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### 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.

## The AMI Lion

We are excited to bring you another issue of the AMI Lion. With May being Mental Health Awareness month, this issue will focus on bringing more attention to mental health, and ways that we can all spread awareness in our community. We will be extending our mailing list to hope to reach more people, providing resources for support with Mental Health, as well as highlighting the way that mental health impacts individuals in different ways.

### **Member of the Month: Andrew**

We would like to take a moment to recognize Andrew as our member of the month. Andrew recently successfully discharged from our Supported Employment program, and is going to school for culinary arts at Hiram G Andrews. Andrew's dream job is to open his own restaurant or diner one day. Andrew was able to learn skills in the Supported Employment program, to help prepare him for school. He became a leader in Jefferson Café, and was able to learn skills like self-discipline, organization, communication, and motivational skills, to help him prepare for the work ahead of him. When asked how AMI helped Andrew achieve his goal, he shared, "AMI gave me the courage that I could go to school and not be scared on my first day." Andrew is a role model for anyone, proving that you can do anything you put your mind to.



Andrew in his new dorm!

## Outstanding Community Member: Julie M.

This month, we would like to feature Julie M. as our outstanding community member. Julie has been to AMI multiple times over the past few years, volunteering her time to practice mock interviews with members of our Supported Employment program. Julie has a background in management and hiring, so she was able to share her experience with members. For the members, the practice allowed them to boost their confidence when going to interviews in the community. Julie also spends time volunteering with various organizations in the community, and is always willing to help others.



### **How have community organizations impacted your life personally?**

There have been times in my life where I have needed the support of organizations within the community. People always stepped up and were there to help me, and now that I am in a place to give back, I want to be able to do the same.

### **What is your connection to mental health recovery?**

Mental health and addiction are both a part of my personal story. I have been in recovery from addiction since 2011 and have always battled with anxiety and depression throughout my life. I have been able to find freedom from these things and want to help others do the same.

### **Can you tell us about your job?**

I am a real estate agent with Keller Williams Realty. I help people buy and sell homes and I love the whole process. It is an honor to be part of such a significant purchase in people's lives and it's a privilege I don't take lightly.

### **What other ways do you like to give back to the community?**

My husband and I are very active in our church, Champion Christian Center. I am involved in outreach that ministers to people in the community, including women's halfway houses, as well as serving at the church on Sundays.

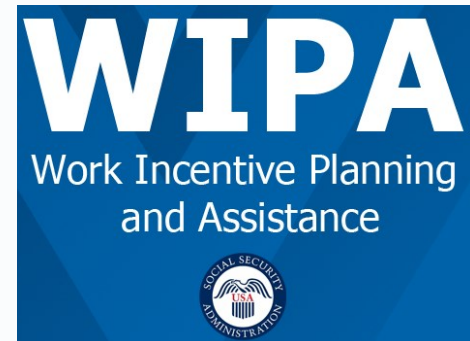
### **What do you do for fun?**

I enjoy spending time with my husband Andy, and daughter Kendall. We like to go roller skating, biking, and play games. I also enjoy reading and music!

## Know Your Benefits!

Did you know that even if you receive Social Security or Disability benefits, you can still work? Do you know the benefits that working has on your mental health?

Working is a great way to socialize, support mental wellness, and receive extra money to help create the life you want. If you receive benefits, but are looking for a part time job, reach out to the benefits counselling agency, WIPA, at 1-888-829-9426 for information on how working could impact your benefits.



## What Does Mental Health Look Like?

**Mental health is not always displayed as “I can’t get out of bed because of my depression.” It shows up in people’s lives in unique ways. To help spread awareness, we interviewed different people in our programs and in our community to paint a well rounded picture of how mental health impacts people’s lives in a variety of ways.**

“When I have a to-do list, I get overwhelmed. This heightens my anxiety. I don’t know where to start. I get short with people around me, and can be mean because of my mental health”

“When I am struggling with my mental health, I get bad thoughts, sometimes I get suicidal thoughts. I call Crisis when this happens, try to do positive things, and surround myself with positive people.”

“I was depressed. I wanted to check out of life. I didn't want to be bothered and wanted give up. I didn't want to show up to work, I didn't want to answer my phone, I didn't want to do anything at all. I turned to using drugs to cope with my mental health, which made it worse. My mental health challenges are getting better. I stay busy and focused. I fill my life with positive things now.”

