

Consumer Newsletter

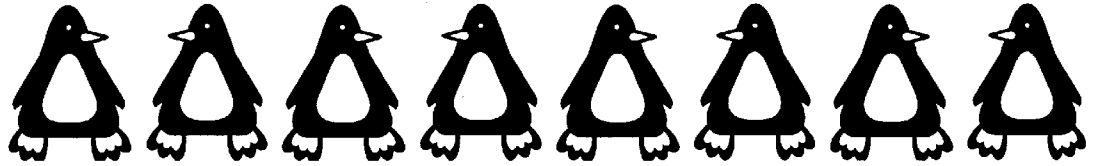
Northern Affiliation

Volume 1, Issue 12

Winter 2010

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WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

By: Betsy B.

A new year has begun again. One of the most interesting aspects of New Horizons Clubhouse is how each year it improves on itself. From the small band of people we started with fifteen years ago, to the over two hundred members we have now, there have been many changes. We have changed locations, changed over staff, changed the way we do our jobs, and we have learned new things every day. We have seen members move away and, sadly, we have seen some die and we have welcomed new members. However, there is one constant about the clubhouse; it is full of people who have an incredible capacity for growth, caring, and resiliency. Everyone here has problems, by definition, or we wouldn't be here. Yet, consistently, time after time, we see people put aside their problems to pitch in and help someone else through theirs. Sometimes, having a small staff could be a problem due to illness or

vacations. Yet each time we are low on staff, members band together and help those who are here to tackle the extra workload and the work gets done. When one member hurts, many members hurt. It is a place that truly cares about each and every one of its members.

With that said, this is the time of year that experts say those of us with mental illness are more prone to depression, anxiety, and the hopelessness that leads to suicide. The point I'm trying to make is that we all do much better tackling problems together rather than apart. I have a tendency to isolate, and I know from experience it only makes it worse. So if you are a member and are having trouble this winter, come into the clubhouse. You don't have to tell us what hurts if you don't want to, but still come on in and enjoy this unique environment of hope.



• AUSABLE VALLEY CMH

• NORTH COUNTRY CMH

• NORTHEAST MICHIGAN CMH

NEWS FROM THE PETOSKEY CLUB

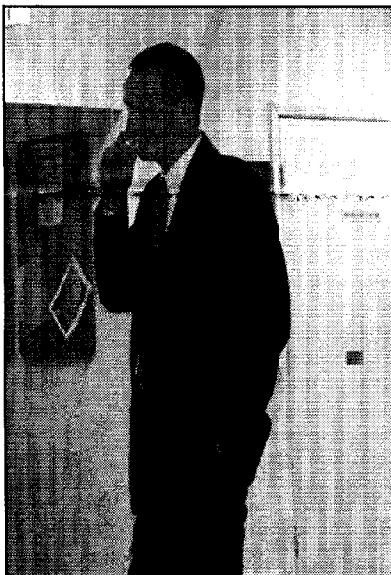
By: Jennifer Cassidy, Employment Coordinator

The Petoskey Club was recently awarded grant funds from the Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation and the Ann K. Irish Fund for their new Education Program. The program is designed to focus on Clubhouse members' educational needs in two areas: 1) those interested in taking subtests toward obtaining their General Educational Development (GED) Certificate; or 2) those interested in learning more about "everyday" skills (Life Long Learning) such as computer keyboarding or money management. The program began on Wednesday, January 20th, and will run through Friday, May 14th.



Instructor Joe Beasley is excited about meeting people where they're at and focus on what they know in order to determine their soaring point, as well as to maintain momentum. Joe's background is in special education with an emphasis on divergent learning styles. His teaching experience includes coordinating the 21st Century Learning Program for Pellston Schools, as well as many years in Yorkshire, England. As a result, Joe has developed skills in reaching a wide educational range and variety of students while meeting their individual needs.

The Education Program is geared toward individualization in both the GED and Life Long Learning Programs and comes with specific attendance and work completion guidelines, including a Statement of Understanding to be signed by each participant. Initially, only two subtests of the GED are to be completed. A second phase will address the remaining three subtests. This way, each step in this educational opportunity may be taken gradually and allow individuals to work at their own pace throughout the 16 weeks.



Instructor Joe Beasley



Front row, from left: participant Erica H., grant coordinator Jennifer Cassidy shaking hands with PHSAC Foundation Board member Sara Ward.

Back row, from left: Instructor Joe Beasley, member Ben C., participants Mark W., Jason B., and Brandon D.



ROLE REVERSAL

By: Steve V.

I'm sure that the old expression "two sides to every story" applies to me in the last few years.

