

LOOKING FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE IN THE MIDST OF AN UNPRECEDENTED STATE BUDGET CRISIS

Despite the immense turmoil and bleak prospects for the State economy, ACMHAI hosted a whirlwind of events in the spring to help set a course for long term policy change and supporting best practices for community mental health. The flurry of activity began with a successful policy forum and legislative reception, cohosted by IPHA for the second year. We admittedly focused on the budget, but thanks to George Hovanec's expert analysis and our legislative consultants' keen observations, we were able to come away with key messages to communicate to our legislators and communities.

Next, in conjunction with Champaign County's anti-stigma initiative, the sponsorship of a mental health themed movie, "Begging Naked" at the Ebertfest, ACMHAI held a best practices training on April 24 to address some of the hot topics and soon-to-be widely disseminated practices in mental health. The training included integrated dual disorders treatment and primary/behavioral health care integration, both skillfully presented by Tony Zipple of Thresholds and his staff. We look forward to hearing an update on these programs next year. The group, comprised of mental health board staff, board members, and providers, also learned about Mental Health First Aid, much like physical first aid in concept with an anti-stigma focus at its core. This program can be used in schools, work places, and in the general public. An upcoming training for leaders will be held in Chicago, August 3—7.

The last in the series of events hosted by ACMHAI was the behavioral health summit held prior to IPHA's annual meeting on April 28, entitled "Advocacy Works".

(cont'd on p. 8)

From the President...

In considering the subject of "unity" regarding the general field of human services, including mental health, developmental disability and substance abuse, the phrase "herding cats" comes to mind. Even with the best of intentions, the various parties in human services can seldom come to complete agreement, or unity, on what is needed and how to make it happen.

Service providers, rightfully concerned about the existence of their agencies, need to concentrate on adequate and prompt compensation for the services they deliver. Consumers and their advocates recognize the signs of a poorly designed and inadequately funded system because they and their family members are the ones waiting for services. Local mental health authorities and the counties and townships that support them,

as well as local units of government that support needed services without a mandate, do so in light of this underfunded system. Our elected officials and their appointed department administrators, in good faith, are presumably doing the best they can with the resources they are given.

The one unifying factor for all these groups is and must be the desire to improve the quality of life for the residents of Illinois who live with mental illness, developmental disabilities and substance use disorders. Whether you fund, plan, advocate for or provide these services, the bottom line, the "end game", the "prize" has got to be improving the quality of life for our neighbors in Illinois.

(cont'd on p. 2)

"The policy challenge is to encourage the integration of people with mental illness into the mainstream...at the same time recognizing unique features of their circumstances that... social and medical insurance programs must take into account to effectively serve them."

—Richard Frank and Sherry Glied
Better But Not Well: Mental Health Policy in the United States since 1950

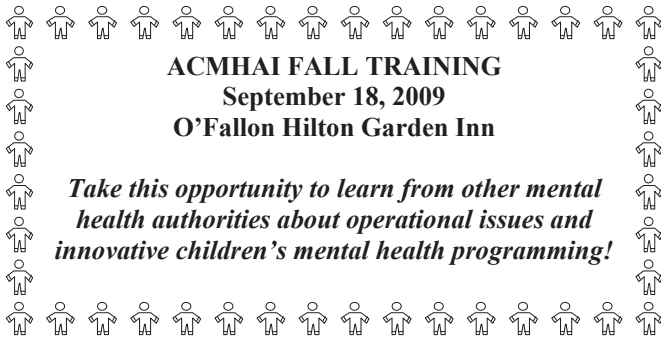
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(From the President, cont'd from p. 1)

Unity, in these trying times, must also be a major consideration for our association, ACMHAI. We are a very diverse group, from small townships or municipal mental health boards with no staff and an \$80,000 levy, to large county-wide authorities with budgets of over \$11 million. Interests and priorities can differ a great deal in such a group. But we must always remember that we have fewer differences than what we have in common. From the smallest to the largest 708 boards, the most common element we share is in our name. We are the mental health "authority". With the title comes the right and the responsibility to help determine what is most beneficial for the people we serve, the residents of Illinois. We can do this best when we all work together and set aside our own priorities to make us all more effective in what we do.

