



The AMI Lion

We are excited to bring you another issue of the AMI Lion. This month, we are focusing on bringing awareness to the importance and benefits that working has on mental health. In August, we will be celebrating Supported Employment's 5 year anniversary. (See flyer on back for details on the celebration) We hope that you come visit us on August 18th to come see and celebrate the impact this program has had on individuals in our services and our community!

Member of the Month:

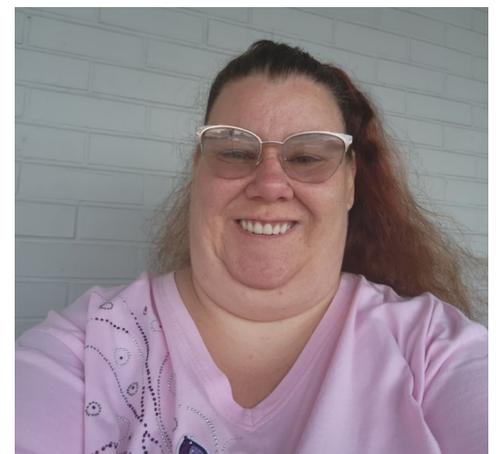
This month, Dawn was chosen as our Member of the Month. Dawn has been a Supported Employment participant for a few years, and recently obtained employment! We asked Dawn about her journey to employment, and she shared, "I was talking with my family and AMI staff about how I was sitting in my house too much and how it was making me depressed. They thought I should get out to be around people more, and suggested that maybe I should go out to Gabes to apply for a job. I called Gabes and asked them if they were hiring. My family and AMI staff encouraged me to fill out an application. Then, Gabes called me for an interview. I had support from Psych Rehab staff with me for my interview, and I got hired! We were so excited when I got hired. I've been working there a few weeks now and I love my job. I get excited to go to work. I got a gift card for getting a lot of people to sign up for a rewards card! I think what stopped me from getting a job before was my negative thoughts from my mental health. I also think working in fast food wasn't my calling. I had to find the right job for me. AMI has supported me in all of my decisions. They also helped me to find a place to work that suited my interests. My confidence to work was built through counting money and practicing skills at Jefferson Café. The Café also helped me learn and how to communicate with people instead of getting angry and walking off." Great work Dawn!

Inside this issue

Jen.....	2
MH and Employment.....	3
Technology.....	4
AMI Choir.....	4
Yoga.....	4
Sunshine and MH.....	5
Spirituality.....	5
YAYA.....	5

Our Mission

- AMI Inc. of Washington-Greene Counties provides an array of recovery oriented services to individuals who experience mental health challenges or co-occurring disorders. Our services are based on each individual's strengths and their desire to achieve personal goals. We accomplish our mission by inspiring hope, encouraging self-advocacy and assisting in the development of natural supports within each person's community.



Outstanding Community Member: Jen Slaughter

With the focus of this month's newsletter being on the power of employment in individual's lives, we wanted to highlight community member Jen Slaughter for her successes in this area. Jen was a former member of AMI programming who became employed at AMI and since has moved on to work at ARC Human Services at one of their residential facilities. Jen is a shining model of how the recovery process works, and how employment can truly enhance your life by helping you achieve things you never thought possible.

What is your experience with mental health?

"I have a mental health diagnosis and I have a history of harming myself in the past. My diagnoses are bipolar, anxiety and PTSD."

Why did you want to work?

"To me, working was being 'normal.' I wanted to show that I am capable of working, and I wanted to be like everyone else out in the work field. I wanted to earn what I bought and wanted to give back to others. The mental health services I was involved with that helped me find recovery made such an impact on my life. This gave me the drive to want to work at these places and give back to them what was given to me."

How did you get started with working?

"I volunteered at AMI for a long time. I eventually filled out an application and went through the interview process and was hired on as a receptionist. Then, I went on to do the peer mentoring training and became a peer mentor. After that, I went on to become a Certified Peer Specialist. Eventually, I took the leap to work in one of the group homes that I used to live in with ARC Human Services."

What challenges did you face when you decided to enter the work field?