Since 2004, I have been a consumer in the AuSable Valley CMH system receiving services from case management and supported employment, among other things.

Although I am now a consumer, I was once also staff. From 2000 to 2002, I was employed by Northeast Michigan CMH as a Residential Training Worker in its group homes.

While an RTW (as they are known), I became well aware of the rights of the consumers I worked with. In fact, I fancied myself an advocate for the rights of all consumers. I spent a lot of time and effort pointing out various issues to those in charge and to other staff. It's gratifying to know that at least one policy was changed because of my efforts.

In 2002, I left my job in the homes because I was becoming too frustrated and depressed to give my best for the consumers.

The situation only worsened throughout the next two years. Finally, in 2004, my doctor referred me to AuSable Valley CMH. Also that year, I applied for Social Security Disability and was denied. In 2007, after a 3 year wait, I won my case on appeal.

I have been with the supported employment program through the Oscoda Program Center since 2006. We do lawn care in the warmer months and snow removal in winter. It gives me a chance to meet many of my fellow consumers.

Having been a staff and a consumer, I know how important rights are. I urge all consumers to ask questions of staff and bring something up, even if it seems unimportant. Consumers have the right to advocate for ourselves.

It's been my experience that 99% of staff are willing to listen to me and will consider what I've said. That's why it's so important to speak up.

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To access CMH services
call:

1-800-834-3393

8:00AM —5:00PM

Monday—Friday

24-hour Crisis Line:

1-800-442-7315

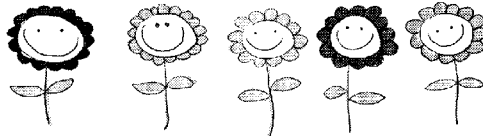
Article Submissions

If you would like to contribute an
article or have content suggestions
please contact

Joanne at 1-800-834-3393 or

e-mail: jrackow@norcocmh.org.

GETTING A LIFE



By: Betsy B.

One of the things the Clubhouse does that is not a direct result of our training here, is the byproduct of getting a life. We have many members who are actively involved in their communities. We have members who are greatly involved in their churches. Some volunteer at medical facilities helping others that need, enjoy, and appreciate our help. A few of us have our own businesses. Most of us are spending more time in our communities socially. Clubhouse members are getting together with other members outside of the clubhouse to play cards, go out for coffee, and do other things together. Fewer and fewer of us are the stereotypical “couch potatoes” we once were. Therefore, this byproduct of the clubhouse doesn’t have a “name,” but it exists nonetheless. For me, the skills and support I get here at the clubhouse enable me to look around and find other places I can be of help.

ALTERNATIVES 2009 CONFERENCE

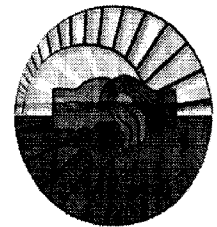
By: Wanda B.

I was asked to write this article about what I experienced at the Alternatives Conference in Omaha, Nebraska.

Shirley and I both went on this trip from October 27th – November 1st. We went by plane. On the first night, we checked in and took a little tour around the motel. Going to this Alternatives Conference has been a very educational and exciting experience. I proudly learned about the effects of Shock Therapy, which is still a controversial subject. I also learned about stigma, and how when society stigmatizes against us, we start to perceive ourselves in the same way it sees us. Those two subjects stuck with me the most.

I took a lot of information home with me and I would love to share everything with you, but then this article would turn into a book. Shirley and I took a tour after the meetings were over. We visited this place called Old Town where we had our dinners at reasonably priced restaurants. We took notes on every thing we did, as an educational experience, and I used up five memory cards in my camera. On one of those memory cards, I kept a daily video journal of what we did.

Across the street from our motel, we saw a building called the Qwest Center. We took pictures of the fascinating artwork, statues, and architecture.



One of my favorite things was meeting a couple that rode their bikes all the way from Kansas to Omaha, Nebraska. They camped out in tents along the way. As we were leaving, they had their bikes ready to go for their long journey back home.

That’s one thing you find at these Alternatives Conferences; you meet such fascinating people. We met people of different nationalities, from different states, and although we are all different, I learned that we share a common ground: mental illness. We’ve been through a lot of pain and ridicule because of our mental illness. One thing I know is that a lot of people call us mentally ill, but our illness does not define who we are. We are not mentally ill, we have a mental illness. In closing my end of the subject, I saw a sign that said, “Label Jars, Not People.” Thank you.

*The theme of the Alternatives 2009 Conference was **Uniting Our Movement for Change**. This “movement” can encompass a wide array of philosophies but is united around common goals: to guarantee that individuals diagnosed with mental illness have all the opportunities, rights, and responsibilities available to everyone else, including the right to pursue a meaningful life.*

MORE FROM THE ALTERNATIVES 2009 CONFERENCE

By: Shirley B.

