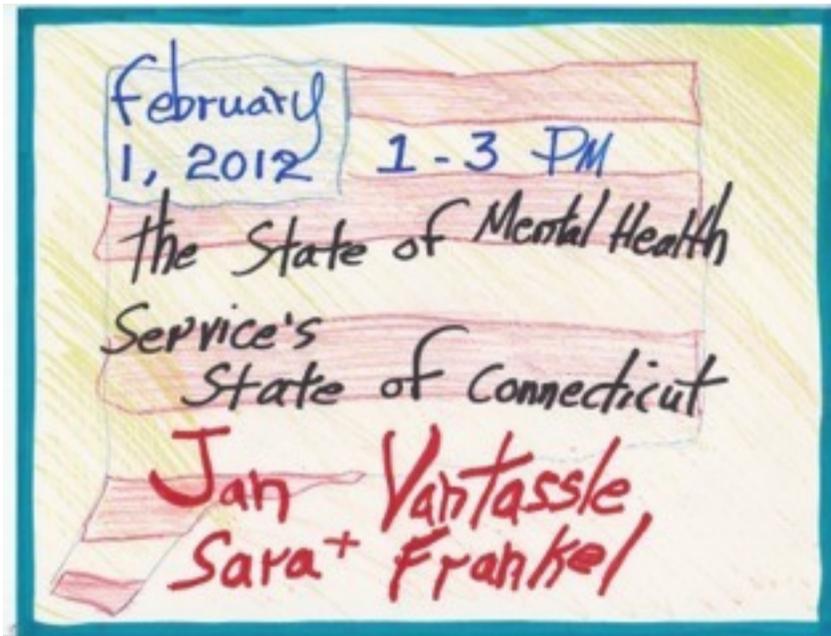




**ECCC COMMUNICATOR
NEWS,ARTICLES, ART,
POEMS,IDEAS AND
BIOGRAPHIES
ALL IN ONE
NEWSLETTER #9
APRIL 2012**

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Moe Layout-Barry Photos

Drawing by Barry



Jan Van Tassle and Sara Frankel came and spoke to Veterans about Keep The Promise.

Keep The Promise is a coalition is an organization which teaches people to tell our stories about mental illness and the mental health services that we receive. Keep The Promise requires that people know our stories well and

Keep the Promise Coalition taught about state government in Connecticut. We were taught how to talk with our state representatives and participate in our state government

WWW.cqa.ct.gov

This is the Connecticut General Assembly's web site. Select either house or senate and find out-who is your state legislator. That is what we were taught.

Jan explained that many legislators like to spend time with people in the district and have a cup of coffee.





Jan explained how each of us can stay and be in our own communities to learn about and participate in the political process...Here is what some of the Veterans who attended the training said about the NAMI sponsored training.

Barry:

I have learned to act positively from lessons learned from dealing with Stigma from the General Public.

I am also learning how to be a better listener and accept myself and people for who they are and to be comfortable with that decision.

Abdul:

What NAMI means to me. Support. I like giving support to other Vets and getting support through NAMI. I get a lot out of NAMI. Like how to run a group and how the group can help those in need.

Efrain:

What NAMI means to me? Go twice a week to the meetings(NAMI).Talk about ourselves and support the group. Reading/Support anything regarding the NAMI illness so I can learn more about it.

Emil N:

What does NAMI mean to me? A good group for support, to help myself and others for help and understanding.

Ray:

To me NAMI has been a Learning Experience. I have seen how mental illness affects different people in different ways and how Peer Groups give positive feedback to help with Recovery.

Sarge E-7:

What NAMI means to me. At this time, it will mean more to me once I learn more about this program. Take more action in this program. Seeing more help with my mental health problems.



VETERANS AT NAMI CONNECTIONS MEETING

Interview Mary Sperrazza: What Is Supported Employment? An Opportunity

Ray Q: Can you give me a brief overview of the Supported Employment Program

Mary: It was an initiative started in 162 VA's across the country seven years ago. It is to provide Employment Services to Veterans who have serious Mental Illness, such as, Schizophrenia, Psychotic Disorders, or Major Mood Disorders. People with PTSD, Personality



Disorders and Substance Abuse Disorders were excluded from this specific program.

Veterans are assigned a Vocational Specialist who completes a vocational assessment of the veteran. This document will change over time as the Specialist meets with the Vet to help place the Veteran in the job of their choice, in the community of their choice, same as anyone else.

My favorite saying is "15 minutes of work in the Community is, 15 minutes of Community work." The Employment Specialist follows the Vet as long as they need support. The Employment Specialist will help the Vet with resumes, set up and go on job interviews,. They will help the Vet with the understanding the transportation systems. They will help fill out job applications and they will support the Vet and the Employer. The support will last a life time if needed. The Vocational Specialist will do whatever it takes to get the veteran a job of their dreams.

Ray: How long does the Vocational Specialist follow the Veteran on the job.

Mary: A lifetime or as long as it takes to make sure that the Veteran is safe and stable in their jobs in the community. Even if the the Veteran think they do not need to be supported any longer, there will be follow up to make ensure the Vets are safe and stable.

