

# Peer Voices Now!

**By Persons with Lived Mental Health Experience, for Our Community  
December 2014**

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You are holding the inaugural issue of Peer Voices Now!, a newsletter published by the Consumer Relations Program for all members of the peer community throughout Sonoma County. Inside you will find many voices – individuals will share their heartfelt feelings about issues close to them, as well as updates from various peer-directed initiatives in Sonoma County.

We hope that you will consider making a submission to our / your Newsletter. Our next issue will be in March 2015 and we hope your voice will be included. It is our intent to provide a written forum for the full diversity of peer voices in Sonoma County.

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The Consumer Relations Program (C.R.P.) aims to bring consumer groups together to promote leadership, advocacy, work and education through strategic outreach, networking and communication.

C.R.P. staff work with Sonoma County's Behavioral Health Division and local agencies to promote a recovery-oriented vision. By bringing peer voices to the table at all levels throughout the mental health system, the Consumer Relations Program aims to inform and support the process of system transformation by involving and engaging peer values within and throughout the mental health workforce.

The Consumer Affairs Coordinator meets with consumer groups throughout the county to ensure that their voices are heard and understood at the leadership level of the Behavioral Health Division of Sonoma County. The Consumer Education Coordinator develops education and work internship programs to prepare peers to enter the mental health work force and to educate the current workforce

in how to move towards more inclusive, power-sharing environments which promote recovery and self-respect.

Additionally, the Consumer Relations Program seeks to bring training to peers and providers on current best practices in public mental health, as well as to provide opportunities for individuals and groups to grow in their desires for a stigma-free life which is self-determined.

To find out how to get more involved in C.R.P. activities email Kate Roberge at [kroberge@gire.org](mailto:kroberge@gire.org) or Amy Breckenridge at [Abreckenridge@gire.org](mailto:Abreckenridge@gire.org).

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**Peer Support Specialist  
Training Program**

The Consumer Relations Program offers a course in Peer Support Specialist Training. Peer Support Specialists (also known as Peer Counselors, Peer Providers, Peer Advocates and Peer Navigators) are trained in a wide variety of topics, including mental health recovery, ethics, communication, boundaries and co-dependency, addiction, crisis intervention, suicide prevention, cultural responsiveness, burnout and self-care, trauma-informed care, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, emotional literacy, and

many more. Applicants to the program must have lived experience as a person with a major mental health challenge.

At the end of the course, students are provided with internships at various agencies and organizations serving people with lived mental health experience. Once their internships are completed, the students are assisted in searching for employment as Peer Support Specialists.

The outcome of employing peers in agencies and organizations that serve people with mental health challenges is well documented. Peer Support Specialists are more sensitive and responsive to the needs and struggles of those they serve. They are able to provide empathy based on their own experience, and to teach staff without such challenges how to work more successfully and effectively. Peer providers can also model the many aspects of mental health recovery.

A new training session will begin on January 12, 2015 and run through April 27, 2015. Classes will be held on Monday, Thursday and Friday mornings from 9am to 11am at the Wellness and Advocacy Center.

If you are interested in becoming a Peer Support Specialist, please call Kate Roberge at (707) 565-4916.

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**Survey Results:**

**Q. What does Mental Health Recovery mean to you?**

Gretchen V

I first got into the mental health system in 1987 when I moved out from my mom. I first had social workers, got help from them – support for living on my own. Then I got on meds for my mental illness. My diagnosis is manic depression/anxiety, panic attacks. So I also see therapy, too. So this all from professionals has been a support to help me cope and be mentally

stable and stay out of mental hospitals.

Also it's very helpful that there's day programs like CLC and now the Wellness Center to go to for a program activity to get out of the apartment so I don't have to stay home alone all day. For me also it's helpful going to support groups up here at the Wellness Center. I always get something out of it! and I'm glad they at the Wellness Center have a variety of activities to offer.

Theresa F

With medications and a good psychiatrist; work out symptoms and functionable with them in a somewhat normal life. Trust in others are helpful with my paranoia; proper care.

