



# Road to *Recovery Month*

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As a new year begins we face new challenges and new pathways in this journey to recovery! In the journey, we are not alone. Each year, more organizations join us to be part of the *National Recovery Month* Planning Partners. For 2013, we introduce a new theme and new colors. In this issue, we also highlight four new Planning Partners—Mental Health Association of San Francisco, Fundación Nuestra Mente, Kansas Consumer Advisory Council for Adult Mental Health, and Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey—and welcome them to our great *Recovery Month* family!

## Welcome Mental Health Association of San Francisco!

The Mental Health Association of San Francisco (MHASF) advances the mental health of the people of San Francisco, leads the global community

in advocacy, education, and research, and supports the promotion of recovery and wellness while challenging the negative perceptions associated with mental health conditions. Eduardo Vega, M.A., Director of MHASF, captures this best when he said “we view our role as recovery driven change agents, and we accomplish business change, social change, and social justice through advocacy, innovations, and peer-run programming and other progressive mental health supports.”

As a new planning partner with *National Recovery Month*, MHASF is determined and dedicated to make a difference in the lives of those suffering from mental health conditions, as well as those recovering from them. “I think it’s important to create a clean and unified vision of recovery from mental health and substance abuse conditions because they go so intricately hand in hand” said Vega. Vega also states that MHASF strives to “bridge the mental health consumer movement and the substance abuse recovery movement with personal and professional knowledge.”

Eduardo Vega stressed the importance of *National Recovery Month* by sharing what recovery means to him, “recovery for me is an ongoing process of succeeding and thriving in spite of personal behavioral health conditions. Recovery is a journey of discovery and self learning.” MHASF echoes this philosophy by engaging the public and people in recovery to participate in recovery events, promote positive messages of

hope that dispel shame and stigma, and represent the contribution that people make by their own behavioral health challenges.

MHASF is planning to host a fundraising dinner to help fund new support for people who suffer from mental health disorders and are facing homelessness. For more information on Eduardo Vega and The Mental Health Association of San Francisco please visit their website, [www.mentalhealthsf.org/](http://www.mentalhealthsf.org/)



## Welcome Fundación Nuestra Mente!

Fundación Nuestra Mente is a mental health foundation based in Puerto Rico. Although the foundation is relatively new (almost two years old), they have been making waves in the Puerto Rican community, which culturally tends to keep issues like mental health conditions, quiet. Fundación Nuestra Mente focuses on providing peer to peer support to Puerto Ricans, while educating people based on their own personal experiences, so that the community has the ability to identify people in need suffering from mental health disorders.

Juan Velez Court, Director of Fundación Nuestra Mente, perhaps put it best when he said “We try to be their ray of hope.” Court, an individual in

recovery, believes it is “important to empower not only the family members, or the consumer, but the whole family and the whole community. We try to bring the family together.” Furthermore he adds, “Our goal is to make sure people have a voice.”

Juan understands that there are obstacles to providing the type of outreach and support services he would like to offer to his fellow countrymen and notes, “In the Hispanic community, we think maybe because of pride or other factors it is generally very difficult to get them to accept that there are mental conditions - especially getting the male population to understand this.” That is why Juan and his foundation are truly breaking mental health barriers in a relatively raw region for mental health awareness.

One of the ways his foundation has done this is by providing visual based productions revolving around recovery. Juan has already produced a short film about his life and his struggles before finding freedom in recovery. The foundation is planning to release their next documentary in May 2013, featuring children and adolescents with mental illness in Puerto Rico.

For more information on Fundación Nuestra Mente, or, Juan Velez Court, please visit their website [www.Nuestramente.org](http://www.Nuestramente.org), where you can also find a trailer of their first documentary. Also like them on Facebook at [www.Facebook.com/nuestramente](http://www.Facebook.com/nuestramente).



## Welcome Kansas Consumer Advisory Council for Adult Mental Health!

The Kansas Consumer Advisory Council for Adult Mental Health (KansasCAC) educates, advocates, and collaborates with communities across Kansas. As Gary Parker, Executive Director, KansasCAC states “our mission is to perform outreach to those

with mental illness, provide support, and to help find ways to improve their lives.” With the reorganization of the state mental health agency authority in Kansas, many are turning to such organizations since they have been such a strong ally in recovery and have “earned a lot of respect,” according to Mr. Parker.