—Jerry J. Murphy
President



ACMHAI FALL TRAINING
September 18, 2009
O'Fallon Hilton Garden Inn

Take this opportunity to learn from other mental health authorities about operational issues and innovative children's mental health programming!



Danise Habun, Hanover Township MHB Director, addresses the 60-member audience at the "Developing Collaborative Solutions 3rd Annual Community Planning Meeting" on April 29th. The result of the meeting was to create work groups to develop collaborative processes for issues ranging from funding to mentoring to WRAP.



ANTI-STIGMA INITIATIVES!

We are pleased to see the fruits of our anti-stigma initiative, seeds planted through small grants from ACMHAI, the Say It Out Loud campaign, and community mental health authorities' own dedicated funding. ACMHAI members have hosted mental health related films: Champaign County MHB sponsored "Begging Naked" and "What's Eating Gilbert Grape?" at the Ebertfest. "Begging Naked" is a heartbreaking documentary of Elise, a talented artist with schizophrenia who becomes homeless. The director sold all of Elise's paintings the day of the screening. The Champaign County Anti-Stigma Alliance also hosted a free community screening of "What's Eating Gilbert Grape?" followed by a panel discussion at the end of Ebertfest. The film is about a boy with developmental disabilities and his family. About 200 people attended with more than 50 students from Lincoln's Challenge Academy. St. Clair County MHB sponsored two screenings of "Jumping Off Bridges" (see p. 4 for details) and hosted its 3rd annual Erase the Stigma conference. Other members, McHenry County and Hanover Township MHBs, have sponsored theatrical and arts events (see following pages), while Oak Park Township MHB hosted a speaking engagement by Patty Duke. DeWitt County MHB's anti-stigma coalition, "Heads Up! Community Advocates for Mental Wellness", presented a panel on schizophrenia and sponsored a health expo. More anti-stigma efforts are sprouting up all the time and members are able to share experiences with others, exchanging ideas and referring speakers.

When I see pictures from the events and read the stories, I have renewed faith that we can make a difference in our communities, and there is hope that individuals and families dealing with mental illness, addictions and developmental disabilities will one day experience true acceptance and the quality of life they deserve.

— Cheryl Ramirez

STIGMA = SHAME, DISGRACE, DISHONOR

Anti-stigma initiatives provide safe places and opportunities that allow open dialog between the general public and people living with mental illness, addictions, and developmental disabilities, with the intended outcome of acceptance and living with dignity, grace, and honor in the community.

Is there a cure for mental illness?*

What are some signs you can see visually that a person has a mental illness?

When will laws change and what can we do so that people with mental illness are not treated different than anyone else?

How do you tell your parents if you feel you want to commit suicide or if you are depressed?

How can you tell if someone you know might commit suicide or might be reaching out for help and not just having a bad day?

