just sit around — connect to something so that you are not dealing with mental illness by yourself. From the holistic approach perspective, if you have these pieces in place, you are destined to recover.

In my current job, my goal is to let people know that recovery is possible. And one of the reasons that I do what I do is because I have received a lot of support and help from my family, from my friends, from the community. To work in the mental health system is challenging sometimes, but because I have met a lot of good people in the community, contacts such as Ms. Galina Sergen, Ms. Mary Ann Luby and others who also help me in my work with clients. When people contact the DC CSA office of consumer affairs, I make note down their concern and I begin to make calls: "This is what I have. Can you help me?" I'm blessed and privileged to know people whom I can easily call, whether it's a landlord issue, a financial issue, or whatever the issue may be. I can call on Legal Aid Society or Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, or University Legal Services. The challenges are great, but if you make your vision and your dream and what you want to do clear, people are ready to help, and to support.

"It's so important to connect yourself to an organization of your peers who believe in you. Those are the people who are going to help you. It's about people that make you feel comfortable and let you be yourself. Then you are ready to do great things." —Samuel Awosika

LH: What is your vision for the mental health system in DC?

SA: Since 2002, things are extremely great compared to how we were doing business before. The system is more accountable, the foundation is strong in terms of accountability and the type of services being provided. My concern, that I pray and I beg for and would love to see one day, is consumer input. Currently, the current system needs more consumer input brought to the table. Based on the people I've met - they may not have a lot of education, but they have experience. They may not have MSW or PhD, titles or degrees, but we have our experience. Many of us have to deal with basic life resources: finding clothing, money, food, applying for Social Security benefits. Many of us have to be in shelters. Many of us get taken to jail, where the mental illness is on the back burner. My dream and my hope and my prayer is to have a society one day where a designated portion of the funds available is given to organizations to bring in the consumer perspectives. Funds and resources should be made available to proven organizations, such as NAMI or the Washington Legal Clinic, or University Legal Services, so that they can have consumers come up with innovative ideas. This is crucial because in both the public and private mental health systems, I would like to see more services designed for consumers, by consumers. There are some services like this, such as the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) designed by Ms. Mary Ellen Copeland. That's a wonderful program. We need resources and support made available to it. As well as the Peer Specialist Program, like the one that comes out of the state of Georgia. I would love a program like that to be supported. Here in DC there are many people who have experience, and ideas that they really think would work, but we don't have the privilege to make these a reality. We would like for people to hear us. Even if it's on a pilot scale, even if it's on a marginal scale... funded through trustworthy and proven organizations that can help consumers and family members to design the programs that will make a difference in peoples' lives. I'm not knocking the mental health services or providers. Everyone has touched my life - nurses, social workers, doctors. But what I'm saying that we need to draw on consumers and family members' experiences to come up with new and innovative programs and ideas. 0

June CLF Meeting Report

By Denise McNeal

At the June CLF meeting, we continued our focus on building an outreach strategy. In doing outreach we want to build C.L.F. membership and to inform consumers about what about what we are doing. The goal is to spread the word about CLF to others consumers and organizations.

We are going to Miriam's Kitchen as a collective group to do outreach. We have monthly outreach meetings on the 3rd Wednesday of each month to socialize and become familiar with the consumers. We would to have more men to participate with outreach, because it is mostly males that go there.

Our outreach strategy includes producing brochures and cards about the CLF for the public. It is important to focus on the whole community, not just the mental health population. We need to be reaching out to providers and visiting day programs. Tell someone you know at the center about C.L.F. Come out of your comfort zone and go share with other agencies. We will be drafting a letter of introduction, explaining who we are and how we can help.

One suggestion was to reach out to the programs that you are already affiliated with. If you are receiving services from a specific agency or program, you should already be talking about the C.L.F. to friends, staff and in groups.

Geno Dunnington spoke about three important aspects in outreach: 1) one on one/the streets; 2) presentation; and 3) outreach to the community. We need supporters. He suggested that we ask the agencies we work with to write a letter of support on our behalf, that we can use to help us connect with other provider agencies. He also suggested that we look into having booths and tables at health fairs. Just because you have NO FUNDS, doesn't mean you can't be a sponsor. They can help you to purchase material things. There's an upcoming health fair in August.

A CLF member mentioned that it's important for us as a group to pay careful attention to the way we present ourselves and our message when doing outreach. Geno volunteered to train us next month on how to present ourselves in different outreach situations.

Early planning is essential for success. Our goal is to start a planning team to help us further organize our outreach campaign, get on calendars, plan to participate in health fairs, events, etc. Please contact Dorothy Adams at dorothyadams2007@yahoo.com or call 2/652-0605 if you are interested in serving on the planning team.



CLF Updates

By Dorothy Adams

CLF Logo

We finally have a logo (see below)! Huge thanks to David Pirtle for producing our off-the-hook new logo. Stay tuned for "CLF: The T-shirt!"