I am a member of the Beacon Center in Cheboygan, MI. I was able to attend the annual Alternatives 2009 Conference in Omaha, Nebraska.

I am so grateful that I could go in light of the budget cuts made by the State of Michigan. I went on October 27th, and returned on November 1st.

There were so many good workshops. I attended one, “Emotional CPR;” I learned so much in that class. It really spoke to me in many ways. I even cried when we acted out in the class.

Another workshop I attended was about “Ending Self Stigma.” There is so much stigma in our lives. I am willing to confront it when it happens.

I did not know that there were so many people like myself, with a mental illness. I met so many different people at this conference and they were very nice. I learned so much that I am a changed person. I see myself differently and look at myself and others in a different light.

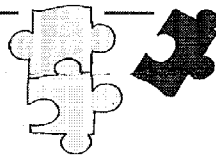
I am glad that I went and I want to thank everyone for what they did so that I could go. If I could, I would go again in a heartbeat. It was remarkable.

There were so many good speakers. I learned a lot from them too.

The meals were very good and the hotel was beautiful. Thank you.



WHAT I'VE LEARNED



By: Gary C.

A member with 34 years sobriety talks about changes to AA and how it's still about carrying the message.

My sobriety date is August 20, 1974, which gives me a little insight on what's been happening in the last 34 years in this program (AA). Some things are just about the same, and some things are radically different.

I spoke at a meeting not too long ago here in Petoskey. It is always an open meeting with a speaker; I've spoken there 20 times and I really enjoy it. At the end of my talk about my adventures, there were 10 minutes or so for the audience to ask questions. The first question they asked was, “What were the biggest changes I'd seen in AA?” I said for one thing, I can remember when people didn't join hands for the Our Father. Later on, when they did join hands, there were a lot of males who backed off and didn't want to hold hands because it was unmanly, I guess.

continued on page 8



WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES

By: Jeanie A.

The waffled sole of someone's size eleven white sneaker smashes down on the roof of a tender marigold. I wince. All of these yellow flowers flanking the north and south sides of the State Capitol sidewalk were set out only yesterday by volunteers.

Hundreds of people are gathered here from every county in Michigan to raise awareness about the difficulties people with mental illnesses face. I'm wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, long-sleeved shirt, and oversized Foster Grants for sun protection. It's only mid-morning and already rivulets of sweat run down my temples. I look around at the milling crowd dressed more wisely in t-shirts and shorts. Different clothing for sure but, more profoundly, different life experiences.

I'm here to see my brother Roger march up to the podium and make his statement about how mental illness shapes his life.

The keynote speaker leans forward toward the microphone shouting the theme of today's rally: "Walk a mile in my shoes!"

"Repeat after me this time, so I can really hear you! Walk a mile in my shoes!"

"Walk a mile in my shoes!" the audience echoes. I've never liked being part of audience participation because it feels like mass manipulation to me, so I repeat the words only loud enough for me to hear.

Two mental health consumers march up the sidewalk, each holding onto half of his county's flag.

"Walk a mile in my shoes!" I say along with the crowd, affirming his plea.

"I live with anxiety and paranoia. The doctors haven't found medication that works for me yet. Walk a mile in my shoes," one says into the microphone.

His flag partner takes a turn at the mike: "I live in a rural area and my illness rules out driving. I have trouble getting to treatment. Walk a mile in my shoes."

"Walk a mile in my shoes!" I say with the audience, feeling more comfortable and speaking a little louder this time.

Off to my side, I see my youngest brother's blue ball hat above the crowd. He's six feet tall. His sky blue t-shirt is stretched over his massive chest and stomach. He's gained weight. The medicine he takes makes him hungry all the time. "The blue matches his eyes," I think.

He is walking up the lane with Margie from Alpena County. I wonder what he's going to say. I can't see him anymore. Too many heads now blocking my view. I hear another courageous speaker: "I lost custody of my daughter the last time I attempted suicide. They won't let me see her. Walk a mile in my shoes."



WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES *continued from page 6*

By: Jeanie A.

I close my eyes and remember Roger six years of age, slouching on our blue overstuffed frizzy sofa, staring at nothing through listless eyes, his jaw hanging open, head hanging forward.

“What’s wrong, Roger?” I asked. “Why don’t you come out and play cops-and-robbers with me and Jan?”

“I just don’t feel like doin’ nothin’. I’m so tired. I feel like an old man.”

And he looked it. Why didn’t our family pick up on this? Why did we assume that the youngest of the family was acting this way just to get attention?