Elaine N

To be the person that understands my mental health issues without spiking with anxiety and fear. I have to learn what I truly want out of life with DBP & Anxiety & GAD. One day at a time. Also being C/S the journey would be so much harder. PS. Being grateful is at the core of my life.

Kris

To me, mental health recovery means staying on my medications unless and until my psychiatrist and I, together, decide differently. It means taking my recovery seriously, taking the necessary steps given to me to recover the best way possible to get back as full and fulfilling a life for myself as possible, including asking for the help I need when necessary. It means doing service for other people and also taking care and doing things for myself in a balanced way.

Christy

Getting an apartment and living by myself.

Roger

Staying on my meds and living a normal life.

Martha

Happiness

Eric

Recovery = getting better. Health = recovered. Mental Health = enough serenity, hope, positive expectation or contentment to say, “I’m okay, right here and right now.”

Mental health recovery means everything to me as well as help to stay on track and healthy mentally in outlook and quality time spent in the pursuit.

Patricia

When you recognize within your soul that you are well.

Joshua

Being productive in society and having healthy relationships.

Deedra

Health recovery for me means being happy most of the time and not sleeping through half of my days, having and maintaining friendships and getting out of the home during the day – maintaining a schedule of sorts.

God is my friend

God loves me

Rosa

Mantener su mente ocupada. Hacer alguna actividad o ejercicio. (Keep one’s mind occupied. Do some activity or exercise.)

### **Q. What is your favorite Wellness Tool?**

Steve

guitar

Vivienne

I love coming here and being able to put everything on the table (within reason) and freely expressing myself. I love the freedom. It is such a blessing to be able to endure. God bless you all.

Kris

My favorite wellness tool is “Resiliency.” I feel it’s very important and healing to prepare myself ahead of time for people in my life to pass away and then attend a Memorial for them, talking it out about what that person meant to me in my life when they were alive. Also, since I’m a singer, to incorporate singing a song for them and the survivors who are there who were in their life as well. Also believing in God and Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior helps, as well, along with prayer.

Theresa F

My favorite tool is the coffee, groups on feelings and support for the positive to help depressions of mental health. Art, jewelry, and understanding providers.

David

My favorite wellness tool is prayer.

Patricia

Bathing & Laundry.

Roger

The computer lab.

Vivienne G

My favorite wellness tool is peer support as a healthy outlook and a step towards good mental health and as a goal towards a positive outlook.

Deedra

My favorite wellness tool is meditative journaling where you don’t worry about punctuation or whether it’s a complete thought or if it makes sense to someone else, just writing what pops into your head. And music.

Russell

Computers, art room, coffee and snacks.

Jennifer P

I take Cymbalta, Ativan and Trazadone to help my symptoms. Self-care is my wellness tool. Art is my meditative, stress-relieving and mindfulness practice. I am

learning how to paint, color, collage, etc. I also very much enjoy my 3DTV and my videogames. I have a Wii, Xbox 360 and just bought PlayStation 4.

Steve  
Silence.

Christy  
The art room.

Rosa R  
Me gusta hacer collares. Me gusta escuchar musica, cantar. Me gustaria que me ensenaran a hablar ingles. (I like to make colorings. I like to listen to music, to sing. I would like someone to teach me to speak English.)

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**Helping Family Members With  
Mental Illnesses**  
by Noah Henderson

I heard a good definition today: people who suffer from depression are simply very sensitive people, who all their lives have been told they must be different than they are (they must be normal). Though depression is difficult to understand, other mental illnesses can be just as hard to understand; they seem to arise without provocation. These "illnesses" are largely biological but can be created, reinforced or triggered by negative environments. The most common diagnoses generally include bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, PTSD and major depression. The most critical cases are people who can become suicidal.

**Suicide**

There is a difference between moderate suicidal ideation, and actually planning or attempting it. It's typical for depressed people to think about it, having lost hope and being unable to see a future in which they are productive and happy. In fact, anyone can go through these periods, and it doesn't necessarily mean anything drastic or immediate is going to happen.