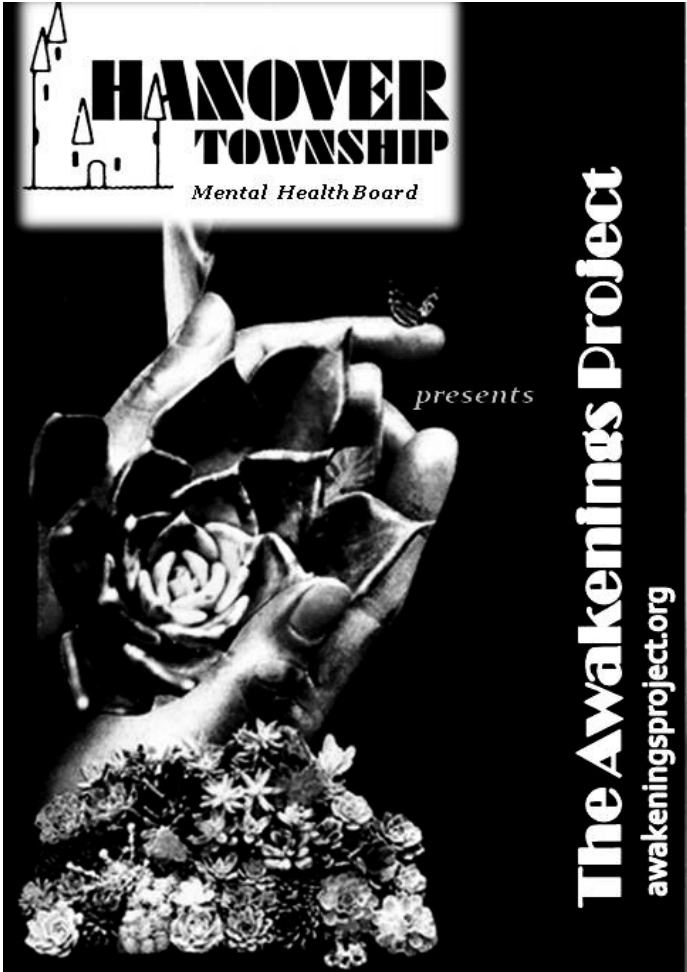
How should the education system become more involved in helping the community erase the stigma of mental illness?

How do you approach a friend who seems to be suffering from undiagnosed mental illness?

*Actual questions from St. Clair County Mental Health Board's "Jumping Off Bridges" anti-stigma film event on May 7, 2009.



↑ Say It Out Loud Campaign representatives from St. Clair County pose for a picture at one of the "Jumping Off Bridges" performances. The event had 250 in attendance- a cultural diverse representation of youth, young adults, and parents. There were so many questions about mental health and suicide for the panel that with the time that was available panelists were only able to respond to several questions. One of the local agencies posted all the questions and responses on its website for the audience.



→ Art work displayed during HanoverTownship's Awakenings Art Show-May 4, 2009.



A vignette from the *Thresholds of a Family* production shares insights into a suicide attempt.

McHenry County hosts events to celebrate Mental Health Month

The McHenry County Mental Health Board hosted two events at the Woodstock Opera House on May 2, 2009 to educate the community regarding issues of mental health. The first McHenry County Behavioral Health Foundation Visions of Hope Awards were presented to two individuals who made significant contributions to heighten awareness of mental health issues. Immediately following the Visions of Hope Awards, the Thresholds Theater Arts Project presented a unique opportunity to learn from stories shared by persons who have experienced mental illness.

State Senator Pamela Althoff received a Visions of Hope Award for her willingness to learn about and fight for issues of domestic violence, mental illness, developmental disabilities, substance abuse, and traumatic brain injury. Additionally, she has supported legislation to expand coverage of Medicaid-covered psychiatric services and to require individualized programs for autistic children. Another award was presented to Michael Deibel, an individual who struggled to regain speech and mobility after sustaining a catastrophic traumatic brain injury and is now a speaker for the McHenry County Chapter of the ThinkFirst program.

The *Thresholds of a Family* theater arts performance followed the awards ceremony, blending narrative, music, poetry, and movement to relate personal experiences with humor and sometimes raw emotions. Numerous vignettes shared insights into the complex experiences, thoughts, and feelings brought about by the symptoms of mental illness.

When asked about his reasons for participating in the theater arts project, Nicholas Susic said "This is a chance to tell my story. It makes me feel better to talk about my life and experiences. Systems of Care are getting better. There is more awareness now, and patients are not drugged like they used to be."

Dale Goulding, assistant director of the performance observes that "This theater is powerful and honest. It talks to the heart. Our group lives in a place that other actors can only visit. To experience this theater changes a person. It makes a lasting impact. It's real people, with real issues telling their stories."