"I think my main struggle was that I was lazy. I didn't want to get out of bed, get showered and ready for work, and then be on my feet all day long. I wanted to work, but it interfered with my free time. Once I started working, I began to see the positives. As I made it a routine to wake up, take my medication, eat breakfast, shower, brush my teeth, jump on Washington Rides to get to work, it became easier. Once I got to work, I was ok. Then I would get back on the rides system, go home and do my thing. I was getting a paycheck from working, which was great. When I started working, I was on Social Security Disability for my mental health. I got assistance from Welfare as well, SNAP benefits and health insurance. As I started to work, there were only so many hours I could work before they would start cutting my Social Security funds. I gradually moved up the ladder of not needing those benefits anymore. I now work full time and am off of those benefits. I had a huge fear of not receiving benefits at first. I was fearful of losing that security blanket. I learned through this process that there is a program called MAWD that when you are working, you can get help towards paying for your medical insurance. Eventually, I moved into working at ARC full-time and now I get benefits from them. I have been off Social Security for about 5 years now. This makes me feel so accomplished! I didn't want to rely on this for the rest of my life, and I reached that goal."

How long have you been working?

"I have been working full time for about 6 years now."

What coping skills do you use when you are stressed?

"I have learned that stepping back, taking some deep breaths, sitting in my car, and praying helps me. Also, if I feel like I need a mental health day, I request time off to take care of myself. I have learned how to do it the right way. Different jobs have different policies, so knowing your job's policies regarding attendance, taking time off, and PTO is very important. I also know now to listen to my body and mental health. I recognize stress, what I can handle and what I can't, and advocate to my employer for schedule changes when needed. I know myself now and want to sustain my job and the life I have today."

How has working impacted your life?

"It has made me a better person. It's given me more confidence in myself. I have a routine and schedule that I follow now, that helps. It feels so good to know that I earn the things that I have now."



A Story on Mental Health and The Journey to Employment

There are so many benefits to being employed, but the journey is not always easy. Employment can be hard. Additional challenges can be added to the employment journey for individuals with mental health challenges. Education on the benefits of employment can be beneficial, however, some barriers, including not wanting to get out of bed to go to work, coping with the anxiety of talking to people, insecurities, and fears (to name a few) can hold many people back from obtaining employment. Here at Supported Employment, we try to work through these fears and challenges with individuals. Although obtaining and maintaining employment isn't easy, we are here to tell you, it is possible! We talked with a former member, Mary, so that she could share her experience with her employment journey with you, to offer some hope and share her success. Mary tried many jobs before she found the right one for her. She has been employed now for over a year, with a job that is flexible, and provides her with benefits!

“As a person in recovery, the job search process was hard for me. First, finding a job that was willing to work with me in regards to my disability was hard. I always forget that it is ok to ask for the needed accommodations. Next, being an adult diagnosed with Autism and ADHD, I feel burnt out quite often after a long day of dealing with people and putting on a nice face at my job.”

“After a long search, I finally found a work from home job and this seems to be the best option for me. It allows me the flexibility to remain at home where I am comfortable and also still make an income to be able to live independently. With a remote job, it does take a lot of determination and self awareness to be able to show up and do what you have to do each day, but I lean on my supports for help when I need it. I found this to be a good fit for me because I can work around my schedule for appointments and meetings with my CPS, along with earning an income to provide for myself. Overall, I want people to know that finding a job while in recovery may be a hard and drawn out process, but it is possible. It takes dedication and motivation to find the right fit for you.”

“Mental Health and mental balance is critical to leading a healthy life.” - Mariel Hemingway

Congratulations to Marrah for obtaining her Child and Family Resiliency Practitioner Certification (CFRP). Marrah earned this certification through the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association. This certification is designed to gear the Psychiatric Rehabilitation process towards children, under 18, to help them live successful, meaningful lives in their community.



Technology Improves Overall Quality of Life

Recently, AMI received a grant from the Washington Community Foundation to purchase laptops for program participants to use while on site. This has been a great enhancement to the resources we are able to use to help individuals achieve their goals and enhance their overall quality of life. Research shows that access to technology improves people's overall quality of life by offering individuals the following: making communication more convenient, easier access to information, and providing better opportunities for learning.

The goal of this grant is to support more individuals in obtaining employment, by giving them the resources and accessibility to complete online applications, update their resumes, and get connected with employers in their community through creating and learning how to use an email account. Recently, one of our facilitators was able to use the new computers to help individuals apply for a free tablet, which they could obtain and use in their homes. Ten individuals in programming were able to receive their own tablet. When asked how these tablets have improved their overall quality of life, one shared, "Now, I am able to listen to music I want to, wherever I go. I'm not just limited to the radio. Music is something I use to cope and to get me in a better mood." Another member shared, "I love my tablet! It keeps me busy, so I don't have time to get in my head. I use it for music and internet." Groups also focus on learning how to navigate the computer, to build individuals' confidence on how to navigate computers and tablets. In today's world, this is valuable and needed skill. Thank you Washington Community Foundation for helping individuals not only enhance their ability to obtain employment, but also for helping individuals become more connected to their community and the resources they desire.