The best thing to do for someone who says they "want to end it" is to talk to them. Don't be afraid! They need a chance to express their pain.

**Healing begins with connection**

The most effective medicine besides prescribed medications is peer support, especially in groups. It is amazing to hear that others feel the way you do, have gone through the same difficulties with family, jobs and friends. We have all felt hopelessness and despair. Support does not supply a cure, but it begins to relieve self-induced stigma and that which is often created by the reactions of others to your plight.

**What we don't need**

If you are a friend or relative of someone who suffers from these or similar complaints, the best thing you can do is listen to them, understand them. Don't bother giving them a list of things they should do. All that says to them is you're not listening, and you want them to be "normal." They need you to understand their feelings! Guess what? Nobody is normal. Accept them as complete, intact people. They are just like you, with a difficulty.

**Military**

If you know a military vet who has PTSD and is resistant to getting help (they do that), go to the VA and ask a few soldiers how to help them. Hooking them up with fellow vets will be a great start, and their fellows can reach them when we can't.

**Recovery is possible**

Everyone with mental or emotional difficulties needs to know that recovery is possible. They may not be able to see that yet, but don't give up on them. Loving your friends and family with mental health issues means hanging in there with them and listening a little deeper than usual.

## Barndor Story by Roger Montgomery

My dog taught me a valuable lesson about my alcohol consumption. I started experimenting with alcohol when I was fourteen, drinking cheap wine. I did that until I was sixteen, then quit drinking all together until I was twenty-three and couldn't get over a failed marriage. Then the party was on for the next thirty years.

After my mom passed away, I ran into a friend that told me she had to take her six-month-old Border Collie to the pound because he was barking excessively when she was at work. I told her I would take him. And we ended up being together 24/7 because I was a handyman and always traveling. I changed his name from Jake to Barney. My friend Doug Pettit used to call him Barney-Barndor so when Doug passed away I changed his name to Barndor, one "o" because he wasn't an object. We played ball and Frisbee often through the years and we even came up with the game Monster.

Then when I lost use of my arms that put me on the street. I had three different doctors tell me three different diagnoses so I didn't know what to do. I was a moderate drinker until this time, and then I began drinking everyday that I could afford it.

I was recycling most of the time. I didn't like to beg but was forced to a few times. Our fifth year homeless I invented a trailer you pull with a bicycle and the bed extends to seven feet so you can sleep on it. A business owner befriended me and he became my sponsor for the project of trying to get the carts into the hands of other homeless people. But my drinking got in the way of all my plans and I lost the shop. Soon after that Mike asked me not to come around his business when I had been drinking. I did anyway thinking I wasn't drunk and I thought that was what he meant. It finally got to the point where

he told me not to come back. "And I didn't get it".

I knew a couple that owned a restaurant and they would give me free meals and cash every once in awhile. And they too told me not to come around their business when I was drinking. Naturally with this illness, they told me not to come back. "And I didn't get it". It hurt my heart losing these friends but I didn't know what to do about it, drinking was just part of what I did outside of smoking pot.

Barndor was always a well-behaved dog. He would hang around camp when not on his leash. So it surprised me one night when I was getting ready for bed and couldn't find him anywhere. We were camping on a creek in Santa Rosa and I went up and down that creek most of the night calling to him. Of course I never found him. So the next day I went to Laurie's house, my friend of thirty-five years, to cry on her shoulder. As soon as I got in her driveway Barn comes running out howling and wagging his tail. He was so glad to see me, and of course me him. Laurie told me he came to her door about two in the morning moaning at the back door. She let him in, fed him which he ate little of, then jumped up on the couch laid his head on the back and started moaning looking out the window.

I took him back to camp that night and actually had him on the leash while I slept. Though this attitude relaxed over time. One night while I was refilling his water bowl I noticed, "Where is Barn?". He ran off again. This time I only looked for him a little bit then went to call Laurie to see if he was there. Sure enough he was there on the couch, moaning. This time he managed to travel clear across town.