Through telling their stories cast members become introspective about their illness. "I can imagine how my life would have gone if I had not gotten ill," said Robert Lundin, co-founder of the Awakenings Project, an organization for people with mental illness to support visual, literary, and theatrical arts. "My life would have been predictable and happy. Mental illness has been a terrific challenge in my life. It has torn me down, but it has also given me an opportunity to grow like I would have never grown before."

National Institute of Mental Health statistics show that about one in four adults suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year. Community education events such as these strive to open communication and humanize the experience of mental illness and recovery.

The presentation of *Thresholds of a Family* was made possible through the support of ACMHAI, The Thresholds Theater Arts Project, the McHenry County Behavioral Health Foundation, and the McHenry County Mental Health Resource League.

— Barbara Jehl, McHenry County MHB



Beverly Thomas, president of the McHenry County Behavioral Health Foundation (from left), State Senator Pamela Althoff and Michael Deibel, recipients of the first McHenry County Behavioral Health Foundation Visions of Hope Awards, and Sandy Lewis, executive director of the McHenry County Mental Health Board, gather at the end of the ceremony on May 2, 2009 at the Stage Left Cafe of the Woodstock Opera house.



Debbie Humphrey, Cherryl Ramirez, Peter Tracy, Lisa DeVivo, ACMHAI Members, and Richard Carroll, Oak Park Board President, enjoy dinner and discussion with our esteemed conference speakers, Josh Taylor, Fred Frese, Bill Emmet, Dan Weisburd, and Kevin Smith (taking picture).

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By Terry Steczo

The last few days of the spring session were very reminiscent of a train derailment, but at this point in time we're not sure when the rescuers, supposedly on the way, will arrive. It was hoped that with a new Governor and a new cooperative attitude in the Capitol that an overtime session could be avoided. Not. The \$12 billion budget fissure requires new revenue to close and there's the rub. A majority of legislators, to this point, have been unwilling to take that step. Without it, disaster looms. With it, legislative careers may be at stake. Even with the legislative reluctance there is simply going to have to be a solution and expect higher taxes, cuts, and programmatic modifications to be part of it.

Last Saturday the Illinois Senate approved a 67% increase in the state income tax along with property tax relief, a broadening of the state sales tax, and an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit. It passed with one vote to spare. And, even with the increase in new revenue it provided, the projected budget shortfall would have been \$2 billion. In the House, support for any new revenue by way of income taxes was sparse. In caucus votes it appeared that a temporary income tax might fare better, yet on a recorded vote on Sunday it managed only 42 of the required 60 votes to pass. As a result, the legislature approved a draconian 50% budget before adjourning early Monday morning. Legislative leaders and the Governor will be meeting through the month of June to try to reach a compromise before the new fiscal year begins on July 1.

Prompt Payment Legislation Update

House Bill 237 (Tracy) requires that payment of bills submitted under Article V of the Illinois Public Aid Code must be made within 60 days (instead of 30 days) before a 2% interest penalty is added. It also amends the State Prompt Payment Act to include within the definition of "goods or services", prevention, intervention, or treatment services and supports for persons with developmental disabilities, mental health services, alcohol and substance abuse services, rehabilitation services, and early intervention services provided by a vendor, which includes but is not limited to a licensed community-based provider. House Bill 237 passed both Houses and will go to the Governor.

HB 3923 (Harris/Steans)

The fate of **HB 3923** is still not clear. The legislation that was approved by the legislature provides some reforms, but meager compared to the original intent. The amended bill does have language relating to an external review process for denied claims, similar to the process used by HMOs, extended to PPOs. A uniform application was also approved, along with reports that will have to be provided to the Director of Insurance that will then be available on the web.

The meat of HB 3923, however, was amended out of the bill before final consideration by the Senate. That substance would have created the Minimum Medical Loss Ratio Law as a new Article in the Illinois Insurance Code. It provides that any company selling a health benefit plan shall spend at least 75% of premium dollars on medical care.