Ray:What is the percentage of successful job placement to date?

Mary: We have a placement rate of 58%. The national goal is 40%.

Ray: How many Employment Specialists are there at the ECCC?

Mary: We currently have five Supported Employment Specialists and one vacancy. Each counselor has a case load of no more than 25 veterans.

Ray: What is the chain of command here at The Center?

Mary:I am the CWT Program Director and Ken Bouchard is the CWT Program Manager. I am ultimately responsible for their program functioning and staff training. I am also a national mentor for Supported Employment out of five other sites. Myself and several others developed this program through the Central Office.

Ray: Who refers the Veterans to the program?

Mary: The referral has to come from the Mental Health Mental Health Provider. First and foremost, we have to be on the same page as the Mental Health Provider. Is the Vet ready to work in their opinion? Also, issues can arise that might involve meds so we have to be on the same page. This all benefits the Vet in the area of work.



Ray: How does Supported Employment effect a Veterans Benefits, such as, SSI, SSDI, Service or Non Service Connected?

Mary: Veterans who are in the Supported Employment Programs are counseled on their benefits, so they understand how much they can make before their benefits are effected. However, VA Benefits are not effected, as long as the Veteran is in the program. And, that could be a lifetime.

Ray: What happens if a Veteran loses a job?

Mary: Supported Employment does not stop. We look and see what worked and what didn't. Then, we go about finding the Vet a new job and moving forward.

INTERVIEW WITH DAVE LEWIS

Hello my name is Dave Lewis and I suffer from Schizophrenia. I believe that I have suffered from Schizophrenia since I was nine. I am now 52 years old. Forty years years ago, I was diagnosed with Schizophrenia. At the time of age nine, I was originally diagnosed with Manic Depression.

When I was younger, I used to get messages from the radio and believe that they are true. I try to function with Schizophrenia. Moe Armstrong sent me some videos about people living with Schizophrenia. People are holding a normal job and



holding a normal life. I have tried to do that. I come here to the program and go to classes, also. I go to Anger Management and Spirituality. I am also trying learning Cognitive Behavioral skills. I also was the Chair person for the Accessibility Committee. This Committee looks at architectural barricades at the VA Community Care Center.

Schizophrenia did not hold me down. At first, I did not believe that I had Schizophrenia. I was self medicating myself with drugs and booze. I took IV drugs and acid. I was in denial. I did not want to take the medication. My doctor kept giving me pamphlets on Schizophrenia. I kept reading those pamphlets. The pamphlets started making sense to me. I said, "Gee, this sounds like me." I used to think that everybody else was wrong. I used to party and drink and self medicate to get me through the depression. I had several suicide attempts. My first suicide attempt was throwing myself in front of a dump truck when I was nine. That is when my family realized that something was wrong with me. I stuttered. I had speech impediment problems. I got through that. And, then when I was twelve years old, I jumped off a building. I started hearing voice at that time. I was still depressed. I am now on medications to help me deal with all these effects of Schizophrenia. I was in denial about Schizophrenia. Reading those pamphlets about Schizophrenia really brought home what I have and what is Schizophrenia.

I started to realize that there is something wrong with me. I started talking to professionals. I realized that there is help. I started talking to Psychologists and Psychiatrists. I started realizing that it is not my fault that I am mentally ill. There is nothing wrong in having this condition. This is lot like diabetes. I also suffer from diabetes, now.

This Schizophrenia is treatable. I found the best way to help me is through talking or counseling. However, I also need medications. I have been taking medication for some time. Since, the age of twenty one I have been taking medications. I need to stay active and have some structure in my life. I need to learn about my illness. Today I am a success. I am off Substance Abuse. I feel pretty stable. My last suicide attempt was a

long time ago. I was in my early twenties. The voices wouldn't go away. I thought the world was against me and I had hallucinations. I was self medicating. I jumped off a four story building. I almost died. I had traumatic Brain Injury. I had several broken bones.



I want to live today. I also attend classes with Moe Armstrong. I agree with a lot things that he talks about. He facilitates a lot of classes here. I participate in the VA Errera Community Center. This Center is in West Haven, Connecticut. Here I am with other people. I was discriminated