Boy I realized I really had a problem. I didn't beat him or anything like that. But my attitude was changing in my drinking. I would curse a lot and throw things around, and Barn was picking up on it. And it



dawned on me. Both times he left I was drinking rather heavily. Then it hit me, "He didn't like being around me when I was drinking"!! I finally "Got it".

I couldn't chance him running away anymore. It was a miracle he made it to Laurie's house those two times. So I quit drinking alcohol, but continued to smoke pot. About a year later my friend of eleven years, Barndor, got an illness and I had to put him down. Soon after that I went out and continued drinking until I noticed Laurie turning away from me because of my drinking. I didn't want to lose her friendship, too. About this time I had a spiritual experience where I thought God was giving me the message that booze and pot were ruining my life, so I quit everything.

That was nine years ago. After living clean and sober all these years, I can't imagine living any other way.

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**Some Thoughts**  
**by Jennifer Shanholtzer**

Struggling with Bipolar has been an ongoing process for me, for over 28 years. I have tried to kill myself numerous times when life seemed to be too much. I have also gone out and spent thousands of dollars on credit cards during my overly ecstatic times in life. For me the process of recovery has been long and hard.

Each day I wake up and do a mental check in with myself. How am I feeling? What can I do to improve my mood and life? Having said all of that, I just wanted to share my experiences after being turned on to Interlink.

Interlink is like no other establishment that I have ever been to. It gives me hope and a purpose for my life, when I wake up each morning. Each day I am able to work on my self-improvement, through classes that they offer. Some of the classes that I attend are for my addiction, while others are for me to learn better

ways to deal with my mental illness. I know that they offer guidance with finding housing, assistance with SSI paperwork, lunch, and showers. I have not yet needed these other resources, but they are available.

While all of these things are important and are really helpful, the most important thing for me, is the feeling of belonging. I do not just feel like I am at a mental health hospital, but I feel like I am surrounded by people who understand and respect me. It is so empowering to be safe and respected by members and also by the peers. I really just want to say thank you to all my fellow members and the staff that has really made such a difference in my life.

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**Small Potatoes**  
**by Claire**

Dear Sir,

I am sorry that I am whimsical and beautiful, I am sorry that I laugh.... I am sorry that I cannot carry on a conversation, I am sorry that I feel alone with you....

I am sorry that I limit you, and I am sooo sooo sorry that I have disappointed you.

But I say, babe sorrys are small potatoes!!!

I am alive, Breathing, wanting, glad to be feeling, swelling, crying. Yes I say!!!! Living!!!

The clouds that once shielded my biggest fears now have dissipated and have left the piercing light to warm my dreams.

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**Them**  
**by ERS**

I look down at you.

I nudge you together.

I pick you up and examine you one at a time.

I hate you.  
I need you.  
I don't want to.

You look funny  
and cause discomfort.  
You make me  
lose things.

Like my feelings.

Sure, they were messy,  
But at least  
they made me  
feel alive.

And my thoughts.

Ok, so they were  
running a marathon  
on a treadmill,  
sinister shin splints  
erupting  
from time to time.  
But I felt  
creative.

And you made me  
gain one hundred  
and thirty pounds.

You tipped the scales  
in the quest for  
chemical balance.  
No doubt about it,  
you're bad news.

But I can't live  
without you.

Serotonin,  
Dopamine,  
Norepinephrine,  
report to work  
at the synaptic gap.  
The outside crew is here,  
ready to punch in  
to begin  
a day of assistance.

Brain food has been launched.  
I'm taking my meds.

### **The Ogre** by Noah Henderson

There once was an Ogre named Thad  
Who knew he was mean, he was bad  
Though he tried and he tried, he just  
couldn't hide  
Thoughts of possibility he'd had

One day as he slowly reclined  
Seeking all the peace he could find  
It suddenly occurred, his life was absurd  
The real Ogre he found, was his mind!

