Way to go Eric!

My name is Eric Stark and I am the Community Outreach Coordinator for HOPE, Inc., the first peer and family run Comprehensive Service Provider (CSP) of behavioral health services in Arizona.

I had always felt alone and different, even during preschool. Along with difficulties making friends, I found it nearly impossible to concentrate, and often felt depressed. But I was very lucky to grow up with supportive parents who always encouraged me. Although I saw many psychiatrists and therapists, and tried many treatments growing up, no one ever suggested I had ADHD, Depression, or Asperger’s Disorder, as these were not common diagnoses in the 1970’s. All I wanted to do was escape from my pain.

Around age 13, I was prescribed a medication that caused me to lose control over my body. My arms and legs twitched uncontrollably. I was rushed to the emergency room and detoxed off this medication but something died inside of me. I stopped trying to have a better life. My goal was to just make it through the day. I was very alone and even the accomplishment of graduating from law school did not feel like an accomplishment.

After a long period of isolation I again started to work on my recovery. I found a medication that worked. It was like traveling from black and white Kansas to Technicolor OZ. For the first time things became possible that had before seemed like an impossible dream. I still had to work on all the negative thinking patterns I had developed through years of living with my illness. Getting hired as a certified peer was the true turning point in my life. It helped me find the confidence to believe in myself. I have always been terrified of public speaking and avoided it at all costs. At my first job, I was asked to emcee an event and I froze like a deer in the headlights. In that moment, I took an oath to myself that I would never pass up a speaking opportunity again. Over time I realized not only that I enjoyed public speaking but also that I was very good at it. Having conquered this fear, I also worked on my socialization and communication skills. Most people with an Asperger’s diagnosis do not go into outreach. But through hard work, observations, and lots of practice, I found myself able to navigate the social currents and use my gifts to inspire and energize people. Every night I go home feeling good knowing I have made a difference in the world. My job is to plant seeds in people’s minds. But often the conditions are not always ripe for the seeds to germinate. I had to realize early in my career that I can provide the nourishments for dormant seeds to blossom but sometimes conditions are not optimal for growth. I once had a gentleman thank me for something I said 5 years before when I transported him in during a crisis to the hospital. He shared that it took many years before he could properly take action based on my words. I am particularly proud of my efforts to identify and inspire potential new peer support. Many of the people I have mentored have gone on to work in this field as agents of change. I want to help people realize that with patience and support a diagnosis does not have to be an obstacle and that they can learn new skills and have the life they were meant for, not a life defined by their diagnosis and their limitations.
New FACT team in Maricopa County

Mercy Maricopa recently announced the launch of a new Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) team and a new Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team. Both teams are busy enrolling members and have received positive feedback from the community. The FACT team, implemented Aug. 1 and managed by Community Bridges Inc., addresses the unique needs of people who have been diagnosed with a serious mental illness and who have been involved with the criminal justice system. The newest ACT team was launched in November 2014 under the direction of Southwest Network. It focuses on the Northeast Valley and includes two registered nurses.

ACT teams use a multidisciplinary approach to provide comprehensive, community-based treatment and rehabilitation to people with serious and persistent mental illnesses — where and when they need it. Team members provide a full array of integrated, intensive supports and services, delivered in the community in a wrap-around model.

The new teams will align with Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) guidelines, ensuring evidence-based practice to:

- Identify and engage members with complex, persistent needs
- Remove barriers to community-based services and supports
- Reduce hospitalizations, reduce contact with the criminal justice system, improve health outcomes, establish stable housing and employment, encourage and strengthen natural community supports

ACT team members have experience in psychiatry, nursing, social work, rehabilitation services, substance-abuse intervention, employment support, independent-living skills and housing. The teams each serve 100 members, bringing the total program capacity to 1,700 members. By the end of FY15, 19 teams will be in place with the capacity to serve 1,900 members. Four additional teams are planned for FY16.

To learn more contact Alisa Randall at randalla2@mercymaricopa.org.

