



Vital Voices for Mental Health

July 2011

ADVOCATES FOR EXCELLENCE IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



Sue Clark

From the Executive Director: **Rain Rain Go Away!**

Welcome to summer in Wisconsin! With all the cloudy, cool, rainy weather we had in May and June it's almost hard to believe it *is* summer, but the calendar says it is, so it must be.

Unfortunately, one of the things that often affect one's mental health and wellness has a lot to do with the seasons. Whether you have Seasonal Affective Disorder or not, the lack of direct sunlight affects everyone.

Seasonal Affective Disorder can be a serious mental health issue which can be treated by a doctor, but what about the rest of us? Do you find yourself feeling blue, restless, anxious or downright depressed when the sun is in hiding? If so, you are not alone.

You can not change the weather, so what can you do? Well, we have come up with some ideas that might help. See if any of these suggestions work for you!

- ✓ Get outside! Even if it's cloudy, the sun is still there, and it's closest to us

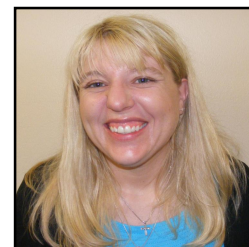
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Introducing Two New Staff Members

Vital Voices is excited to announce the addition of two new employees, Danielle Summers and Laura Sherman. Welcome ladies, we are happy to have you part of our advocacy team.

Danielle Summers

Danielle started out as an Interviewer/Surveyor for Vital Voices, but when the new Wiser Choice Advocacy Specialist position became available she was selected and has been a perfect fit. She has experience in the nonprofit and social services sectors. In previous positions, Danielle has worked in Quality Assurance and Compliance, was a Peer Specialist Trainer, and has been trained in trauma informed care. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and is a thesis away from her Master's Degree.



"I love Vital Voices; all of the staff, providers, and consumers are wonderful to work with," Danielle says. She is currently meeting with providers and consumers of Wiser Choice to introduce our services. She states, "I would like all providers and consumers to feel comfortable with me and have a clear understanding of what Vital Voices has to offer." Danielle's bubbly and likeable personality combined with her education and expertise make her an ideal match for this position.

Danielle has traveled extensively and lived in many different parts of the United States giving her a wide variety of real life adventures and personal experiences to draw from.

Laura Sherman

In late March, Laura began working with Vital Voices as a part time Interviewer/Surveyor. She assists in our special interview projects, report writing, and survey administration.

Laura has a passion for advocacy and states "Advocacy is my favorite component of social work. I love giving underrepresented people a voice when they struggle to find their own." In the past, she has worked in the social service field for many years and has recently rejoined the workforce. "Vital Voices is a great place to start working when you've been out of the workforce for a while." Laura has a Master's Degree in Social Work.



Besides enjoying being back at work, Laura likes going to festivals, going out to eat, getting together with friends, reading, camping and traveling. She states that she hopes to someday increase her hours in order to do more traveling. We are good with that.....as long as she comes back!

A True Success Story

Ernestine Burton

Ernestine has been through a lot in her lifetime. She had a difficult childhood and in her adult years was in an abusive marriage and became addicted to drugs. She struggled to find her true self. That day came in 2004 when Ernestine stated she was tired and knew she needed help. She decided to seek support and went to one of Wiser Choices' Central Intake Units and there completed an assessment. Ernestine was assigned a Recovery Support Coordinator to help guide her through the recovery process and began attending Day Treatment services at one of the provider sites. During her recovery process, she worked through understanding her addictions and found ways to utilize the treatment methods that would be most beneficial to her. When asked how she feels Wiser Choice has helped her, Ernestine replied "they helped me learn that I was in control of my actions and that my husband did not make me do drugs."

Ernestine has made much progress in the time after her initial assessment. She now works for Goodwill Industries, is a member of Wisconsin Association of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse, is a nurse and sings at her church. In addition, Ernestine speaks to different groups in the substance use community. She lets them know "that there is support out there and that people do not have to live their lives controlled by substances." Ernestine contributes a lot to the people and programming that have helped her. She reflects, "I would be lost if it wasn't for the help of Wiser Choice."