### **The Weather** by Claire

Her environment harsh and scornful  
She sees the storms coming, following  
her, ascending toward her.  
She does not run but freezes.  
Holds it tight inside of her.  
Like the coiled tapes of her distress and  
discontent  
The sun pierces through the clouds again  
and she can feel.  
For a moment she can feel well, at least  
half of whole.  
A light shone on her most damaged parts  
and it felt warm and like life was inviting  
her in again.

### **News from the Mental Health Co-op.**

Recovery happens with positive  
support each step of the way.

It can begin with the informational  
meeting at Goodwill and continues by  
working with the Department of  
Rehabilitation, Goodwill Redwood Empire  
and Sonoma County Behavioral Health  
Division with the focus on finding  
employment in the community.

The Good Eats Kitchen is a great  
working example of what is needed to  
succeed in the workforce. The resident  
chef, Rainey Bouchard, has trained her  
employees to believe in their abilities with

patience and the understanding of each of their own challenges.

Stacy Darlington says, "Rainey is the most inspirational person I know! When I felt I had made a mistake, she turned it into a positive."

Dan Crowley, who is employed at Grocery Outlet in Rohnert Park loves working. "Being able to hold down a job and being a significant part of society has changed my life!" Dan says, "This is the happiest I've been, except when I'm out on San Francisco Bay fishing. My future is moving forward with Happiness and Hope."

Sherri Loythan, who also went through the Good Eats Kitchen training program is now a job coach with Goodwill. "I'm more comfortable in my own skin and always want to continue learning! My goal was to get into food service or bakery work, dreams do come true! Through the experience of the Good Eats Kitchen, I realized my abilities surpassed my own expectations! My life has been changed forever!"

Within the last six weeks the Mental Health Co-Op has assisted four more clients find jobs in the community.

There are other valuable resources in our community. Interlink Self-Help Center and the Wellness and Advocacy Center enrich and support our participants in a way that carries our mission of hope and self-sufficiency.

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**Russian River  
Empowerment Center**

We are a peer support program for people looking for recovery with emotional and behavioral challenges operated by the Community Family Service Agency.

The Empowerment Center has been in operation since 2008 in Guerneville, California. We serve people in The West Sonoma County Area from Sebastopol all the way to Jenner. We recently relocated

to 14520 Armstrong Woods Rd at the Guerneville Community Church. We continue to provide many groups and activities including Writing, Music Appreciation, Yoga, a women's support group, Life skills and Daily check ins. A lunch group is prepared and cooked by members. And other activities.

We have a new shuttle van that picks up members between Sebastopol and Monte Rio. Those members are also returned later in the day to where we picked them up. We recently had an Open House in September and a Fundraising dinner with a raffle in October. We plan to have other events in the near future.

Our goal continues to be to provide a safe haven for recovery from the challenges of mental illness. We offer many resources, referrals, and encouragement to help peers continue on a path to self-sufficient and productive lives in their community, free from stigma. Please call 707-604-7264 for more information.

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**Petaluma Peer Recovery Project**

Petaluma Peer Recovery Project (PPRP) opened its doors in January of 2012. This was in response to those who wanted peer run resources in Petaluma. Initially, the plan was simple. We hoped to open a peer run center incorporating the best of what I had seen in practice at other peer run centers. The philosophy was simple. We hoped to minimize the role of paid staff. Because of my own experience in the peer community, I initially hoped that those involved could build a framework based on a few rules and guidelines. Over the last three years, this has changed. We have managed to create a peer community that is part of the community as a whole. This has given consumers in Southern Sonoma County a voice in the larger community, changing hearts and minds.



As the push towards integrated services continues, the question remains: How do we make sure that consumers do not get lost in the shuffle and are able to define the system itself? After all, the mental health industry exists because of consumers, not the other way around. I believe we at PPRP have found an answer. Even though it has not always been easy, the members of our community have found a way to reject their prejudices and embrace all, whether provider, consumer, family member, friend etc. When asked about this, I always give a simple answer. PPRP was founded as a place where stigma did not exist. How can this mean anything if consumers engage in stigma regarding non-consumers? The end result continues to amaze me: A peer run center operating from inside a county building! Seeing this on a day-to-day basis has been wonderful, inspiring me to make positive choices in my own life.

