



Greetings to our Maryland Participants!

2015 marks a time of great change for the Maryland Public Behavioral Health System. On January 1, 2015 ValueOptions® Maryland went live with the new ASO contract managing both mental health and substance use disorders. Ever eager to support our members, ValueOptions is pleased to provide you with the first edition of our quarterly participant newsletter. This newsletter will be filled with articles promoting health and wellness and peer support services.

In the coming months we will have more information regarding new programs. We welcome feedback from you, our valued participants, and would like to invite you to reach out to our wellness and recovery staff.

To your health,

Zereana Jess-Huff, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer- Maryland
Valueoptions

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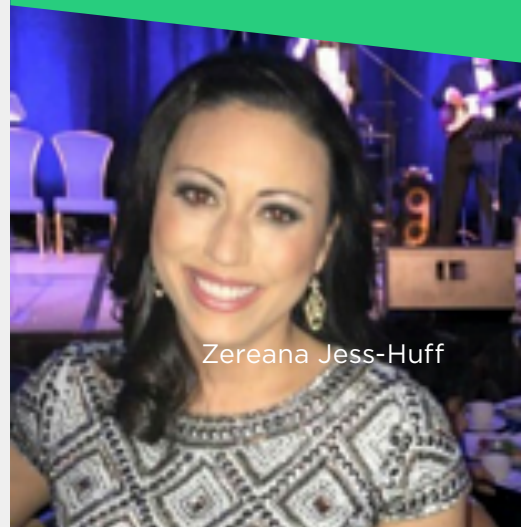
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Wellness & Recovery Community Centers—What They Can Do for You

Wellness and Recovery Centers or Recovery Community Centers are peer run organizations. They offer safe and caring places in the local area for people to give and receive support who have faced mental health or substance use problems.

At the Centers, people are able to join with others who have the same kind of problems and support each other. They find that worry, fear, anger and pain are all natural feelings that other people feel, too. This can help you feel less alone or afraid.

No Stigma

You can find acceptance at peer run programs because everyone has been in the same place or shared the same kind of feelings. When people feel accepted by their peers, they learn to accept themselves. This makes confidence and self-esteem grow.

Family

There is a feeling of family. Even though all people have different backgrounds, a sense of family is sometimes missing in their lives. The strength of a family group, the feeling of fitting in, and caring for each other grows at the center. Many people come to the center because it is like “home” to them; a place is familiar and safe. Even those who have been away from the center for a while always know that they can come “home” to share their joys and troubles.

Advocacy

Advocacy is a special skill that you can learn at the centers. Advocacy is taking charge of your life and standing up for your rights and others. Since the Center is a safe place, people are able to talk about their views and ideas. By doing this, people see that their voices can make a better life for themselves and others.

Problem Solving

People who feel that they have no control in their lives often find problem solving difficult. With encouragement and support, people can learn that every problem has an answer, no matter how big. Learning how to solve problems is an important step to independence.

“At the [Welcome] Centers, people are able to join with others who have the same kind of problems and support each other.”

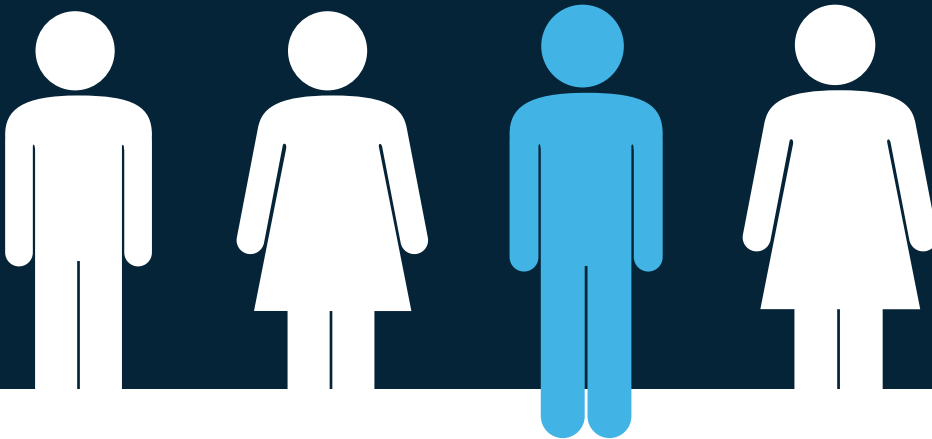
Face Your Challenges.