“I am a mother of 2. I am diagnosed with depression and anxiety. There are great days and there are not so great days. Being a mother, it is heartbreaking to know that depression can lead me to wanting to crawl into bed at 4:30 in the afternoon and not want to get out. My children are 17 and 18. They want dinner, they want to go shopping, they want to have their mother attend all of their events and cheer for them, they want to be able to rely on their mother whenever they need something. Sometimes I want to order take out for dinner and pull the blanket over my head and sleep. And sometimes I do, because it makes me feel better in the moment. But is it better? After times like these, I feel like I let them down. I cry and get more depressed. This looks sad, but the beautiful thing is that it's ok. Depression for me, doesn't have a script. I don't know when it is going to take hold of me. However, being that I work in recovery, I know what it looks like, and when I begin to feel these symptoms, I use the skills that I learned from peers, co-workers, and the evidenced-based toolkits that are out there to help me. I know that I can call my support system when I don't want to make dinner. I know that I can give myself a break and order the takeout food some nights. I know that it is ok to not want to get out of bed some days, but I also know that I feel better when I get out of bed. I know this because I learned about my depression. I learned that there are resources out there to help me have a better quality of life. “

“It impacts my self esteem. I start to doubt myself, my relationships and my abilities. This then causes me to freeze up, and starts the negative self-talk cycle where I tell myself I cant do anything right.”

“My mental health has had and can still have a direct impact on every area of my life. It impacts everything from my family and friend relationships, to work, to my self-esteem. I can pull away from my relationships, become distant, and get locked in my negative thoughts. It also effects the little things in between, like my financial stability, my physical health, and my daily routine. There are times I can't stop my mind from racing so I try to get involved with projects and new tasks to calm my mind. When I am nervous, I find myself compulsively shopping, and obsessing over things I want. After some reflection though, I can see how my mental health also positively impacts me. I feel that from my experience with mental health, I am more empathetic and understanding. I am less judgmental of others, because I can relate to their struggles. My mental health has taught me patience and the importance of self-love and perseverance.





# Wellness Workshop Reveal

AMI recently received a grant from the Staunton Farms Foundation to create "The Wellness Workshop." The Wellness Workshop is designed to provide holistic methods of healing to the individuals in our programs, through interventions including yoga, Reiki, meditation, and music and art based workshops. In order to implement this grant, we had a staff member obtain their yoga certification, and started implementing a yoga group every week for Psychiatric Rehabilitation members, where they were able to be educated on the benefits of yoga, and then get the opportunity to try various flows and poses. We wanted to do this to make yoga more accessible for individuals we serve, and give them the opportunity to use this tool that, research has shown, is so beneficial for mental health. We also have music and art based workshops, where members are able to participate, and see how these methods can help their mental health. One group even composed their own song! Facilitators use research and toolkits to help tie in how these methods support mental wellness.



Both staff and participants use the workshop to do meditations to decompress for a few moments. We have a volunteer from the community coming in to do Reiki with interested individuals as well. The workshop has been a huge success. We have collected data to show that after using the workshop, 85% of individuals have a decrease in stress, anxiety, and or depression. AMI is excited to continue to expand upon our innovative, recovery oriented interventions to help individuals find mental wellness in their everyday lives. When asked how the workshop helped, various participants shared the following:

"The Workshop and activities in it help me unwind and leave the day behind me. Yoga helped me realize that physical and mental health and wellness go together."

"The Wellness Workshop helps me with my anxiety and my depression. It helps me calm down. It's a good environment. I

never did yoga before doing it here, and have found that it really helps me."

Huge thank you to the Staunton Farm Foundation for giving AMI this opportunity to expand upon our recovery based model, and provide this wonderful space for the people we serve and for our staff.

About the Staunton Farm Foundation: The Staunton Farm Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of people who live with mental illness and substance use disorders. The Foundation works to enhance behavioral health treatment, support, and recovery through grant making to nonprofit organizations in 10 southwestern Pennsylvania counties (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indians, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland)





## DISTINGUISHED ADVOCATE AWARD

Pennsylvania Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation recognized our very own Tracy McElhone and honored her with the Distinguished Advocate Award. This award is to honor an individual who has advocated for the inclusion of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services in their organization. Tracy received this award due to her work in advocating and supporting Supported Employment members to create and develop the Jefferson Café. Through brainstorming ways to develop and enhance job skills, Tracy encouraged members to begin their own snack cart. They found an old computer cart that wasn't being used, cleaned it up and made it into their "Snack Cart." Tracy included members in the development of the snack cart, and over time, the snack cart turned into Jefferson Café. These additions to AMI's Supported Employment program opened the door for group members to use their voice in each step of the process while learning about money management, accountability, teamwork and communication. Members take full ownership in the functioning of the café; from opening and closing the register, to taking orders and ringing people up, to inventory, shopping, cleaning and sanitizing, food preparations, and cooking. Tracy guided them while they navigated each step of the journey. Tracy continued to advocate and guide them through the process, and the café is now fully functioning and still growing. They make various coffee and smoothie drinks, have breakfast and lunch options as well as snacks. They got T-shirts made as part of their uniform that they wear proudly each day, and they are continuously helping each other out with learning and navigating all of the employment related scenarios. This tool has boosted confidence in many members' job skills, and has encouraged individuals to seek employment in their own community. Since receiving this award, Tracy has moved on to become a therapist at the Lighthouse for Women in Washington, PA. We are very proud of the work Tracy has done for AMI and the peers during her tenure here.