New Behavioral Health Facility in Benson

Community Bridges Inc. has recently opened a new behavioral health drop-off facility in Benson, AZ. The Benson drop-off center will serve all of Cochise County and offer specialized behavioral healthcare such as crisis stabilization, substance abuse and psychiatric treatment services. Community Bridges is committed to supporting first responders and hospital emergency rooms when those with behavioral health needs are identified. Law enforcement agencies will also have a place to drop individuals in need of behavioral health services at the new location.

Community Bridges currently provides comprehensive, medically integrated behavioral health programs which follow nationally recognized treatment models. It is also one of Arizona’s largest behavioral health providers offering integrated medical and behavioral health care.

Banner Psychiatric Center Reduces ED Holds

Banner Psychiatric Center (BPC) located inside the Banner Behavioral Hospital Campus is designed to address behavioral health crises in Maricopa County. Over time obtaining behavioral health services has shifted both locally and nationally to acute-care hospital emergency departments. In the past, the average hold time in the Banner Health Emergency Department (ED) was approximately four hours, while some patients were held for multiple days until a psychiatric bed was available. As you can imagine this presented substantial challenges for the entire hospital. Banner has recently built a state of the art assessment and observation unit that is modeled from a “psychiatric emergency room”. The 23-hour observation area has decreased behavioral health hold times in the emergency departments throughout the valley, allowing patients to receive care in a timely manner. Patients around Arizona and even from surrounding states have been admitted to the BPC through the Banner Regional Patient Placement Office.

BPC is looking to expand their scope of services in the near future to provide remote psychiatric evaluations from the BPC by adding the additional level of care. Banner has seen a 50-percent decrease in the number of assessed patients being admitted to high levels of behavioral health care along with reducing hold hours and costs. Overall the hospital has been able to free up beds, which has allowed more patients who truly meet the criteria to receive timely placement and appropriate care. The BPC model has received attention from other hospital systems; also groups from Tucson, Washington State and British Columbia have scheduled tours to view the BPC.
7 Tips to Keep the Scales Balanced Over the Holidays

It’s that time of year... With chestnuts roasting on an open fire, fig pudding, and eggnog, even the Christmas songs have a common theme of food. It’s no wonder that at holiday parties and friends and family gatherings we celebrate by eating. So, how can you enjoy a taste of the season without over indulging? Here are some tips to help you navigate the tables

1. Stick to healthy portions
2. Eat before you indulge (don’t starve yourself before the feast and don’t go to the party hungry)
3. Substitute healthy ingredients for unhealthy ones
4. Drink lots of water and take a walk after eating
5. Avoid mindless, unhealthy snacking throughout the day
6. Fill most of your plate with veggies and protein and leave the smallest space for desserts
7. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation

There is no doubt that most of our holiday traditions revolve around food. You don’t need to feel deprived, have fun and enjoy yourself, just find your balance.

Healthy Recipe
Berry-Banana Smoothie

This recipe may help you fight off the flu because it contains one of the best foods, berries which aid in the prevention of illness.

Ingredients:
- 1 ripe banana, sliced
- 1/2 cup raspberries
- 1/4 cup blueberries
- 1 1/2 teaspoons honey
- 1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 cup unsweetened apple juice
- 1/2 cup ice

Instructions:
Place ingredients in the order listed in a blender. Pulse twice to chop the fruit, stir well, and then blend until smooth. Serve immediately.

Nutritional Information:
Calories 126; Fat 0 g; Saturated fat 0 g; Mono Fat 0 g; Cholesterol 0 mg; Carbohydrates 33 g; Dietary fiber 4 g; Protein 1 g; Sodium 4 mg; Potassium 351 mg.

Prep: 5 minutes | Total Time: 5 minutes. Makes: 2 servings, 1 cup each

Source: WebMD

Fight the Flu to Protect Yourself and Others!

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness that causes symptoms such as fever, body aches, fatigue (tiredness) and cough. People who have the flu can spread the virus by coughing or sneezing droplets that can be inhaled by people around them. People may also catch the flu by touching their faces after touching something with the virus on it (such as doorknobs, countertops, etc.).

The best way to protect yourself and those around you from the flu is by getting a flu shot every year. It’s not too late to get your flu shot! Find out where at www.stopthespreadAZ.org.

