



## The AMI Lion

We are excited to bring you another issue of the AMI Lion. This month, we are focusing on the benefits of community integration. We wanted to also shed light on various community activities and events to help you integrate more into your community. Lastly, we want to invite you all to join us for AMI's 14th Annual Poetry and Fine Art Show on October 20th at Venue 54. Admission is free, and there will be complimentary food from Let's Taco, as well as coffee served by AMI's Jefferson Café. We hope to see you there.

### **Member of the Month: Sabrina**

We would like to recognize Sabrina as member of the month for her work in community integration. Recently, Sabrina has been working on skills for self discovery, advocacy, educating others on culture, diversity and promoting overall unity. Sabrina wants everyone to find success in their recovery journeys. To achieve these skills, Sabrina reached out and asked for guidance. She met individuals from the LGBTQ community who invited her to a pot luck dinner. She felt understood and a sense of connection on a level she never thought she would find. This all was made possible by Sabrina making an effort to connect with people and agencies in her community. She has found a place in her community where she can thrive and be herself. She has found support for each aspect of her transition, which is part of her recovery goal, including support from mental health providers, medical professionals, and social support systems. Sabrina has shown that by taking steps, staying motivated and connecting to her community that she can build a foundation that fosters success and happiness.

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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.



## Outstanding Community Member: Austin Lee

This month, we would like to highlight Austin Lee as the outstanding community member. Austin was a former employee of AMI, and continues to stay connected to the agency through providing interviews to the people we serve through the Consumer Family Satisfaction Team to help us improve the quality of our services. Austin also continues to support AMI through helping us host the Annual Art Show. Austin volunteers his time to help AMI put together this art show, because of the passion he holds for breaking stigma, and giving individuals the opportunity for further community integration through being a part of this Art Show. We are grateful for Austin and the work he does to continue to support mental health services in Washington County.



### **Can you tell us a bit about yourself and the work you do?**

I went to college for engineering at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. I worked at nuclear power plant until I had a nervous breakdown in 1986. I was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and initially was very resistant to having this diagnosis. I kept thinking I would get my engineering job back never happened. I think there was some stigma associated with my new diagnosis. Following that, I did some contract work over the years. In 2000, I had my second nervous breakdown. At this point, I was married and had a toddler. This actually was a good thing to happen because my doctor put me on medicine. I didn't even realize I was hearing voices, but after going on medication, they went away and I was able to be very productive. I ended up working at Community Action as a computer instructor, and then ended up at AMI. Long ago when I graduated college, I wanted to go into the Peace Corps. AMI ended up being my Peace Corps. I worked at AMI for about 15 years, and now work for the Consumer Family Satisfaction Team through Blueprints.

### **Why do you like working in the mental health field?**

When I came home from college, my brother was experiencing the onset of his mental illness. I didn't understand it at that time, but my dad delegated me to take care of him. I would just get mad at him, not realizing it was a mental illness. He was hearing voices. I think that is why God wanted me to have voices, and not hear them anymore, to help me understand my brother, and the other people I would eventually mentor. My experience has led me to want to help others overcome their challenges as well. I think this was what I was called to do.

### **How did the Art Show start? What is its purpose?**

The purpose of the Art Show is to break stigma associated with mental health. What we try to do with the Art Show is give our peers an outlet to express themselves through quality work. This is an opportunity for the public to understand that we, people with mental health challenges, are capable of doing great things through art, poetry and photography. It initially started with one of my peers. He was showing me his art work and wished he had a place to display it. So we hosted the first Art Show at AMI. Over the years, the show grew, and became more successful. We eventually moved the show to host it in the community. We have the support from Washington County Behavioral Health and Developmental Services as well, who continue to help our show be successful.

### **Why is the Art Show so important to you?**

It pushes me to do art which is good for my wellness, and also helps break stigma towards mental health, which is very important to me.

### **From your point of view, why is it important to break mental health stigma?**

When I was a peer specialist, I didn't see my peers as having issues, I saw them as people who want to learn to grow. I know my job was to support their mental health, but I did not see individuals with having mental health issues. My family stigmatized my brother, and it was painful for him. I feel that it is important for the public to understand that it is an illness, and you shouldn't be isolated or treated differently because you have this illness.

### **What are your hopes for the future at the art show?**

Our hope is that we want to continue to grow and get new submissions from new artists or photographers or poets. We would like reach a larger audience, and help them have a platform to submit their work, and feel the joy and pride associated with that. Stigma is what we are fighting against, I hope to continue to complete this mission.

