Celebrating Mental Health Month 2015
By Clare Marie Celano

The Friends of Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey (CSPNJ) came together to celebrate Mental Health Month 2015 at the Community Wellness Center in Freehold. The event highlighted the many innovative Peer-Led Initiatives that promote wellness and offer strategies for recovery, along with the reading of Governor Chris Christie’s Proclamation for Mental Health Month 2015.

The event, coordinated and hosted by Dr. Peggy Swarbrick, Director of the CSPNJ Wellness Institute, drew 45 attendees and was held in the newly renovated Community Wellness Center on 17 Bannard Street Freehold NJ. Attendees heard from representatives from CSPNJ and the Mental Health Association in New Jersey (MHANJ), who all spoke about the importance of mental health and programs offered by CSPNJ and MHANJ.

Peggy told guests that May was deemed Mental Health Month to take time to reflect on mental health. “We do this all the time in our day-to-day work,” Peggy said “We are always talking about the importance of mental health and doing what we can to bring awareness that mental health is as important as physical health.”

Speakers at the event included Lynn Kovitch, MEd, Assistant Commissioner, New Jersey Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services; Claudia Morrison of the Mental Health Association in New Jersey (MHANJ), Coordinator for the Peer Recovery Warm Line service; Jody Silver, the CSPNJ Executive Director; Mark Duffy, the CSPNJ COO; and Judy Banes, from the CSPNJ sponsored Community Wellness Centers.

Neil Harbus and Christina Serrano, of the CSPNJ Wellness Institute, shared educational wellness resources to manage symptoms of mental illnesses. Christina shared information about the importance of mindfulness for people to maintain their mental health and how important it is to be “in the moment.” Neil shared information about sleep and how mental health and wellness are linked for a good night’s sleep. After the presentations, attendees networked with panelists.

Peggy said the event celebrated Mental Health Month by acknowledging Peer-Led Initiatives and programs adding that, in her travels, she is often asked by others how CSPNJ has managed to open and operate so many Community Wellness Centers and Respite Centers. She referenced programs sponsored by the MHANJ and CSPNJ that reach out to consumers to promote recovery and offer wellness strategies.

Lynn Kovitch described the variety of services, support, and opportunities offered in NJ and the various programs available to access services to maintain mental health and wellness. She read from Christie’s Proclamation, which states that 25% of all people experience a diagnosable mental health

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condition in their lifetime and points out that mental illness accounts for 4 of the top 10 leading causes of disability worldwide. The Proclamation described mental health as “a significant component of physical health and, when offered adequate services, wellness and recovery are possible for all who live with mental illness.” The Proclamation also noted that New Jersey has made “great strides” in raising awareness of the importance of mental health and “to advance treatment opportunities of individuals with mental illness.”

The Governor’s Proclamation credits the community-based mental health system of care and peer support as being, “built of strong and dedicated organizations committed to helping individuals with mental illness receive necessary treatment and achieve sustained recovery,” and references New Jersey state psychiatric hospitals as providing “consumer-centered recovery-oriented treatment geared toward the transition back to successful community living,” noting that New Jersey “is advancing its goal to provide those with mental illness independent, meaningful and productive lives in the community.” Lynn added that Governor Christie has been “very supportive of mental health and addiction recovery services” and referenced his efforts.

Calling Peggy Swarbrick “our very own homegrown expert in wellness and recovery,” Lynn referenced her Eight Dimensions of Wellness Model to provide balance in one’s life and described how Peggy has focused her efforts on providing access to services that enable people to achieve in all of the dimensions of wellness. She thanked Peggy for her dedication and leadership.

“Recovery is a linear journey with ups and downs,” Lynn said. “Part of the journey is to recognize when you need someone to talk to and work on how to balance your life to work toward getting better and not suffer.” She spoke of how the mental health system had been “crisis-oriented” rather than managing ongoing care so that the focus can be on having access to services when people are well instead of trying to figure out how to find services when they are in crisis. Lynn also referenced the education efforts to address stigma.

President Barack Obama also issued a Proclamation for Mental Health Month, which states, in part, that the government “stands with those who live with mental illness and recommits to ensuring all Americans have access to quality affordable care.” The President’s Proclamation referenced the Clay-Hunt SAV Act, which authorized additional steps to address mental health and prevent suicide among veterans. The law will build on the current administration’s ongoing work to bolster mental health service members, veterans, and their families.