In addition to vaccination, other ways to prevent getting and spreading the flu include washing your hands often, avoid touching your face with unwashed hands, covering your coughs and sneezes, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces frequently, avoiding close contact with sick people and staying at home if you are sick. Remember, just because your hands don’t have any visible dirt on them doesn’t mean that they are clean!

For more information, visit the ADHS website or the CDC website.

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Biannual Kickball Tournament

Biannually, the entire mental health community gets excited for its Kickball Tournament. This is a time where health and wellness is promoted by a friendly but also competitive game of kickball. Peers run agencies, clinics, and other organizations come together to compete. Yes, it all seems like fun and games, but many of the individuals take this tournament very seriously. Throughout the year, the players come together to practice and improve their skills and work as a team to be the best.

Rebecca Price, a member of the Marc Community Resources team, looks forward to this event every year. This was Rebecca’s fourth year playing in the Kickball Tournament. When asked what she likes most about this event, “she stated it was playing kickball.” Rebecca didn’t always feel this way. When she first started playing four years ago, she was afraid to be around a lot of people. She was encouraged to come out and play and she did. Now she enjoys it so much she doesn’t want to stop playing. This year Rebecca’s team won the tournament. She said she was very tired but very, very happy too! Rebecca wants to encourage other people to join a team and come out and play! She not only enjoys the physical aspect of the tournament, but the friends she has made along the way. Her favorite part about being on the team is the overwhelming support she receives from her teammates. Having positive influences and knowing others who walk the same road as her in life have made it easier to “recover”.

Our Place Clubhouse

“A Certain Slant of Light: Emerging from the Shadows of Mental Illness” was written by Sheila Wilensky and 13 members of the Our Place Workshop Thursday Writing Group at the Our Place Clubhouse, which is a psych-social rehabilitation center in Tucson, Arizona, for adults recovering from serious mental illness. Wilensky is an Our Place Clubhouse board member, editor, journalist and educator who started the writing group to help dispel misconceptions about mental illness and reduce the secrecy and shame surrounding it.

Following the January 8, 2011 shooting in Tucson, the fear of people with mental illness rose. For more than a year, Wilensky facilitated the Thursday Writing Group in order to have individuals speak for themselves about living with mental illness. Every week, they read their writings aloud with no feedback, judgment, or criticism, listening to individual voices striving for recovery and applauding after each piece was read. At the end of each group, they collected the pieces, and this is how the book developed. One of the shooting victims wrote the introduction. To purchase this powerful book, visit http://www.ourplaceclubhouse.org, or call 520-884-5553. Discounts apply for multiple copies purchased.

Disability Benefits 101

Have you ever heard these questions or comments from individuals with disabilities you serve or work with? Have you yourself ever uttered these words?

• “How much can I earn and keep my eligibility for Social Security disability benefits?”
• “It took me forever to get my SSDI check. I am not working and messing with that.”
• “I would love to work, but I cannot afford to lose my healthcare.”

Individuals with disabilities now have direct access to online tools and information to help plan for and manage the transition to increase their financial wellbeing and self-sufficiency through employment.

If you are on SSI and/or SSDI and live in the state of Arizona, you are in luck! Arizona has a resource at its fingertips that only 2 other states in the country have...a comprehensive, state-specific disability benefits online calculator that will allow you to see what will happen to your income, benefits, and health coverage if you gain employment. You can use the Benefits and Work Calculator to find out how a job may affect your total income and your health coverage. Get started by watching the 90-second introduction video.

DB101 has a broad range of information, does not require any identifiable information, and is completely FREE to use. Visit the website (http://az.db101.org/) and help your members get started on their road to recovery and empowerment.
Wellness means overall well-being. In each issue of Recovery WORKS we incorporate each of the Eight Dimensions of Wellness: mental, emotional, physical, occupational, intellectual, social, environmental and spiritual aspects of a person's life. Each aspect of wellness can affect your overall health and quality of life. This is especially important for people with mental and substance use disorders because wellness directly relates to the quality and longevity of your life. This month’s focus is on the financial dimension of wellness: satisfaction with current and future financial situations.