**Congrats to Don, a member of our Psychiatric Rehabilitation Program who recently attended the CPS training, and passed his CPS exam. Don wants to use his CPS certificate to give back to others, the way he has been helped.**



## Cognitive Enhancement Therapy

AMI is excited to be working with Washington County BHDS and members from the University of Pittsburgh Medical School to implement a new program, Cognitive Enhancement Therapy (CET). CET was deemed by SAMHSA as an evidence based practice. CET focuses on helping individuals with schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder enhance their social cognition skills through group therapy and various exercises that encourage individuals to better understand how to react and respond to social situations. CET also works to improve mental stamina and cognition in participants through their work on computer based exercises that help to improve attention, concentration, information processing, working memory, problem solving, and task proficiency. The outcomes of this program include increases in individual's abilities to obtain and maintain employment, improvise activities of daily living, and expand social functioning. AMI has integrated this service into our Psychiatric Rehabilitation program, and we are looking forward to seeing the amazing results this program has to offer.

### What's New at Jefferson Café?

Jefferson Café is a peer run coffee shop on site that Supported Employment members manage and use to help build job skills, empowerment, self-esteem, and stress management skills. Our newest addition to the menu this month is our flavored



lemonades. Group members worked together to decide what to add to the menu for the upcoming summer months. After some research and discussion, it was decided that flavored lemonade was the featured drink for the summer. Their flavored lemonade comes in raspberry, mango, and strawberry, with the option to add dried fruit. "Learning to make new drinks makes me happy because I make other people happy with the new items. It was good to work as a team to create a new menu item. We were able to practice voicing our opinion, and agreeing to disagree at times too."

## Resources

Check out these resources for help and support with Mental Health. Use for yourself, or share with others who could need.

**Center for Community Resources:** Need connected to resources and supports? CCR can help! 724-914-3058.

**National Suicide Prevention Line:** Call 988 for support.

**SPHS Crisis Hotline:** Call 1-877-225-3567 for support.

**National Crisis Text Line:** Don't feel like calling, but would still like support? You can always text 741741 to start the conversation.

**Washington County BHDS:** Questions about mental health services in Washington County, or need help getting connected? Call 724-228-1234.

## Mock Interviews

Supported Employment members were given the opportunity to practice their interview skills they have been working on in group through mock interviews. Four members of our community volunteered to come on site to help members practice their interview skills to prepare them for interviews for jobs in their community. Although this caused some anxiety amongst group members, facilitators practiced wellness skills with members before hand, to help them manage this stress. Facilitators provided members with essential oils, to help calm them, as well as breathing techniques to calm their nerves. When asked about how mock interviews were helpful, one member shared, "This helped so much. It helped me find confidence in my ability to talk about my experiences. It was interesting to see how interviews are conducted." We appreciate the generosity of our volunteers to come down and spend time with our participants.



# AMI'S 14th Annual Art Show

***\*\*\*Calling All Artists\*\*\****

AMI is looking for artists to submit 2 and 3-dimensional art, photography, and poetry for our 14th annual Poetry and Fine Art Show. The deadline for submissions is Thursday, September 14th, 2023.

Artists must be Washington County residents, 14 years or older, and identify as having a current or past history of mental health challenges and/or co-occurring substance use disorder.

Submissions will be received at AMI, Inc. during normal business hours, 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, at 907 Jefferson Avenue Washington, PA. Artists can submit up to 3 quality pieces in each category.

There is no submission fee, and the artists can sell their pieces at the show. AMI will direct the potential buyer to the contact information on file in lieu of the artist not being present at the time of interest.

The Art Show will be held on October 20, 2023, in Washington, PA at Venue 54. For questions, please contact Kat, Director of Peer Services at 724-228-5211.

**HELP US  
BREAK  
STIGMA**



Erica Rae  
Photography

We are looking for sponsors for this year's Art Show. If you are interested in sponsoring the show, please contact Kat at AMI at 724-228-5211.