### **Corinne Camp Action Network**

Corinne Camp Action Network (CCAN) members are people with lived experience of mental health challenges coming together to keep the clients' voice alive, to work for system change, and to promote our own empowerment and mental health recovery. We formed in November of 2009, and since that time have made recommendations to the Sonoma County Behavioral Health Division which helped form the Consumer Relations Program, The Speakers Bureau (now Stories of Hope and Transformation) and the soon to open Warmline. We helped design and administer a client survey in 2011, and have held meetings in outlying areas of Sonoma County to find out what consumer concerns are. Periodically we invite Mike Kennedy, Director of Behavioral Health, to meet with the consumer community at large. Also on occasion we organize social events for our

consumer community.

We meet every second Tuesday from 3:30pm to 5:00pm at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 547 Mendocino Ave. Santa Rosa. We will no longer be meeting on the fourth Tuesdays, unless there is a special issue to meet about.

To contact us or to get on our email list go to [ccansoco@sonic.net](mailto:ccansoco@sonic.net) or call (707) 324-3498 ext. 1300. Please come and share your thoughts.

### **Stories of Hope and Transformation**

*Stories of Hope and Transformation* is an experience where people can hear inspirational stories of how their neighbors in Sonoma County have experienced and are healing from mental health challenges to build meaningful lives. Our workshops vary in length from 45 minutes to an hour-and-a-half and include an interactive educational overview with informative handouts and individuals sharing their personal recovery journeys.

Workshops can be, and have been, held throughout Sonoma County, including in the following types of venues: Community Organizations, Faith-Based Audiences, Health Centers, College Campuses, Behavioral Health Forums, Community Housing Settings, Senior Centers, Business Associations and Consumer-Operated Centers.

*Stories of Hope and Transformation* evolved out of the CCAN Speakers Bureau and is now a key project of *Transforming Peers' Lives*, an umbrella organization run collaboratively by peers to advancing experiences of hope and transformation in Sonoma County through support, consultation and services.

For more information, to book a workshop or to inquire about becoming a speaker (training provided), please email us at: [peerslives.sonoma@gmail.com](mailto:peerslives.sonoma@gmail.com).

## Peer Warmline Connection of Sonoma County

The Peer Warmline Connection of Sonoma County (aka The Warmline) will be in operation beginning January 2, 2015. Calls will be answered from 5:30pm to 9:30pm every Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening.

A warmline is different from a hotline, crisis line or suicide prevention line because it is staffed by peers and offers callers an opportunity to chat with someone who can relate to their experience and offer informal support. Referrals to community resources can also be offered.

It's ok to call if you are feeling lonely or just want to hear someone else's voice. It's fine if you just want to bounce some ideas off of someone else who could listen to you without having to worry that there will be unwelcome consequences. You can also ask to have The Warmline call you from time to time and see how you are doing. If you feel you are experiencing a crisis and need professional help, your call will be directed to a more structured level of care.

A peer-run warmline has been a dream of activists in Sonoma County at least since the opening of Interlink over a decade ago. A small group of CCAN (Corrine Camp Action Network) folks have been working diligently on a proposal for years. About a year ago, CCAN representatives met with Mike Kennedy to discuss their ideas. The result was that in early 2014 Sonoma County Behavioral Health Division issued a Request for Proposals for a "Consumer-Operated Warmline." CCAN partnered with Goodwill to design a proposal that incorporated CCAN's ideas with Goodwill's and the County's requirements. Mid-year, it was announced that the County would award the contract to Goodwill. Ann Tate, previously the Career

Lab Coordinator at the Wellness and Advocacy Center, was hired as the coordinator.