## Peer Mentor's Community Integration



Bowling at Alpine Lanes

In AMI's Peer Mentor Program, we focus a lot on community integration. Frequently, individuals with mental health challenges struggle with isolation and loneliness. This is why the peer mentors at AMI work hard to help the participants find things in their community that are fun, engaging, and help them to feel a part of their community. Some of the benefits of community integration include gaining a sense of belonging, expanding their natural supports who can help the individual in their recovery process, and giving individuals a purpose. Here is a list of ways that peer mentors help the individuals they serve gain more community integration:



Playing basketball in the community

- Visit the Wilfred R. Cameron Wellness Center to use the workout equipment, pool, and sports courts
- Drop by the Local Food Bank, and other resources to help people access resources for food
- Go to Christian Outreach for resources and a warm meal
- Visit the City Mission for the food bank, lunch, and other resources
- Stop by the Local Library
- Explore the Local Park
- Check out the Farmer's Market
- Go out to lunch at a local restaurant



Supporting a peer in moving into Supported Housing Apartment



Introducing peers to Produce for the People Resource

By providing one on one support, AMI's Peer Mentors work to build the confidence of the people in our services, and eventually transition the individuals to participate in these activities with their friends or independently.

## AMI Leadership Presents at Staunton Farm Rural Conference

AMI was given the opportunity to share on the topic, "Effectively Employing Peer Staff" at Staunton Farm's Rural Conference. Diana McKinney, CEO, and Katherine Ranko, Director of Peer Services, shared their experience on the benefits of hiring peer support staff, and tips on how to support them through the employment process. Jen Slaughter, former AMI employee, also presented on her experiences as a peer support staff, and was able to provide personal insight into some of the benefits and challenges of this role. Thank you Staunton Farm for the opportunity to be a part of your amazing conference.



# Heinz History Center

During the month of August, three local museums in Pittsburgh offered free admission, which AMI's program participants took advantage of. A group of 10 members travelled down to the city of Pittsburgh to visit the Heinz History Museum. For many of the members, this was their first visit to this museum. While at the museum, participants were given the chance to explore interactive exhibits that featured iconic artifacts that helped shape Western Pennsylvania into what it is today. This opportunity allowed participants to learn more about their community's history, giving them a greater appreciation and understanding of Pittsburgh culture. While in the museum, participants were able to also socialize with fellow community members who were also enjoying the beauty that the museum offered. Lastly, the museum was promoting health and wellness to its visitors by presenting them with a challenge. Each person that visited the museum was given a punch card, and for each set of stairs they walked to get from floor to floor, they got a punch in their card. At the end, if they took all six flights of stairs throughout the day, they were awarded with a small Pittsburgh collectable, a Heinz Pickle Pin. Most AMI participants engaged in this challenge, and many of the participants proudly wear their pins to group at AMI each day. This was a great way to promote community integration with participants, showing them also how much fun it can be to get out and engage in the wonderful things our community has to offer.



## Community Events

With fall and the cold weather quickly approaching, it can be easy to get into the routine of staying inside. This can lead to seasonal depression, and a feeling of isolation and sadness. To help combat this, we have provided a list of upcoming community events that you can attend to help you connect with your community, get out and socialize, and have fun!

- Attend the NAMI meeting on September 28th at 95 W. Beau Street, 3rd floor at 6:30 PM
- Visit the local Farmer's Market in downtown Washington, every Thursday from 3-6 (open through October)
- Visit Arc for their Wellness Connections Community Health Fair on September 29th from 10AM-2PM in Canonsburg
- Attend the Out of the Darkness Walk on September 30th at 9AM in Washington, PA
- Visit your local park and admire the leaves changing colors
- Go bowling
- Explore Trax Farm on the weekend for their fall festival starting September 23rd through October 22nd. Activities include hayrides, corn maze, pumpkins, music, and food trucks
- Go to the Hickory Apple Festival October 7-8 and enjoy live entertainment, unique crafts, apples, apples and more apples
- Visit Bedner's Farm now through September 24th to pick your own bouquets and veggies
- Free yoga at the Cameron Wellness Center every Friday at 5 pm
- Join AMI Inc. for the 14th Annual Poetry and Fine Art Show at Venue 54 on October 20th from 11AM-6PM!!!!