Meet the Choir

Research shows that singing can enhance mental health. Singing enhances your mood, social connectedness, and reduces stress. Singing can make you a happier person. This has encouraged AMI to form a choir with group members. Their goal is to prepare to have their first performance at AMI's annual Christmas Party, and potentially go caroling during the holiday season to various nursing homes to boost the mood of fellow community members. We are looking forward to seeing how this group develops.



One of AMI's CPRP's, Mel, recently obtained her Yoga Certification through a grant received by AMI from the Stauton Farm Foundation. Mel has been able to merge Psychiatric Rehabilitation principles and values with yoga to be able to teach this holistic intervention to group members using the Psychiatric Rehabilitation process. Group members have learned about the benefits of yoga on mental health, and have had the opportunity to access yoga on site at AMI through this grant. This has been a great opportunity for group members, and AMI as a whole.



Impact of Sunshine on Mental Health

With summer in full swing, we wanted to shed light on the importance and impact the sun can have on mental wellness. Being outside in the sunshine can boost your serotonin (your happy hormone). Also, outside activities usually revolve around mood boosting activities. Attending a cookout with friends can increase your socialization and support network, while enjoying a good burger. Swimming can give you a much needed cool down in the summer heat, while participating in physical activity. Taking a hike can allow you to immerse yourself in the beauty of the nature, while also getting in some exercise. Additional outdoor activities can include:

- Taking a trip to Kennywood or Sandcastle
- Attending a Wild Things or Pirates Game
- Going mini golfing
- Visiting the local Farmers Market
- Picking your own flowers and veggies at Bedner's Farm
- Taking a walk around Canonsburg Lake
- Going on a picnic



Spirituality Group

At AMI, we strive to continue to practice and implement the core values and principles of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and recovery. To support full community integration, we recently started facilitating a spirituality group in our Psychiatric Rehabilitation Program. This group provides a safe space where individuals can explore and learn about different spirituality and religious practices. The group is also working to support individuals to get connected with congregations they wish to be a part of. We recognize the benefits of having a sense of belonging and connectedness where individuals can participate in the religious and spiritual activities they find most supportive, and the impact this can have on each of their recovery journeys. This has prompted individuals to enhance their community integration and natural supports.



Youth and Young Adult Summer Outing

AMI Youth and Young Adults recently attended an outdoor picnic hosted by Youth Move PA. This event was great for the YAYA to socialize, build their support networks, and attend educational workshops to help them improve on their leadership skills, advocacy, and learn ways to have fun in their recovery processes. One youth shared, "This gave me a place to learn how to deal with my triggers around people that understand me." Another shared that they rarely have the courage or opportunity to leave the house, so this was a nice option for them. Thank you Youth Move PA for this great outing for the Youth and Young Adults.



YOU'RE INVITED TO AMI'S SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT CELEBRATION



Please join us as we celebrate 5 years of supporting individuals who experience mental health challenges to find and maintain employment. We will have food and coffee provided by Supported Employment's very own Jefferson Cafe, DJ, employment resources, and success stories. There will also be a **PIE IN THE FACE FUNDRAISER** to support Jefferson Cafe featuring a special guest.

**At Washington
Park, Stone
Pavillion
on
Monday, August
14th 2023
from
11AM-2PM**



**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT MELISSA
(878)212-3927 OR
MGARDNER@HOPE4WELLNESS.ORG**

Save the Date

For the 14th Annual AMI, Inc.

Poetry and Fine Art Show



October 20th, 2023
11:00 AM to 6:00 PM

at

“Venue 54”

54 West Wheeling Street
Washington PA, 15301

*Free Admission

&

Complimentary Meal
for all Patrons*

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and Developmental Services

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SOCIALIZATION FOR PEOPLE IN
MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY**

**907 JEFFERSON AVE.
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**TUESDAYS & THURSDAYS
4:30 PM-7:00 PM**

CALL KATELYN AT 724-228-5211 FOR MORE INFORMATION