



Recovering Together

Welcome to *Recovering Together*, a quarterly newsletter focused on cultural competency, self-help, mental health, recovery and wellness. *Recovering Together* is for individuals, groups and communities from culturally diverse backgrounds who are involved in mental health consumer and consumer-supporter work.

Diversity, Wellness and Community: Talking with Dr. Johnette Hartnett

Dr. Hartnett is the Director of Research and the Real Economic Impact Tour for the National Disability Institute (NDI) and Co-Principal Investigator with the Burton Blatt Institute, Syracuse University, College of Law. She is co-founder of the Real Economic Impact Tour that since 2005 has provided free tax preparation and other asset building strategies to taxpayers with disabilities.

The STAR Center is proud to call Dr. Hartnett a friend and was honored when she agreed to share her personal story of recovery with us and our consumer and consumer-supporter readers.



How Have Mental Health Challenges and Illness Touched Your Life?

The Loss of Family

One night in 1983 while I was away from home, my sitter and three children died in an early morning house fire. At age 33 I had lost my family and was soon to be divorced. There was no remedy for fixing this in my toolbox of life. The morning of the fire my pastor (albeit young) told me that “God needed my children as angels in heaven.” I kindly told the dear Father that the God in my life would not take children. I inherently knew that things happen that are outside our control and not necessarily God’s will. I also knew I was not home when they died and would have to come to terms with the guilt of not being able to save my children.

Recovery Work

Some people don’t like to use the word recovery when talking about the loss of children. They say you can never recover. My dear father used to write to me and remind me, “Remember Johnette, recovery is a choice.” I hated that. But he was right. I slowly peeled off the layers that really had nothing to do with the fire but with my struggle to survive. None of us know how we will react to sudden traumatic loss until it happens.

My therapist told me I needed at some point to go back home to Vermont and do some “recovery work.” So, two years after the fire, I moved back home and found a new therapist who worked with people who had experienced loss. I saw this therapist over a five-year period—sometimes twice a week. I had no mental health insurance so I would pay as I could which in those days was \$50 a visit. He allowed me to keep a “running tab” so to speak. When I ended my therapy and started making a living, I paid him back in full.

It was at a statewide mental health conference in New Jersey in the winter of 2010 that I actually shared this recovery story. I

realized then that I too have been in recovery for 28 years.

Most of my recovery work had little to do with the fire—which is surprising to people. Most of my work had to do with who I am as a person and my response to my life now that my family was gone. There really wasn’t much example of how to do it—support groups didn’t work because people would be grieving the loss of a pregnancy or a child. I would choke back my tears and slip away out the back door of the hall understanding why my therapist had told me not to go to these groups yet. Old friends dropped away and new ones dropped in.

My Education and Work

So with seven years of therapy under my belt, I ventured out into the world to find a new life. I moved from Vermont to Florida and then back to Vermont where I spent seven years going back to school. With three degrees under my belt, became

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STAR Center Snapshots



(L to R) GAIL PROUT, STAR Center Program Manager PHILIP QUALO, BRENDA OSIBIN, STAR Center Director STEPHEN KIOSK, and DEBORAH MARCOTTE.

STAR Center staff met with inspirational STARS Gail, Brenda, and Deborah, consumer leaders who are pioneering recovery work in Rhode Island.

an associate professor at the University of Vermont. I took out school loans to pay for my education—instead of putting money into a 401K, I was putting it into my education. While at the university I received a fellowship from the Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation to go to Congress to work on behalf of people living with disabilities. From there I started working in D.C. and helped build the nonprofit the National Disability Institute (NDI), where I work today. Our work at NDI is solely about improving the financial well-being of people living with disabilities.

Finding Your Purpose, Living Your Dream

Although I could write so much more I must end this wonderful time with you. I know this: It is possible to start over and build a new life. I graduated with my Doctorate at 50 years old and since then have helped build a national movement called the Real Economic Impact Tour (www.reitour.org) that has helped over a half a million people receive free tax preparation and other financial education opportunities. It is never too late to go after your dream—it isn't about age or loss or education—it is about resiliency and hope and strong faith.