Peer run centers are places where people have the chance to learn to take risks. They know they are accepted when they succeed or fail. The center serves as a safety net giving a secure place to return to after taking new risks. At the center, people learn that the only failure of taking risks is not trying at all. People have gone back to school, gotten new jobs, started treatment, moved into independent living, stayed out of the hospital, faced problems and learned to go on with their lives. We encourage you to visit a center near you.

To find the closest Wellness and Recovery Center or Recovery Community Center, visit ValueOptions Maryland website <http://maryland.valueoptions.com> or contact On Our Own of Maryland (410) 646.0262.

Source: Words for Wellness, Value Behavioral Health of PA

FACT of the MONTH



1 in 4 American adults have a diagnosable mental health condition in any given year



Who Peer Support Helps

We all have our struggles and we all need help from time to time. We are not always likely to ask for it or take it though. Often this is due to our own sense of shame or our fear of being judged. We may be afraid other people will think less of us. Instead of reaching out to others we try to keep it all inside. This only tends to make matters worse. Help is easier to take if it comes from someone who knows what we are going through. This is the unique value of peer support. Peer support can be as simple as two people talking over coffee. It can also occur in the form of a structured support group. This group may be peer-led or led by a trained group leader. The trained leader should be someone who has been through recovery. Support groups often meet either weekly or monthly. These group meetings are designed to complement, but not replace, other health care.

Common types of peer support groups

A wide range of peer support groups exist to help people cope with common issues. Some of the more recognized groups are:

- Alcohol and substance use recovery
- Mental health recovery
- Cancer, diabetes and other disease support
- Grief and trauma support
- Anger and stress management
- Divorce care
- Domestic and sexual abuse support
- Veteran and PTSD support
- Weight loss and management
- Trauma care

Core values of peer support groups

Despite the many types of peer support groups, there are certain values common to all. Some of these core values are:

- Honesty
- Respect
- Confidentiality
- Empathy
- Tolerance
- Equality
- Hope
- Positive feedback
- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of choice

The goal of peer support

Peer support is designed to help with more than just coping with issues and symptoms. The goal is to move beyond simple recovery to a state of well-being. This sense of wellness involves all aspects of one's life. This includes mental, physical, emotional and spiritual



Meet Jackie Pettis

Throughout my career, I have been driven by a commitment to improving the lives of individuals living with behavioral health issues and their families. My passion was borne from personal experiences.

As a young person, it was easy to hide my sadness by pouring myself into school, activities and work. My approach to most challenges was to push myself until things got better. I grew up in a family where the unspoken expectation was things always get better if you work hard enough. I believed it because I saw my parents and grandparents work to overcome major barriers to create a better life for us. I was determined to “push” my way through to a better mood.

As I got older, it became more difficult to balance home, school, community activities, and career. Eventually, I confided in a colleague who was a psychiatrist. She suggested I talk to a professional. I was hesitant at first because of prejudice and discrimination against people who receive mental health care. I eventually got over my fears and sought professional help. Treatment takes time, but it works if you are willing to invest in yourself.

healing. Peer support is not meant to take the place of regular doctor's care. Instead, it is a welcomed and useful addition to other forms of care.

Why peer support works

Peer support works by allowing people with shared life experiences to work toward the shared goal of recovery. Members are all counted as equal and therefore are less likely to feel judged. This means members can feel free to share their struggles as well as their successes. No one is put down because each person has been in similar situations. Even trained leaders will have similar backgrounds and are often seen as mentors and role models. Leaders can also help members get other kinds of help through other contacts and resources. Peer group members offer each other respect, understanding and a listening ear.