Outreach update

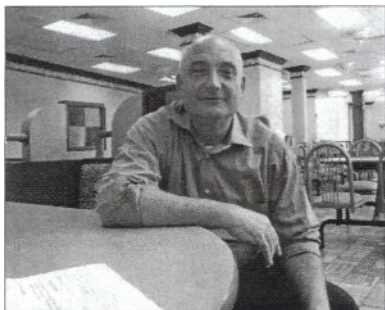
In June, we continued to deepen and expand our outreach efforts to consumers and providers in Washington, DC. We did a recent outreach session at Pathways to Housing. We talked to the staff about how they can help consumers to grow on the path to recovery. We discussed ways they can help consumers a grow by giving them the freedom to do things for themselves, to listen to them when they talk, not to talk down to them. We believe that providers should step in when they that consumers need some assistances, but in the end we know what's best for us. We said that they should treat each person as an individual, but should also know what each person can and cannot do by listening, and observing them, and trusting in them enough to give them a chance to do things on their own, make decisions about medication and finances. They are going to refer consumers that they feel would be interested in our group. The staff was very friendly and eager to learn from us. We gave them the award that they won at the Consumer Choice Awards and they were very excited about it. Linda Kaufman, the organization's director, said that it meant more than any award that they had received. It was put in the front office where everyone can see it.

Housing Task Force update

I will put each suggestion on a form and put down our solution down that we feel could help out. What we are going to do is give a problem as well as how we feel you can help with that problem. I call it an action plan. We want help with housing for Independent Living, Assisted Living, Crisis Beds, Saint Elizabeth's Hospital patients that are being discharged. We are planning to attend and speak out at meetings that can help us to make these changes.

NEW MEMBERS' CORNER

We have decided to include a new feature in the newsletter—a chance to officially welcome the new additions to the CLF "family." Please give a warm welcome to John Lynch!



DC Consumer Leadership Forum



NEW CLF LOGO: designed by David Pirtle

CAN Corner

Summer is here and with it came some major changes for CAN. As initially reported in the May-June Capitol Connection, Mary Blake, the now former Director of Training & Communications, started her new position as Public Health Advisor for the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) on June 11, 2007. We'd like to thank those of you who took time out of your busy schedules and stopped by CAN's office to wish Mary well at her "Moving On" open house held on Friday, June 8, 2007.

June also saw us welcoming a new part-time staffer, Stanice Anderson, who is Training and Communications Coordinator. Her e-mail address is sanderson@can-dc.org.

CAN is also gearing up for the Dixon Court Monitor and the Department of Mental Health Presentation of the Results of the 2007 Community Services Review.

CAN is elated to announce the signing of the contract with DMH awarding us a competitive bid to continue our work at the Independent Peer Advocacy organization. Our work includes assisting consumers and family members on understanding their rights, resolving complaints, filing grievances, and providing outreach on recovery and planning for self-directed care. This contract furthers our outreach and assistance to consumers and families throughout the city, and our collaborative work with all stakeholders.

As always, if you or anyone you know needs help or to talk about recovery, rights, dealing with grievances or concerns about treatment, call CAN at (202 842-0001 or e-mail info@can-dc.org. CAN's mission is to empower mental health consumers and their families by promoting recovery and self-advocacy. We are a vehicle for people to have their voices heard at the individual and systems levels. We look forward to our continued collaboration with all of you in the community to improve services and open doors for consumers in recovery.

Beatniks' Corner'

By Peter R. "Beatnik Pete" Warner:

Note: Throughout the summer, and into the fall, the Beatniks will be meeting virtually every Wednesday night at our usual hangout, Alfio's Trattoria in Friendship Heights. Why not make Alfio's your Wednesday night hangout!!

Wednesday, July 4th: Jerry Cott, Ph.D., is a researcher, writer, lecturer, and scientific consultant for conventional and complementary health care and academia. He has lectured at major universities and international meetings for more than 25 years. His research interests include psychotherapeutic drug development and the treatment of mental disorders by the rational use of conventional drugs and/or nutritional (essential fatty acids) and botanical (e.g. hypericum, ginkgo, kava, valerian) supplements. A current specialty is herb-drug interactions. He has more than 80 scientific publications and was most recently Chief of the Psychopharmacology Research Program at the National Institute of Mental Health at NIH. Jerry has also done research in the pharmaceutical industry and currently reviews new drugs with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Wednesday, July 11th: Cecilia Thonet & friends from the Suburban Hospital day-treatment program discuss the changing role of day treatment—as inpatient stays get shorter and shorter—and their program in particular.

Wednesday, July 18th: Therapist, social worker, author, and lecturer Jerilyn Ross—president of the Anxiety Disorders Assn. of America and of the private Ross Center—delves into anxiety disorders and the mission and structure of the ADAA.

Wednesday, July 25th: forensic psychiatrist Lee Haller describes the role of his specialty, and how doctors treat consumers who are incarcerated.