If you haven't started living your dream because of financial challenges, please visit the sites below that are tailored to help people living with disabilities find their dream.

Do You Have Any Advice That Might Ease the Stress of the Tax Season?

Many people dread the beginning of the year because there isn't a day that goes by that they don't hear something about taxes. Taxes can be intimidating, frustrating and just plain confusing. But there is help available to make the task easier and maybe even enjoyable. For those who are comfortable on a computer, there are a number of websites that offer free software for the preparation through the IRS Free File partnership. One of our partners, One Economy, has very easy-to-use software. If you would be more at ease having someone prepare the return for you, assistance is available from IRS certified preparers at

VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) www.vita-volunteers.org or TCE (Tax Counseling for the Elderly, www.irs.gov) sites across the nation. To locate the nearest VITA site, call 1-800-906-9887 or check the partial VITA site list online. (This list does not include every VITA site.) As part of the IRS-sponsored TCE Program, AARP offers the Tax-Aide counseling program at more than 7,000 sites nationwide. To locate the nearest AARP Tax-Aide site, call 1-888-227-7669 or visit AARP's website. You can also check out the Real Economic Impact Tour website for a coalition near you that offers not only free tax assistance but asset-building information.

It is a fact that millions of dollars in Earned Income Tax Credit go unclaimed every year. Why? Because some people don't realize they or those they care for are eligible to apply for the credit. Consider this:

Common Myths About People Living with Disabilities Filing a Tax Return and Receiving EITC and a Refund

It's time to bust the myths!

Myth: Do not "have" to file because the income is too low.

Fact: May lose money by not filing an income tax return

Myth: Afraid it will impact applying for benefits.

Fact: Federal law excludes tax refunds from determination for other federal benefits

Myth: Afraid it will impact remaining benefits.

Fact: Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is not included in income in the month received and not included in resources for twelve months (eff. 2010, 2011 and 2012) after receipt.

Myth: Cannot afford to pay a preparer.

Fact: Free tax prep is available at VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) and (Tax Counseling for the Elderly) TCE sites.

For more on Dr. Hartnett's incredible journey of recovery please go to www.consumerstar.org.



Multicultural/Diversity Calendar

February: Black History Month

February 17: *Lantern Festival* (China, Taiwan) - Marks the end of the Chinese New Year celebrations.

March 20: *Purim* (Jewish) - Known as the Feast of Lots, celebrates the deliverance of Jews in Persia from the machinations of Haman. Jews dress in costume and give gifts of food to each other.

April 13: *Songkran* (Buddhist) - In southeast Asia, Songkran is recognized as the New Year for Buddhists. The event lasts three days.

Source: www.dom.com

Also Coming From the STAR Center:

- Self-help materials on mental health and spiritual issues, including video clips of personal spiritual and recovery/wellness journeys and practices
- Self-help materials for individuals and communities focused on successful life after involvement with the justice system
- Teleconferences on multicultural diversity, leadership development, self-help and self-management tools, practices and resources
- And more! Please sign up so you don't miss these and other technical assistance products and teleconferences: www.consumerstar.org

Recovery and Wellness Toolbox Responds to the Arizona Tragedy: Coming from the STAR Center—Peer Support Skill Training Curriculum: Responding to Urgent Situations

This regular feature presents books, CDs, websites, self-help practices, tools and products that can be used to enhance or continue recovery, mental health and wellness or help strengthen organizational effectiveness.

“How could he shoot and kill those people?”... “Was there something that could have been done to stop him?”... “Where were the parents in all this?”... “Were there any warning signs that should have been noticed that would have prevented this tragedy from happening?”... “Did any teachers or students see or hear anything that should have warned them of the devastation to come?”

These are very difficult questions that can be very easy to ask but tremendously difficult and complicated to answer. Depending on cultural factors, views, beliefs and assumptions that one can bring to such an awful event, there can be many responses and reactions. The most common reaction can be shock, anger and blame, which while understandable, may not be the most helpful response for making things better.