Vital Voices wants to make sure others going through the Wiser Choice system have the best treatment available to them. We act as advocates for individuals who are receiving substance use services under Wiser Choice. They are able to contact us if they are having any concerns with their current provider and we will work with that provider to help make the person's recovery process a safe and healthy one.

Ernestine has also been diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. Something she admits she has struggled with, but feels healthy now. She stated when she was diagnosed, "it was difficult to express what I was feeling and I would have liked to talk to someone who would have listened." Often times people with a substance use disorder will also have a mental illness. Vital Voices understands that and recognizes the need for advocacy and support in those situations. That is what we are here for!

From the Executive Director (continued from page 1)

around mid-day. Take a lunch break and go for a walk. If you are unable to get outside, stand in front of a window, turn your face to the sky and smile. It does wonders for the psyche.

- ✓ Make time to exercise every day, rain or shine. Rediscover your inner child. Go for a walk in the rain. Splash in the puddles. Remember how fun that used to be? You won't melt, and mud washes off.
- ✓ When you can not get outside, bring the outside in! Colorful flowers, bright lighting, comfy clothes and any kind of music you enjoy will help to lift your mood instantly. Enjoy the fragrance of fresh-cut flowers. Make yourself a cup of tea and enjoy the antics of the birds in your outdoor bird-bath. They love the rain!
- ✓ Eat healthy. Seasonal farmer's markets offer a plethora of fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs at a lower cost than the markets. They are so good, and good for you! Just walking around enjoying all the sights and smells, mingling with like-minded people and visiting your favorite vendors can put things in perspective. Then go home and make something wonderful!



Save the Date

It's that time of year again! Last year's Bowl-a-thon was such a "striking" success we look forward to doing it again this year! As a matter of fact we are in the planning stages as we speak.

Mark your calendars for **Saturday, November 12, 2011** and start digging out your favorite bowling shirt and shoes! We will send reminders as time draws closer.

Welcome New Board Members

We have three new board members to introduce to you, each with their own strengths, capabilities, and areas of expertise. See below for their individual profiles.

Sarah Andritsch

When asked why Sarah originally joined the Board she responded "I wanted to become more involved in influencing measurable change in our community's mental health sector. I work for a community health center that provides medical and dental care to low income and un-insured individuals. Inadequate access to mental health services is one of the largest issues facing our patient population."

As far as Vital Voices' role in the community, Sarah feels that "Access to quality health care is a human right, not a privilege." She continues "Mental illness knows no race, gender or income. It can affect anyone at anytime, but is often considered taboo. It's no secret that there is room for improvement in the way we provide mental health services. Vital Voices establishes checks and balances to ensure the system is fair. We are the voice for those who are unable or afraid to speak for themselves."

Steve Reinhold

As a Business Development Manager of MAXIMUS, Inc., Steve brings a variety of skills to the Vital Voices Board. He joined the board because he "wanted to be involved in mental health advocacy" and believes that "issues surrounding mental health are often over shadowed by other policy matters" and wanted to use those skills to help.

Steve feels that "Vital Voices plays a critical role for ensuring quality of service for mental health consumers in Milwaukee County" and sees this role growing "as our expertise with survey research continues to grow." Steve states "being aware of community needs and concerns and working together to address those needs, just makes you a better person."

Jeff Walden

Jeff joined the Vital Voices Board at the first of the year. He tells us he joined for a variety of reasons, but "mainly as a way to give back to the nonprofit community." He recognizes that "many services we take for granted are provided by the nonprofit world..." and that by taking a more active role with our organization he might "more fully appreciate the positive effects of nonprofit missions." He also notes that it allows him to "make connections and friendships both personally and professionally."

"As a marketing business professional, I have always worked on the other side of the (nonprofit) board" Jeff commented. "I present concepts and strategies to boards on a regular basis. Having the opportunity to serve on the other side of the table allows professionals to understand the roles and challenges that may not otherwise be taken into account." He says it "better prepares" one to anticipate and address these challenges.

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The mission of Vital Voices
is to advocate for excellence
in mental health and substance use
recovery services through the voice
of the people being served.

Many Thanks to Our Donors!

Vital Voices thanks everyone who donated from January through May 2011. Your contributions mean a lot to us and make a difference in the lives of those with mental illness and substance use disorders!

\$100-\$500

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~Toby Recht