Calls will be answered by volunteers who identify as having successfully managed their own mental health challenges and are also currently engaged in a recovery practice. Volunteers fill out an application, are interviewed and participate in several hours of training and orientation. Shifts are from 5:15pm to 9:45pm on the evenings The Warmline is accepting calls. Volunteers are still being sought, and a new training will take place in the beginning of 2015.

Peers in Sonoma County can also be involved by participating in the Advisory Council. This group has supported Ann in the planning and initial decisions about opening The Warmline. Moving forward, outreach – both for volunteers to answer calls and to let people know they can call in – will be a priority. Ongoing accountability to the peer community will be assured via the Advisory Council. Open meetings will be held frequently, and opportunities to give feedback about one's experience using The Warmline will be possible. Ideas and suggestions are welcome!

For further information about volunteering to answer calls, do outreach or becoming involved in the Advisory Council, please call Ann Tate at 707-565-7809, or email her at [atate@gire.org](mailto:atate@gire.org). We look forward to serving you.

## Interlink Self-Help Center

Interlink offers 35+ opportunities for members to connect in groups, classes, and socialization activities each week. We provide one-on-one peer support, help with community resources, and host patients' rights clinics, monthly forums and more. We have quite a range of groups, such as Learning Together - Spanish and English, Coping with Anxiety, Managing

Depression and Mania, Dealing with PTS, and classes such as Introduction to Peer Support, and Mental Health and Addiction Support.

Thanks to MHSA funding we have a Dual Diagnosis Consumer Counselor position which is filled by Jennifer Peoples. Jenn is a certified Smart Recovery trainer and facilitates a number of groups for members that want support dealing with substances, such as alcohol, drugs and food, as well as behavioral issues, such as shopping, gambling, etc. Jenn's groups are well attended and we get constant feedback about the positive impact these groups have on member's lives. Jenn facilitates weekly LifeRing and Relapse Prevention meetings, as well as Expressing Creativity where participants have made tie die shirts, recovery collages, mandalas, spin art, recovery notebooks in support of their recovery and Piñatas for our parties.

Claire Newman, our Activities Director, leads the coordination of our numerous activities, including our parties and our *Wednesday Activities* when we celebrate birthdays, play games, make thank you cards and much more.

Interlink is open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 to 3:00 except Thursdays when we close at 2:00. You can check us out online at [interlinkselfhelpcenter.org](http://interlinkselfhelpcenter.org).

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**Welcome to  
Wellness and Advocacy**

The Wellness and Advocacy Center is a peer-run, mental health, self-help program for individuals living with mental health difficulties in Sonoma County. Funded by the Mental Health Services Act and open since April 2007, the Center offers a safe environment to pursue personal recovery goals, learn and upgrade computer skills, gain assistance

with employment pursuits and participate in a variety of creative expressions.

Additionally, the Center offers a place for members to socialize and make connections with each other, gain knowledge of and assistance with community resources, and receive one-to-one or group peer support, which aims to encourage each person in his or her self-directed recovery goals.

The Center also provides wellness support through its garden project. Three organic gardens host individual plots for members to plant vegetables or flowers and to offer natural, organic food in season to the Centers' members.

At this peer-run Center, we strive to live and model the recovery tools and services we might use and try to live by. We recently revisited our mission statement to ensure it is truly in line with peer values: "Together we are moving toward mental health recovery in a safe, non-judgmental peer community".

We invite you to visit the Center and find your own way towards recovery and wellness. The Center is free of charge and open Monday through Friday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and on Wednesdays 11-3 p.m. We are here to join you and support you on your journey!

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**Editor's Note**

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the contents of this first CRP Newsletter. This project has been underway since the beginning of 2014. Due to staffing patterns, there may be some submissions that were not included in this edition of the newsletter. Please contact Amy Breckenridge, Program Manager of the Wellness and Advocacy Center with any concerns, suggestions or feedback: [Abreckenridge@gire.org](mailto:Abreckenridge@gire.org)

The next issue of Peer Voices Now! will be published in March 2015. Please send submissions to Amy as well.