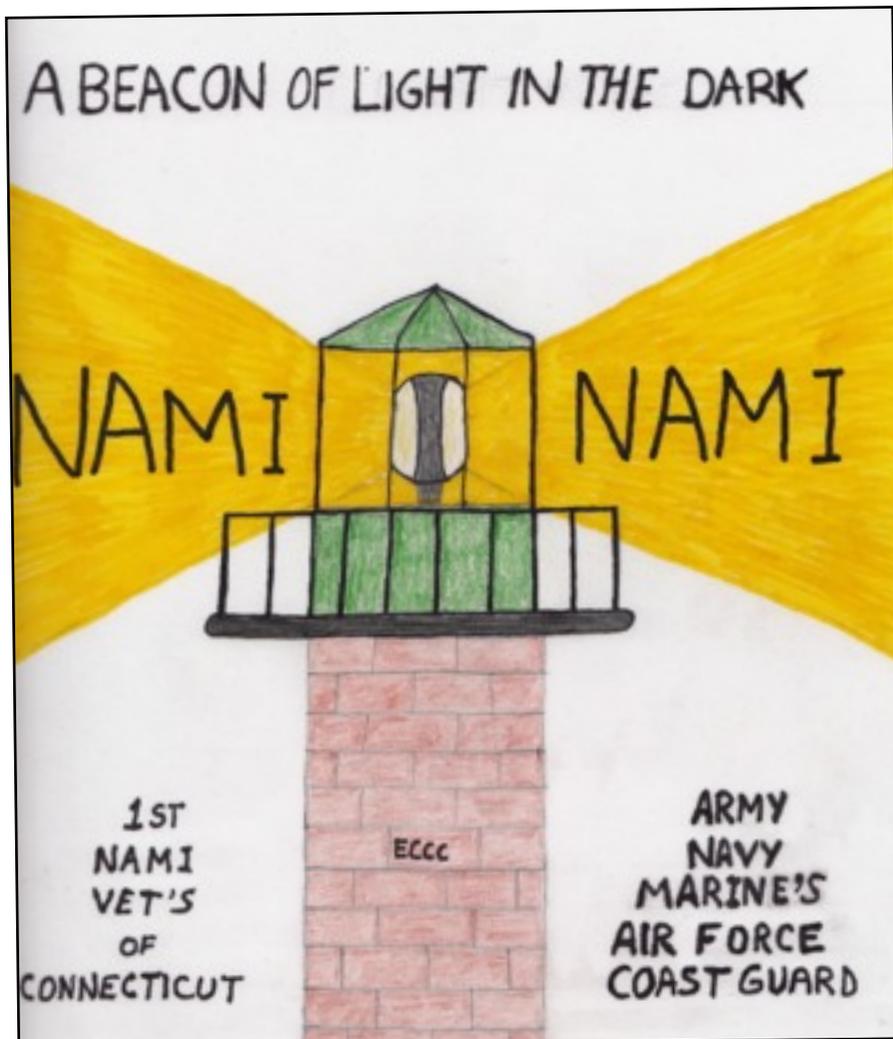
against by family, friends and relatives. They did not understand mental illness. They wanted nothing to do with me. Hollywood has made us look like murders. Richard Bates in the movie Psycho is an example. Most people with mental illness and that includes Schizophrenia. We harm ourselves and we are in a lot of pain. People do not have to be afraid of us. Anybody out there reading this, if you suffer from Substance Abuse or Mental Illness, we can get better. People with Schizophrenia and other mental illnesses can get better. Please, listen to me and what I have to say.

I seek Professional Psychiatric help

I have structure in my life

I got around and hang out and learn from other people who suffer from this disease.

I hope that someday Schizophrenia gets recognized like blindness and other diseases. I hope that we get respect one day. I hope if you are Doctor or a Politician reading this that you help get more help into our mental health system. I have educated myself and this has helped my life a more normal life. Thank you for chance to talk about my life with Schizophrenia.



Artwork by
Ray Spurr

SUPPOSED TO BE

Always supposed to be
The poor kid
From the wrong side
Of the tracks

The railroad ran
Through the town where
I came from.....Bushnell, Illinois
I was always trying to do something
With my life

I was always trying to go somewhere
In my life
Dreamed and read books
Wrote notes, poems and articles
Walked beside rivers
Sang songs. Song after song
Sang in the school musicals
Sang through the Vietnam war
Sang through the Haight/Ashbury
Sang through London and Europe
Sang through Colombia and Cuba
Living in the Americas and on these continents
Tapping my feet and dancing
Letting the music take me
I was supposed to be the poor kid
Who never amounted to anything

Got music in my life and head
Music shakes through my whole body
Got through Vietnam by music
I danced across rice paddies to save people
Rescue people under fire
This poem is dedicated to Bill Mulkey
We served together in Vietnam
We sang in Vietnam
We got together in Kentucky after the war
and sang again
Bill died a month ago in Harlan, Kentucky
Dodging bullets



This was the poem read at Arts and Ideas Festival...June 25, 2011

Bill Mulkey was my friend and in contact with me until his untimely death last year.

Singing and dancing

Got back to the Base Camp and more songs
Never quit singing and dancing
Never gave up writing songs and poems
Never gave up a life of poetry and music
I was supposed to be the poor kid next door
Never go anywhere, or do anything
Traveled the world looking for music,
Songs, Poetry and Art

Yet, never forgot I was Type to enter text
the poor kid who
Went off to war
Went into the military
for a job and love of
country
Got shot out of the
military shattered and
broken
Trashed out from the war
Broken mind and body

Still, never stopped singing and dancing
Started out in life
Midwest kid
People gave nickels
At the Kirby's Cafe
" Sing me an Elvis tune, kid
And do that little dance"
Maybe, what I been doing my
whole life is.....
Who I am supposed to be
Singer, Writer, Dancer