## Coping with Mental Health Challenges

Coping with mental health can be a challenging task. Sometimes, it is hard to even know when you are experiencing mental health symptoms. Getting to know yourself, and being able to identify your symptoms before they become overbearing is an important skill. At AMI, we help individuals with the early identification of symptoms by helping individuals create a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP, by Mary Ellen Copeland). In completing a WRAP, you are encouraged to look for your early warning signs. These could include changes in your sleep, appetite, mood, increased isolation, lack of motivation, changes in your attendance at work or school, to name a few. Being able to connect the dots between these behaviors and your mental health can bring positive results to your life. In addition to identifying these early warning signs, it is important to learn positive coping skills to help you manage these symptoms. At AMI, we not only support people in identifying coping strategies that work for the individual, we also help the person practice these coping skills so that they are prepared to use them when they are experiencing distress. Some general coping skills could include taking a walk, coloring or using other forms of art, listening to music, calling a friend, yoga or other forms of exercise, deep breathing, and watching a feel good television show. In completing a WRAP, you also get the chance to identify and work through creating a daily plan, identify stressors, learn when things are breaking down, and develop a crisis and post crisis plan. WRAP can be a great tool to help you learn about your mental health on a deeper level, and give you the tools to help you cope with it successfully, which in turn, can lead to goal attainment and stability. If you are interested in learning more about WRAP and its benefits, you can contact Kat Ranko ([kranko@hope4wellness.org](mailto:kranko@hope4wellness.org)), Director of Peer Services, who can get you linked with a Certified Peer Specialist!



## Co-Occurring Group

AMI focuses on delivering holistic services to the individuals in our programs. We aim to support the individual as a whole, addressing all barriers that might prevent an individual from finding recovery, and supporting them in cultivating their strengths to help them overcome these barriers. To further this approach, we are working on creating a group for individuals who experience substance use and mental health challenges. As a mental health provider, our focus will be to help the individual identify how to manage their mental health along their journey of recovery. We believe it is imperative to have groups of people that can relate to one another, and identify with each other, so that will be the focus of the group; bringing likeminded people together to support each other, and learn how to cope with their mental health challenges, complete the goals they want in life, and achieve recovery! If you are interested in attending this group, contact Katelyn Ivanac at [kivanac@hope4wellness.org](mailto:kivanac@hope4wellness.org) for more information.



**TOGETHER  
WE WILL  
ALWAYS  
SUCCEED**

## Supported Employment's 5 Year Celebration

In August, AMI hosted a picnic to highlight the Supported Employment Program. We had a wonderful turnout, over 50 individuals attended, and it was a great way to showcase the successes of the program and the impact it has made on so

many people's lives. We

had providers attend to

share resources, including TEC, OVR, and Washington County BHDS. Jefferson Café

prepared and served lunch, along with specialty coffees and lemonades. We

had success stories where participants were able to share how the program has

helped them find success and joy in their employment journeys.

Mary Jo Hatfield shared a few words on the benefits of employment. We ended the day

with a Pie in The Face, a fundraiser to support The Jefferson Café. Huge shout out

to Scott Berry from Washington County BHDS, and Katelyn Ivanac, AMI Director of Psychiatric Rehabilitation, for getting Pied in the Face for a great cause!



## Driver's Education Group

A common barrier for the individuals with mental health challenges is a lack of transportation. To address this barrier, AMI's Psychiatric Rehabilitation Program created a new group: Driver's Education Group.

Members of this group will be taking the first step towards overcoming this barrier by getting prepared to take their permit test. The skills we will focus on enhancing in this group include how to cope with test anxiety, supporting individuals through the registration process, enhancing memory and comprehension, and building the belief in individuals that they can indeed obtain a driver's permit, and licenses.



# 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

Sponsored By:

Washington County Behavioral Health and Developmental Services

Chamber's Insurance Agency

NAMI - Washington Chapter

Family Wealth Management Group, LLC

New Directions Mental Health

Mental Health Association of Washington County

Palermo/Kissinger & Associates

Where the Wildflowers Grow - Women's Support Group

Ronald McCartney

\*Free Admission  
&  
Complimentary Meal  
for all Patrons\*

A M I I N C .

# Drop in Center

MOVIES- POOL TOURNAMENTS  
GAME NIGHTS- KARAOKE- COOKING  
ARTS AND CRAFTS

COME JOIN US!

A PLACE FOR SELF-HELP,  
ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND  
SOCIALIZATION FOR PEOPLE IN  
MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY

907 JEFFERSON AVE.  
WASHINGTON, PA 15301

TUESDAYS & THURSDAYS  
4:30 PM-7:00 PM

CALL KATELYN AT 724-228-5211 FOR MORE INFORMATION