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DHHS - STATE OF NEBRASKA

Alternatives 2009 Omaha, Nebraska

Office of Consumer Affairs Report on Alternatives



Alternatives is a national conference that is prepared by people living in recovery with mental health issues (or consumers) for people with mental health issues. It is a tradition of the consumer movement that speaks and breathes recovery.

The theme of this years conference was uniting our movement for change. Our state was selected because of its rich symbolism of unity in Nebraska's one-house legislature where legislators are elected without party designation, where East meets

West at the 100th Meridian (in Cozad, Nebraska), and motto: "equality before the law.", and because Omaha is an emblematic site- where, in 1865, the Union Pacific laid the first rails for its transcontinental railroad, which would unite the country.

The best example of how Nebraska symbolizes unity in the consumer movement is how Dan Powers took his vision of a national memorial

and spurred key individuals forward to make it happen. National recognition of those that have passed without an identity at state hospitals nationwide is a common goal that unites our movement.



Dan Powers and Kathryn Power at the National Memorial

SCOT ADAMS AND NEBRASKAN PEER SUPPORT

Scot Adams, director of Division of Behavioral Health, took time to absorb all that Alternatives has to offer. He addressed the audience with Carol Coussons de Reyes in a welcoming address on the first night of the conference. In his talk, he flipped a coin to symbolize many points: Nebraskans love football and the impor-

tance of the consumer voice in the Division of Behavioral Health being equal to his own. He also spoke of his own experience as a family member of a loved one that benefited from peer support in the world of addiction recovery. In

fact the coin that he flipped was a recovery chip. Carol chose the side that said Journey to be the determining side of the coin- that side won the toss.

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Kevin Karmazine and Scot Adams at Alternatives

THE ART LEGACY OF GAYLE BLUEBIRD

This year's conference had a component that defined the role of peers in a landmark way: as supporters of experiential art. Art is a tool of the story teller and stories are the songs of recovery. Gayle Bluebird has known this truth for years, as she pursued the inclusion of this important element of art in the Alternatives Conference. This year her vision brought forward the Pre-Conference Arts Institute. This Institute show-

cased the incorporation of art into peer support in a way that supports the journey of recovery. In peer support, art is not an instrument of analysis— it is a medium of story telling. There is a message in incorporating art in

peer support that recognizes it is our art that creates a sense of wholeness that belongs to the individual, which is uniquely separate from art therapy. A manual was distributed at this event to allow peers to carry this work to hospitals, support groups, crisis respite centers, and wherever our journey leads us.

PS. If they hand you a coloring book, refuse to stay within the lines!



FELLOW MOMS, AUTHORS, AND ARTISTS: GAYLE BLUEBIRD AND CAROL COUSSONS DE REYES

THINGS THAT GO WOOF IN THE NIGHT by DAN POWERS

Psychiatric service dogs were present at the conference. Normally there is a \$75 dollar charge by the Hilton for having a dog at the hotel, but this does not apply to service animals. The dogs came in a variety of sizes and played a valuable role of support for the owners and other conference guests.

Dr. Jean Campbell is currently leading an action research training for people utilizing mental health services to identify research that will directly answer their own questions versus a tradition of being the subject of research. The focus is to improve community living for people.



Dr. Jean Campbell and Beethoven

HUSKER FANS AT ALTERNATIVES by DAN POWERS

On Saturday during the conference there was a televised game, Nebraska vs. Baylor. A small group of loyal Nebraska fans took time off from the conference and watched the game in the Hilton Liberty Tavern. The bartender, a Ne-

braska fan, was most accommodating and refilled pop glasses without charge. Nebraska won the game 20-10. The outstanding defense fore-

shadowed the upcoming game with Oklahoma which Nebraska won 10-3. Nebraska's defense is ranked first in the Big 12 and second in the nation.



Proud Husker Fan

PARENTING AT ALTERNATIVES

There was a Caucus on supporting people in recovery as parents. Attendees to the Caucus included several consumer-run organizations that provide activity groups and welcoming environment for children at their office: Cheryl Bledsoe of SIDE and Paul Conils of Alaska Youth and Family Network (www.ayfn.org).

Caucus participants discussed the discrimination that parents face nationally in relationship to department of family and children services. It was reported that in some

instances plans to separate children from their parents are being made before a child is even born based on the parent living with a diagnosis of mental illness. Paul Conils recommended that parents have a member of a support group present during any home visit by such an organization as an extra set of eyes. The University of Pennsylvania also publishes a powerpoint to train parents living with behavioral health issues in their rights in regards to such investigations. This training en-

courages parents to not sign for voluntary placement without consulting an attorney.