WHERE: Alfio's Trattoria, 4515 Willard Avenue in Friendship Heights, three blocks west of Wisconsin Avenue and the Friendship Heights Metro stop. Free valet parking. WHEN: Dinners start 6:30pm, lecture/discussions start 7:15pm. QUESTIONS? Call Pete at (240)449-5988. Beatnik Pete/"Bethesda Beatniks Dinner Club"V www.bethesdabeatniks.org ###

Consumer Leadership Forum

Our Vision



1. We seek an end to our isolation and we refuse to have our existence limited;
2. We seek a community that looks after the health and well-being of each individual, that respects the choices we make about our lives and our care;
3. We seek an improved system of crisis care and continuous care, where holistic healing, progress, and recovery are the key components. We need services that are individualized and self-directed as well as community supports such as consumer-driven respite and wellness centers;
4. We seek to engage with one another and to create a grassroots movement where we can support one another and keep our morale high. To forge our own identity as individuals and as a movement, separate and distinct from the provider community, but working in partnership with those who support use;
5. We seek a system that is driven by the needs, choices, and voices of consumers, not large pharmaceutical companies, providers and others in positions of power;
6. We seek a system of natural supports, where we can recognize that it is ok to fail, to make mistakes, to test new ground for ourselves in all that we do and in safety move beyond the system;
7. We seek an end to homelessness among persons with mental illness, and the creation of a network of affordable housing;
8. We seek to support and encourage consumer-run businesses and enterprises and to foster job opportunities;
9. We seek a community that respects the diversity within our movement and protects our traditions through a culture of competency and understanding. We seek to support families, youth and individuals to prevent isolation from one another and to provide training and information so that our community is empowered to cope with the unique challenges we face;
10. We will seek support from communities that are willing to partner with us and respect our choices and goals.

If you come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound with mine, then let us work together. - Lilla Watson, Aboriginal elder

Next Consumer Leadership Forum Meeting |

Friday, July 6, 12-3 pm
The McClendon Center
1313 New York Avenue, NW
 Lunch will be provided.

Summer Outreach Strategy Session

CLF member and advocate Geno Dunnington will give a training on how to present ourselves when are doing outreach in the community — both to organizations and one on one. Dorothy Adams and John Lynch will facilitate. Dorothy Adams will talk about the outreach project and training, where the CLF is going with it, and how we are working with organizations to do outreach.

Upcoming Meetings

Crisis Emergency Planning Services Workgroup
 July 11, 2007, 10:30 am to noon 64
 NEW YORK AVENUE, NE, Isr
 FLOOR, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION CONFERENCE ROOM.
 Please attend this important meeting if you can. We need the voices of consumers at the table to help determine the future of crisis services in DC!

The Dixon Court Monitor and the Department of Mental Health Present: Results of the 2007 Community Services Reviews
 July 23, 2007, 1:30—3 pm & 3:30—5 pm
 July 24, 2007, 9:30—11 am
 DMH, 64 New York Avenue, NE, 4th Floor Training Room
The results of both the adult and child reviews will be discussed at each presentation.

ESSAY/POETRY CONTEST: WHAT DOES DIGNITY MEAN TO YOU?

DEADLINE: AUGUST 3, 2007

First prizes: \$50.00 voucher from Giant
 Two runner-up prizes of \$25 each.

Webster's Dictionary defines Dignity as: - 1. the quality or state of being worthy, honored, or esteemed. 2.a. high rank, office, or position, b. a legal title of nobility or honor. 3. formal reserve of language or manner.

What does dignity mean to you?

Please submit an essay or a poem answering this question in less than 300 words.

Only entries that are legible will be considered — can be typed or handwritten. Must have name, address, telephone number on the entries, pages must be numbered and must be the original work of the person submitting the essay or poem.

Please mail entries to:

The Consumer Leadership Forum
 c/o Galina Sergen
 The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia
 666 11th Street, NW, Suite 800
 Washington, DC 20001

Or email as an attachment to:
consumerleadershipforum@gmail.com

Leadership Forum

of the District of Columbia
Suite 800
1

Phone: 202-661-5947
Fax: 202-727-2132
Email: gsergen@legalaiddc.org



DC Consumer Leadership Forum

Consumers Uniting for Freedom and Choice

Taskforces Under the Consumer Leadership Forum

**If you're not on one - you should be -
Great things are happening!**

Housing	<u>Regular meeting time:</u> 12:00pm—2:00pm 3 rd Thursday of each month Legal Aid Conference Room
Crisis-Care	<u>Regular meeting time:</u> To Be Determined
Peer-Specialist	<u>Regular meeting time:</u> To be determined
St. Elizabeths	<u>Regular meeting time:</u> To be determined
Consumer Leadership Forum	<u>Monthly meeting</u> - 1 st Friday of each month. 12-3 pm at the McClendon Center 1313 New York Avenue, NW