The Most Expensive Time of the Year

Christmas may be the most wonderful time of the year, but it can be one of the most expensive times too. It can be tempting to use your credit cards or spend your savings to make Christmas picture perfect. So how do you survive the holidays without breaking the bank?

Planning ahead is one of the keys to making it through Christmas without over spending. Set a realistic budget. Plan on what you can afford to spend and stick to it. Expectations run high, and it’s tempting to find that perfect gift.

Sometimes emergencies happen. If an expensive setback or unexpected event happened during the year, you may have to change your holiday spending plan. It’s important to remember that credit cards and emergency savings are for necessities and difficulties. The holidays are not an emergency.

Here are some ideas of ways you can stick to your holiday budget:

- Leave the credit cards at home.
- Make a list, check it twice, and shop the sales.
- Send e-cards.
- Make it yourself.
- Make your own wrapping paper, and gift tags.
- Set up a secret Santa or gift exchanges.
- Exchange gifts a week or two after the Holidays are over.
- Just say “no”.
- Don’t forget the “reason for the season”.

Making a holiday budget and sticking to it will make sure you not only have a Merry Christmas, but a Happy New Year as well.

Are You Financially Well?

What is financial wellness? Financial wellness is the balance of all of the aspects of money. It means having an understanding of where your money comes from, where it goes, and being prepared for financial change.

Money provides access to products and services and can have a huge effect on your life. So to build your financial wellness is important.

You might start by making a list of all of your income and expenses, your savings and debt. Once you know where your money comes from and exactly where you spend it, it’s time to make a plan. This plan involves budgeting and savings. It makes sure you’re ready for the future and change. The change could involve holidays like Christmas spending, a vacation, unemployment, retirement or emergencies. You can manage these goals by yourself, or get advice from a professional.

Understanding your finances and being ready for change will make sure that you can breathe easier not only through this holiday season, but through all the ups and downs ahead.
We work together to improve services and resources for children in Maricopa County. Come get connected!
The Child and Family Advisory Partnership (CFAP), is a partnership between you, parents/caregivers, youth, and family and community members – the Family Involvement Center (FIC), Mercy Maricopa and our network of providers.

When: Wednesday, December 10 from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Where: Family Involvement Center
5333 N. 7th St., A-100
Phoenix, AZ 85014

Call 602-288-0155 to register.

For more information please contact Paula Fernandez at: Fernandez@marccr.com or 480-969-3800 X 339

Community Partnership of Southern Arizona- Got opinions? Raise your voice!
Community Partnership of Southern Arizona (CPSA) wants to hear from you at our new Member and Family Advisory Council.

Where: Meetings are held at the CPSA Training Center at 2502 N. Dodge, Tucson, AZ 85716.

For meeting dates and times, or for additional information, please contact Individual & Family Affairs at (520) 318-6994. We hope to see you there!

The DBHS’ Blog Connection

Walk Scheduled for Survivors of Suicide
Officials from EMPACT-SPC, a local non-profit agency, are once again gathering community members to walk a 5k in honor loss survivors of suicide. At 8 am, Saturday, February 7th, walkers will come together at Tempe’s Kiwanis Park for the annual memorial Jeremyah Walk.

Those who have a family member or close friend who has committed suicide are up to nine times more likely to also be suicidal. This walk is one way to help the organization raise awareness about its services. It’s also one way we can help others and raise dollars to make sure programs are available for those struggling with depression, anxiety, grief and loss. The walk’s motto is: “Take a walk, save a life. Help us create a safe, strong, and healthy community.” Read more...

For more Behavioral Health News, visit the blog at http://bhsblog.azdhs.gov. Hint: you can subscribe to receive the information as soon as posted!

To submit an article: email your article to DBHSCommunications@azdhs.gov for publication the nearest quarterly issue, pending on space available. Maximum length is 200 words, must be in an editable word document and picture(s) included within the document. By submitting an article you authorize the Editorial Board to edit as appropriate. Bylines or independent writers’ names are not included in the publication, instead you can include a link to your website or resources within the article. Thank you!