When the legislature adjourned on May 31 the House had not yet approved the amendments that had been approved by the Senate. If the House refused to accept them and the Senate, in turn, refused to remove them the measure would die. With no House action having been taken the last few

Prior to adjournment Republicans offered amendments to the budget that reduced costs by way of changes to managed care as well as budget cuts. Those ideas will certainly be on the table as negotiations begin and continue. Even with a successful discussion on spending there will still be the huge question of convincing enough legislators to make the ultimate legislative sacrifice and vote for tax hikes. With the vote requirement to have legislation effective immediately increased as of June 1 to a three-fifths from a simple majority, it may be a while before the train is put back on the track.

Prior to adjournment the General Assembly did approve a new capital construction bill with legalization of video poker, small expansion of sales taxes, online sales of lottery tickets, privatization of lottery management and increasing some vehicle fees. Also, legislation was approved to expand the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), enact campaign funding reform, lobbying, ethics and procurement reform. Information about specifics contained in those reform bills will be provided in the near future.

days of session it appears that the House sponsors may not be thrilled to accept what the Senate thought was an acceptable start to reform.

Senate Bill 1750 – PTELL

SB 1750 was approved by both the House and Senate and will shortly be sent to the Governor for his approval. It allows an explanation of ballot propositions to increase the "limiting rate" in tax capped counties. The Illinois Property Tax Extension Limitation Law is a complex statute and interpretations of its provisions are also complex. What should be a simple modification has become a source of numerous conversations and interpretations to make certain that there is no misunderstanding of the impact of our suggested change.

As the language of the bill currently stands all tax capped local governments would provide an explanation of the ballot proposition when attempting to increase their "limiting rate". There still may be a need to clarify some portion of the Act relating to the ballot explanation, but it is fairly certain at this point that the quest to make this modification should have a successful ending.



ACMHAI ANNOUNCEMENTS



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

June 15	Vermilion County Human Services Forum	Danville
June 29	Mental Health and Aging Summit	Chicago
July 23-24	NACBHDD Meeting	Nashville, TN
September 18-19	ACMHAI Quarterly Meeting and Training	O'Fallon Hilton Garden Inn

(Looking, continued from p. 1)

We learned about successful advocacy efforts that have enhanced the behavioral health care system and about new programs that can greatly improve the welfare of our communities.

The overall goal of the summit was to show that advocacy does work and to learn how to elevate behavioral and other public health issues to policy and funding top priorities. Topics included efforts to ensure mental health is in the national health reform proposals that are being considered; Another Kind of Valor, a DVD training series for treatment of active duty service members and veterans of war; recovery of people with mental illness; successful advocacy efforts and messages for people with substance use disorders, and Illinois drug policy and recommended changes based on examination and comparison of other states' more effective drug policies.

I must admit that I was in awe as I sat with several of the speakers the night before the conference (*see p. 6*). Here were true reformers of mental health systems in the United States: Bill Emmet of the Campaign for Mental Health Reform, who is the voice of our national mental health associations; Fred Frese, NAMI board member and Psychologist, who speaks candidly from his own life experiences and forever changes his audiences' perceptions about people with mental illness; and Dan Weisburd, a successful director and writer, who dedicated his life's work to educating the public and improving mental health treatment, now focusing especially on veterans. How fascinating it was to hear about how they got to this point in their lives!

We can become mired in doomsday budgets and scarcity, but we have to look forward and plan for a future when our clients will not be seen as "second class citizens" or afterthoughts in the funding hierarchy. Although Human Services do not have priority status with the state currently, we need to act as though we are a top priority by advocating for fair and dedicated funding, so that some day in the future we will experience this reality.

— *Cherryl Ramirez*

If you would like additional information about any of the articles, please call 217-369-5168 or email acmhai@shout.net.
Also check out the ACMHAI website, www.acmhai.org.

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