George Badillo discussed that he now consults with other parents after his child's case-workers actively tried to discourage him from testifying in a case that led to his reunification with his son.



NEBRASKA'S MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Alan Green and Kasey Moyer of the Mental Health Association of Nebraska served on the conference planning committee. Nebraska MHA coordinated the Tour Nebraska Room, a list of local support groups, and a fleet of volunteers to assist conference guests.

Most notable of contributions was their invitation to Wendell Birdhead of the Lakota tribe and the Urban crew to open the meeting with a prayer and drum ceremony.

MHA-Nebraska also showcased Keya House to conference guests with interest in their new innovative hospital diversion respite center. Indi-

viduals looking for alternatives to hospitalization can voluntarily participate in Keya House.



Ashley Moyer, Chad Magdanz, Kara Magdanz, Alan Green, Carol Coussons de Reyes, and CJ Zimmer

Keynote Speaker: Nebraskan, J Rock Johnson

J. Rock was a keynote speaker at Alternatives. Her topic was “The Power of Our Voice”. She shared her story of recovery with us. None of us there will forget it. J. Rock was an early advocate for mental health consumer empowerment in Nebraska. Senator Mike Johanns was also a keynote speaker. He recognized J. Rock for her work when he was Governor of Nebraska to pass LB1083.



J Rock Johnson: Keynote Speaker

Two Leaders in the Consumer Movement Chat at Alternatives

Stephen Pocklington of the Wellness Recovery Action Plan, WRAP, training is seen here with Sue Burgeson, former president of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA). Stephen was sporting a Pharm-Free button at the conference, which is a campaign from the American Medical Students Association promoting evidence-based prescribing, pharmaceutical innovation, and ac-

cess to medicine. He is better known as a powerful speaker and educator of the power of WRAP and the hope of Recovery. I will never forget when he spoke in Georgia at our consumer conference and stated that there is “no pill for poverty”.

Sue Burgeson lead DBSA for six years. Sue now works with Optum Health, formerly known as Behavioral Health Solutions,

as Vice President of Consumer Affairs, Public Sector.



Stephen Pocklington and Sue Burgeson

Charles Willis Returns to Nebraska!

Charles Willis, guest speaker for Nebraska’s Town Hall Meetings came back to Nebraska for Alternatives. Charles leads a statewide wellness initiative in Georgia that includes Wellness Recovery Action Plan training for the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network.

When I began my work in Georgia, as the Director of Consumer Relations and Recovery Section,

one of the first questions Charles asked is: Aren’t you going to Alternatives? Turns out almost everyone interested in the national consumer movement goes to Alternatives. It is more than a learning forum. It is a place to learn from leaders in the movement and a place to see familiar faces that share the journey of building bridges to support the work of recovery for everyone in the United States.

by Carol Coussons de Reyes



Charles Willis and Carol Coussons de Reyes

Ken Timmerman— A Man to Count On!

Ken Timmerman managed and organized a team of volunteers to staff the conference. Many volunteers received scholarships from the Mental Health Association of Nebraska, the Office of Consumer Affairs, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Nebraska. He was so out of breath at the time of this photo that he asked not to be photographed. Shery Mead walked by and he decided to take a photo with her. Ken has been trained as

a Facilitator in Intentional Peer Support and is a Consumer Specialist in the Region 6 Office in Omaha. Shery Mead will be coming back to Nebraska to participate in our first State-wide Peer Support Training with folks from FOR-U and Yale University.



Ken Timmerman and Shery Mead

Anne Rohan's Letter of Thanks to the OCA

Carol –

My thanks to you, Dan, and others who were involved with my receiving a scholarship to the Alternatives Conference. It was excellent and at one time I had 4 sessions that I wanted to at-

tend! One did not last for the entire time so I snuck into another one and also got great info from it. I received info on making my organization more sustainable, pointers on improving relationships with staff, and great info that will be valuable

to other staff and the families that we serve.

Thank you for this opportunity!

Anne Rohan

Executive Director

Families CARE

Peer Leadership Breakfast

Linda Neiheisel of the Peer Support and Wellness Center from the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network is one of the many peer leaders that are responsible for offering a respite opportunity that allows individuals to do something different when another hospitalization just is not the answer. The different thing is that people engage crisis as an opportunity. Essential to this program design and the Keya House staff of Nebraska has been *Intentional Peer Support Training* from Shery Mead. To learn more about the Peer Support and Wellness Center visit www.gmhcn.org (see tab on right of screen– Wellness Center).



Tammy Fiala, Consumer Specialist of Region 3, Nancy Rippen, Consumer Specialist of Region 2, Judie Moorehouse, Consumer Specialist of Region 1, and Linda Neiheisel of GMHCN.