They can also offer practical advice on specific coping skills. For instance, members of an anxiety support group can teach the group stress lessening activities such as yoga and deep breathing. A support group on quitting smoking can discuss experiences with nicotine patches, gum and e-cigarettes. Other members can then decide whether or not to try such methods for themselves. Mostly though, members share a common burden as well as a shared hope for recovery.

AchieveSolutions By Kevin Rizzo

MEET JACKIE PETTIS (CONTINUED)

Many stereotypes about mental illness are based on observations of people who are not receiving treatment or receiving inappropriate treatment. I have learned that one way to change public opinion is to share my story, get the right treatment and live a productive life.

For the past five years I have provided leadership for wellness and recovery activities at ValueOptions® Maryland. These activities extend beyond the walls of our organization. Services are available to individuals and families whose lives are affected by behavioral health issues. We offer peer support, advocacy, community outreach and education, training, and technical assistance. One of the most rewarding aspects of my job is offering hope to individuals that mental health and recovery are possible.

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TAKE ACTION: Healthy Eating for Families

Childhood obesity is a problem. The good news is that by making just a few changes, we can help our children lead healthier lives. Parents can set a good example in the home. Here are a few ideas:

- Making fruits and vegetables part of all meals
- Limiting treats
- Walking and playing
- Shopping together can help build healthy habits for life
- Keep a bowl of fresh fruit within reach to grab as a quick snack
- Plan a menu for the week and get children involved in the planning and cooking
- Turn off the TV during mealtime and share some family time.

Everyone has a role to play in reducing childhood obesity. Parents, elected officials, schools, health workers, faith-based and community-based group and others. Together, we can make a difference.

Source: letsmove.gov www.letsmove.gov

Preparing to Quit Smoking

Just thinking about quitting smoking may make you anxious, but your chances will be better if you get ready first. Quitting works best when you are prepared. Before you quit, **“START”** by taking these five important steps:

S – Set a Quit Date. Think about choosing a special day such as a birthday or anniversary. If you smoke at work, pick a weekend day to quit.

T – Tell. Tell family, friends, and coworkers that you plan to quit. Quitting smoking is easier with the support of others.

A – Anticipate. Anticipate the challenges you will face. The first three months are the hardest. Plan how you will handle the cravings.

R – Remove. Removing items that remind you of smoking will also help you get ready to quit.

T – Talk. Talk to your doctor about getting help to quit.

Believe that you can quit. Think about some of the most difficult things you have done in your life and realize that you have the determination to quit smoking.

Resources to Help You Quit

Maryland Tobacco Quitters: (Ages 13 years +) | Toll-free: 1.800.784.8669 | <http://smokingstopshere.com>

National Free Quit Line: 1-800-784-8669

American Lung Association: www.lungusa.org | www.determinedtoquit.com

Wellness: A Holistic Approach

Successful recovery from mental health and substance related disorders often require a holistic approach to wellness. It is believed people who achieve long-term recovery address all areas of their lives which include physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Your health is greatly changed by your lifestyle and your environment.

Physical wellness includes aspects of your life such as diet and exercise. A balanced diet is an important part of wellness. Adding a healthy diet to exercise is important as well. Be sure to talk to with your doctor before starting any exercise program. Maintaining a healthy body and healthy weight leaves you feeling physically well. It also improves emotional health. Having routine visits with your doctor are just as important. If an illness does occur, finding out early can provide good outcomes.

Emotional wellness includes the ability to cope with the problems that often result in stress. Major life events, happy or sad, can create stress. It is thought that stress may be responsible for many illnesses. Relaxation is one way you can reduce stress. Everyone relaxes in a different way. You may enjoy listening to music, painting, journaling, or going for a walk. A good support system helps reduce stress and often provides positive feedback and solutions to problems.