The President’s Proclamation adds that mental health must be “brought out of the shadows” and encourages treatment for those who might benefit, stating that it is “our shared responsibility to recognize the signs of psychological and emotional distress and to support those in need.” Advising the need to remove the stigma around mental illness and its treatment, and the Proclamation stated that “we must overcome fear and misunderstanding, and make sure all those dealing with a mental health issue know they are not alone,” and called upon “government agencies, organizations, health care providers, and research institutions to raise mental health awareness and continue helping Americans live longer, healthier lives.”

Claudia Morrison described the telephone support available through the warm line. The Peer Warm Line service is an effort of NJ Mental Health Cares and a service of the MHANJ, funded by the NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Mental
Health and Addiction Services. Claudia said that the Peer Warm Line service is empowering. She also said the line is a peer-run service providing ongoing telephone support to mental health consumers working towards recovery. Calls are answered by peers who are trained as supportive mental health consumers who use the Intentional Peer Support Model, which stresses support of one another’s recovery. This model helps both the person who is calling in and the recovery process for the peer taking the call. The peer taking the call is able to refer the person to a variety of programs and services. The peer responders are trained in Intentional Peer Support to encourage and support others through a supportive interpersonal relationships. “The model sets small steps in place. You can change your life,” Claudia said. “Recovery is possible. This line is making a difference.”

Claudia also described other services offered by MHANJ including NJ Connect for Recovery line, a confidential call line that provides counseling to individuals and families coping with addiction to heroin and prescription pain killers. Callers are connected with a peer specialist who can share their personal experience with recovery and who understand the effect of addiction on relationships.

Judy Banes is a key founder and leader of the Wellness Center model in New Jersey and has been involved with centers in the state for 30 years. Judy indicated she never had a problem staffing the centers even though many in 2006 who applied for the full time manager position running the center gave up social security benefits that allowed them to stay home and not risk the entitlements. “They have my deepest respect for taking this risk,” she said.

Judy’s passion for peer-led centers was clearly evident as she spoke of how much the centers help others and how the centers allow consumers to feel connected to someone who understands and who can relate to feelings of loneliness and isolation. “If I feel bad I can’t tell my coworkers I feel lonely, but I can tell someone at the center and they will hold out their hand to me. They understand,” Judy said, adding that peer support is a strong part of the centers. “There are a number of roles that peers can do, such as mentoring and coaching, and they are effective in helping people avoid going into the hospital” she said, adding, “and they have been successful.”

Mark Duffy reported that the Peer Respite Center in New Brunswick has seen 112 Individuals seeking help in a crisis and the Haledon Respite Center has seen 65. “Respite Centers help people though difficult situations and avoid hospitalization,” he said. “Respite Centers change lives,” he said. “The main focus is on peers and their helping one another to move on with their lives.”

Jody Silver closed the program by thanking Peggy Swarbrick for the inspiring event and commented on the progress made in peer-led initiatives. She referenced a mental health care system today that is based on wellness, recovery, and hope, and added that a system such as this does not exist in many other places. She credited Community Wellness Centers for evolving “into many other things,” and said that peer-operated Respite Centers “are a growing movement and an alternative to hospitalization.”

All attending found the event to be enlightening, and a true celebration of the month of May, dedicated to promoting mental health, recovery, and wellness.
**Motivational Interviewing and Quality Improvement**

Dr. Mike Evans, who is known for famous whiteboard lectures on YouTube, has shared another gem. His most recent video discusses the topic of how quality improvement (QI) in healthcare is taking on a new outlook to create a better user experience. He asks the question, “How can we use QI to make care better?” He elaborates on systems thinkers and encourages constant curiosity about a world that we might not understand fully, but can get one step closer to understanding. He makes the connection between Motivational Interviewing and Quality Improvement by stating that not everybody is ready for change. Furthermore, he asserts that we can change the result by changing the system the produces it, and points out that changing systems requires change agents. That’s where we come in!

Dr. Evans suggests using person centered approaches and motivational interviewing techniques to approach Quality Improvement. It can be tough to balance proactive and reactive care but starting with small incremental changes can have a large impact. For example, small behaviors like washing hands can have a rippling effect on health.

Dr. Mike Evans does a great job of connecting something that helping professionals already know, motivational interviewing, and something many of us fear, quality improvement. He illustrates how they work together and, with our role as change agents, we can start making small incremental changes that can and will eventually change the system.

To learn more about Dr. Mike Evans and his informational videos, please visit his YouTube page or his website below.

http://youtu.be/jq52ZjMzqyI  
http://www.evanshealthlab.com/