The Council is made up of 21 consumer run organizations/consumer operated service programs that are 100% owned and operated by people in recovery in the state of Kansas. Helping consumers realize and achieve their full potential is one of the Council’s primary concerns, along with reducing the stigma of mental illness. Mr. Parker believes that “labels have a detrimental impact on recovery and language reinforces such behavior and by educating the public, people will view mental illness like a physical ailment.” People are not defined by their disease. This new ideology is making people think twice on how they treat mental illness and many are turning to the council for answers.

The KansasCAC’s “Get Healthy, Kansas” initiative, which began in 2012, is focused on improving the overall health and longevity of mental health consumers in the state of Kansas. Educating consumers about health and wellness topics, including how to make healthier choices to avoid developing diabetes, motivating people to become more active to maintain healthy cholesterol levels, the dangers of self-medicating as seen with substance abuse, and how to form support groups, are all encompassed within the new initiative.

Throughout the year, the Council’s programs provide leadership and trauma informed care trainings supported by the SAMHSA. These trainings make choice, voice, and trust central to the healing relationship. This training perspective acknowledges and validates the individual’s feelings and experiences with the goal of not re-traumatizing the individual.

To perform these trainings, however, organizations must overcome an obstacle most of us take for granted. Kansas, unlike other places around the country, has little to no infrastructure.

Transportation is one of the biggest challenges throughout the state and these organizations serve all three true classifications of population densities such as the rural, frontier, and urban consumers; some of which have no access to services. Some people might have to travel 120 miles to see the closest practitioner. KansasCAC also advocates at the state level in attempts to resolve these types of problems.

To learn more about the Kansas Consumer Advisory Council for Adult Mental Health and the great work they are doing around the state, you can explore their website at [www.kansascac.org](http://www.kansascac.org)



## Welcome Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey!

Innovators for their time, the Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey (CSPNJ), began as a small grassroots group running three drop-in centers and incorporated in 1984 as a not-for-profit, peer-operated statewide mental health agency. In 2005, the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services recognized the importance of self-help centers as part of the continuum of services. Today, CSPNJ runs over 25 peer-run centers along with providing entrepreneurial, employment, and economic development programs. CSPNJ identified the need for a stable housing environment prior to the delivery of rehabilitative services. Currently, they administer supportive housing for over 450 people through their “Housing First” initiative.

Committed to their mission, their motto is: “The greatest resource is the life experiences of persons working through their own recovery,” and it emanates throughout the organization.

A majority of their board of directors, and a significant amount of their staff, including their CEO, are people in recovery. CSPNJ, as well as the SAMHSA, have adopted the eight dimensional model of recovery. Statistics in 2006 revealed that people living with psychiatric illness died 25 years prematurely due to modifiable risk factors. For example, Peggy Swarbrick, Director of the Institute for Wellness and Recovery Initiatives at CSPNJ, shares the personal story of her brother, a man who spent the last 15 years of his life in recovery, but recently passed away at age 58 due to undetected health issues.

CSPNJ annually celebrates “Fall Fest,” but in recent years moved their celebration from October to September to coincide with **Recovery Month** and Wellness Week. This year, they had nearly 500 participants at the event. Trailers for health screenings operated by Checkmate were available where participants were able to get their blood pressure measured, blood tests screened for diabetes, high cholesterol, and HIV/AIDS. At least 100 patients from state psychiatric hospitals were bussed in to attend the event.

Staff assisted with registering people to vote while people had the opportunity to listen to the music of live bands. Information pavilions were provided to educate people about support groups, legal protections, and advocacy.

To learn more on how CSPNJ is changing lives or to participate in next year’s Fall Fest, visit their website at [www.cspnj.org](http://www.cspnj.org) or call their headquarters at (732)780-1175.



## Editor's Column



As we begin 2013 full of hope and a sense of gratitude for all that we have – particularly for those that are sustaining their recovery with help from families and friends – we need to also look forward to our continued quest to expand even more the **National Recovery Month** observance nationwide. In this issue of the **Recovery Month** Newsletter, we profile four new partners in the mental health area who are joining our ranks. You will be hearing from key staff members of these organizations about ways in which they serve their communities. In doing so, like many of you, they bring a message of hope and recovery to those they serve.

You will note that this new roster of planning partners mostly serve mental health clients. This is due to our interest to broaden the base of this observance and include more mental health providers and associations. This will be critical to the efforts to integrate both of these disciplines into the new Affordable Care Act public health paradigm. I know that by welcoming these new members to our fold, we will be broadening our own knowledge and perspective related to mental health issues and client needs as they too will be learning about addictions and the needs of your clients.

I look forward to the year ahead and to our continued allegiance.

Peace,

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