Spiritual wellness is personal and involves an individual's values and beliefs that provide a purpose in their lives. It is important for everyone to explore what they believe is their own sense of meaning and purpose. Exploring spiritual wellness may involve meditation, prayer, affirmations, or spiritual practices that support your connection to a higher power or belief system.

Holistic wellness is an effective approach in taking care of your "whole" self. It is recognizing what affects one part of the system affects the whole person. It is important to keep in mind the consequences of your habits and actions. However, you have control over most of these factors and can make choices that lead to improved health and well-being.

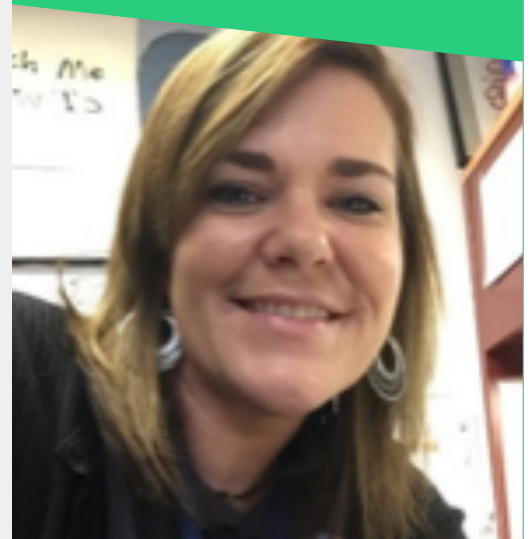
Meet Jennifer Tuerke

For as far back as I can remember, I felt different. I felt disconnected from family and society—my heart held a void that contained pain and confusion. The cause was elusive and worsened as I grew older. Despite the caring efforts of family and counselors, my behaviors became impulsive and self destructive. As a result, my life was unmanageable.

At a young age, drugs and alcohol became my solution that numbed the discomfort of my feelings. Quickly, my whole world became finding ways and means to escape myself. When the consequences of the juvenile justice system and isolation became great, I couldn't stop using even when I wanted to. At the age of 17, I did not know another way to successfully live without the use of drugs.

This is where my recovery story begins. As a result of early intervention services, I was given the opportunity for treatment. Inpatient treatment allowed me to learn about addiction and identify myself as having the disease. It gave me the tools to treat my illness and be free of its most devastating symptoms.

I was introduced to a 12-step fellowship that gave me a plan to change my life, from the inside out. The peers there gave the support I



Wellness and Recovery Staff Sightings

MEET JENNIFER TUERKE (CONTINUED)

1. 2015 NAMI WALK Kickoff Luncheon Jennifer Tuerke, Jackie Pettis, Kate Farinholt
2. Mental Health Association of Maryland annual Reception
3. Jennifer Tuerke receives a 2015 Unsung Hero Award from NCADD-MD



needed to find solutions that work for me. Through being abstinent and applying spiritual principles such as honesty, hope, integrity and compassion, I have been able to rise up out of despair and claim the life that I really want. These changes have not been easy, but have been necessary to make my life worth living, from the heart. I have achieved goals such as having a family, becoming a better parent, continuing my education, participating in my community, and more.

My life has been exciting in recovery—I have jumped from airplanes, traveled across the country several times, went to many concerts and have had relationships with some of the most amazing people on earth. Active addiction would have robbed that from me, keeping me in isolation and thinking and rethinking the past, present and future while not even taking a single step.

As a Certified Peer, I have the opportunity to share with others what I have received with an attitude of gratitude. The definition and path of success is very personal to each individual, I believe it is uniquely written on each of our hearts. Some of us want guidance and support to find it. I am truly grateful for those who have helped me and for the opportunity to help others to live our best life, together.

**Jennifer Tuerke, CPRS Peer
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4. Leola Howard, Officer David Sharpe, Jackie Pettis, Coffee with Howard County Police event
5. Jennifer Tuerke, Jackie Pettis, Brandee Izquierdo
6. Jennifer Tuerke speaks before the Lt. Governors Heroin & Opioid Taskforce