Although I hear and respond to the continuing testimonies of the marchers, with the other half of my mind I sift through the evidence of my brother’s illness our family ignored through the years.

One report card day, Pop stood before Mom, dangling a note from the principal in front of her face. “It says here, Roger doesn’t finish his workbook assignments and he’s being bullied at school. I know what’s wrong with him,” Pop said. “The trouble with Roger is that you’ve pampered him so much. This is your fault.”

She cried. Both of our parents suffered from untreated mental illness. Pop with paranoia and obsessive hoarding and Mom with bipolar disease. Both preferred denial to the guilt they might feel for passing an illness on to one of their offspring.

“Walk a mile in my shoes!” Getting bolder, I punched my arm into the air and give a full shout.

In his twenties, Roger tried to medicate himself with alcohol. Drinking destroyed his marriage to the beautiful girl of his dreams.

“Walk a mile in my shoes!” we chorus.

He spent time in a mental institution, but our family still thought it was a ploy to escape responsibility. “How was it possible that our own brother was manic-depressive?” we asked.

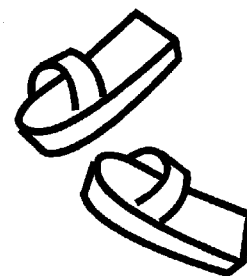
“Walk a mile in my shoes!” we holler together.

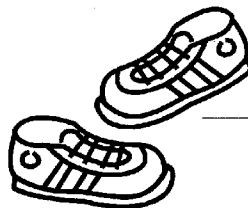
He remarried. Had two sons. Swore off alcohol. Tried many medications. Some helped. Some didn’t. His boys suffer with mental health issues.

“Walk a mile in my shoes!” I clamor again along with the throng around me.

I think Roger must have changed his mind about speaking at this rally. Maybe next time he’ll muster the courage.

I’m glad I’m wearing a hat and sunglasses after all... to cover my red, swollen eyes. The marchers speak on. Their declarations are powerful and I’m surprised to learn mental illness takes so many different forms.





WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES *continued from page 7*

“Walk a mile in my shoes!” I yell, not caring anymore that my voice is hoarse.

It was a random genetic lottery that handed my brother these shoes he walks in. They could just as easily have been mine.

July has come. This time I’m in front of the Capitol taking pictures with our exchange student from China. The scraggly marigolds of two months ago have grown lush and thick. I don’t think anyone would even notice the plant that was randomly squashed.

Note: This year’s Walk A Mile In My Shoes rally will be held on Tuesday, May 11, 2010 in Lansing.

WHAT I’VE LEARNED *continued from page 5*

By: Gary C.

I also remember the women I had seen come into AA. I remember when they had an intervention for Betty Ford and a lot of older women joined the program at that time. I think that a lot of us have been too anonymous in our program and we need to get out of that and become a little more opportunistic. Like Bill W. said when a gentleman approached him at a meeting and said, “Oh Bill, you’ve done so much for me,” obviously sucking up and trying to make a good impression. They talked and talked and talked, and when he finished Bill said, “Pass it on.” That’s what we all should be about. “Pass it on” to me does not mean that I pass it on to alcoholics; I pass it on to everyone I meet anywhere. When I was new, somebody gave me a card that said, “When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA to be there. And for that, I am responsible.” That message does not say, “When any alcoholic reaches out;” it says, “**anyone, anywhere.**” And so I think we all have a responsibility to carry the message, not only to alcoholics, but to anyone who has a question about what we’re all about.

I’ve seen other changes in the program. I think one of the most important was when judges and lawyers and some other outside people sentenced people to AA, so to speak, because they had alcohol-related offenses. The judiciary system finally found out that this is a disease. People who were sentenced to AA were sentenced there for good reason and if they had to make up their minds whether they would go or not, they wouldn’t go. So when the judicial system stated sentencing them to one, two, or three meetings a week – whatever the term was – I think it was a good idea. I’ve seen people who have their papers signed week after week after week and I’ve heard them say – a lot of them – that as soon as they get through probation they’re going to go back to drinking. However, I’ve found that many of them continue to come to AA. For that, I am forever grateful.

I’ve also noticed that when people come back after a slip I’ve never heard anybody say, “Oh, drinking was better...” they all say it was worse, and they all say they’re glad to be back. I think that’s because, as I was told early on, drinking and alcoholism are progressive. If you drink, you don’t get on where you got off – you get on as if you never got off. So if I think I was really, really bad back in 1974 when I quit drinking, I would take up the period that I have in sobriety and it would pile up not where I left it, but as if I never left off.

I didn’t have many goals when I was younger. Now I have two or three.