A more thoughtful and helpful response of some kind can mean the difference between allowing tragedy to destroy us or make us stronger. Human creativity can transform such an awful experience into something beneficial that not only helps one to cope with the present trauma but also enhances observation and response skills for the future. In support of this human creativity, the STAR Center is pleased to announce the upcoming availability of the Peer Support Skill Training Curriculum: Responding to Urgent Situations, a set of technical assistance materials developed in partnership with Boston University’s Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

The set of materials will include a trainer’s guide and a participant workbook for skill-building geared toward teaching peers in colleges and school settings how to assess and respond to urgent situations involving behavioral health by identifying and recognizing important signs and signals and having informed and integrated responses.

Please keep a look out for this technical assistant set coming soon from the STAR Center, or send us your request to receive these materials. www.consumerstar.org

Peer Support Skill Training Curriculum: Responding to Urgent Situations

A tool that will help students and peers develop more effective assessment and safety-action skills for urgent mental health-related situations.

What You’ll Learn in the Peer Student Guide:

- Assessing critical situations
- Devising action options
- Implementing an effective response
- Using learning scenarios for skill-building

Communities Corner: National Resources and Information

African American Community

National Leadership Council on African American Behavioral Health, Inc.
www.nlcouncil.com

Asian and Pacific Islander Community

National Asian American Pacifica Islander Mental Health Association
www.naapimha.org

American Indian and Native Alaskan Communities

American Indian Health
<http://americanindianhealth.nlm.nih.gov/mental-health.html>

Latino Community

National Latino Behavioral Health Association
www.nlbha.org/

National Alliance for Hispanic Health
www.hispanichealth.org/

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning & Intersex Community

Center for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/>

Youth Community

National Youth Crisis Hotline: 1 (800) 442-HOPE (4673)
Provides counseling and referrals to local drug treatment centers, shelters, and counseling services. Responds to youth dealing with pregnancy, molestation, suicide, and child abuse. Operates 24 hours, seven days a week.

Women

The National Women’s Health Information Center
www.womenshealth.gov/mental-health/

Student Community

ULifeline
www.ulifeline.org

Military Veterans Community

www.caregiver.va.gov

NAMI Veterans Resources
www.nami.org

Elder/Senior Community

Elder Community Care
www.eldercommunitycare.org

General/National

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
www.samhsa.gov

National Alliance on Mental Illness
www.nami.org



Dimensions of Diversity

| | |
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| Ethnic heritage | Income |
| Mental/physical abilities and characteristics | Work experience |
| Race | Military experience |
| Sexual orientation | Geographic location |
| Age | Education |
| Gender | Work style |
| First language | Family status |
| Religious/nonreligious beliefs | Communication style |
| | Organizational role and level |

from *Implementing Diversity*, by Marilyn Loden

About the STAR Center/National Consumer/Consumer-Supporter Technical Assistance Centers

The STAR Center, a consumer-supporter technical assistance center, promotes mental health recovery by providing consultation, technical assistance and information resources and referrals to enhance self-help in diverse communities.

The National Consumer/Consumer-supporter Technical Assistance Centers (STAR Center and those listed below), are funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services, and were established to provide mental health consumers and their supporters with skills necessary to foster self-help/self-management approaches and to assist with the improvement of state- and local-level mental health service systems and practices.

National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse

1211 Chestnut Street, Suite 1207
Philadelphia, PA 19107
Phone: (800) 553-4539
www.mhselfhelp.org

National Empowerment Center

599 Canal Street
Lawrence, MA 01840
Phone: (800) 769-3728
www.power2u.org

The Family Café

1332 N. Duval Street, Tallahassee, FL 32303
Phone (850) 224-4670 - Toll-free (888) 309-CAFE
www.familycafe.net

Mental Health America of Oregon

1600 SW Fourth Ave., Suite 900
Portland, OR 97201
Phone: (503) 725-9688
www.mhaoforegon.com

Please visit the STAR Center website for online audio and written materials on recovery, self-determination and cultural wellness at www.consumerstar.org.



STAR Center

NAMI

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<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs>

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