

New forensic peer services at Community Advocates

By: Jeff Shair, Editor

Jon Sigal is the new forensic peer advocate for Community Advocates of Montgomery County. He is very passionate and excited to help start the new forensic peer advocacy service for people in Montgomery County who are involved in the criminal justice system.

The primary focus of Sigal's job is to help divert individuals from jail into mental health services and to provide peer support for individuals in the community who are trying to navigate the criminal justice system.

"I'm in the process of learning all about jail diversion and helping people not go back to jail once they get out," Sigal said. "I feel like my experience in the jails has allowed me to see the failures in the system but, at the same time, find ways to utilize these experiences in a positive way. It gives me the drive to help people so they don't have to go through this."

Sigal's lived experience gives him a valued perspective and sensitivity for what individuals encounter in jails and prisons. Sigal pointed out that research shows people with mental illnesses lack adequate mental health treatment in jail and often serve disproportionately longer sentences because of the symptoms of their illnesses.

One of the ways Community Advocates want to assist people through the incarceration process is to provide support groups at the county jail. Sigal and the rest of the advocacy team completed a three-day forensic peer support training in November sponsored by the PA Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

Jail is one area where Community Advocates can provide support. Other areas include arraignments, preliminary hearings, and

transitioning from jail to the community. In addition, forensic peer services include participation on outreach teams, peer support for individuals in Behavioral Health Court, and conducting trainings to educate peers, family members and staff about forensic issues and resources.

Sigal's own path to recovery can inspire hope in others involved in the criminal justice system that they, too, can triumph over difficult circumstances.

Community Advocates

of Montgomery County is a team of individuals who use or have used mental health services. They promote self-advocacy through peer support and self-advocacy trainings.



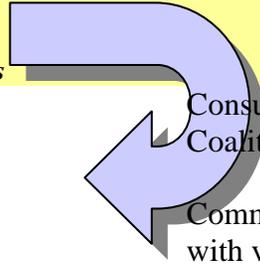
Back: Anthony Garcia, Jon Sigal
Front: Kathie Mitchell, Ellen Kozlowski, and Caroline Chen

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What is the Sequential Intercept Model?

By: Kathie Mitchell, Director

Here's the short version. It's a concept for communities to use which identifies points of interception in the criminal justice system where interventions can be made to prevent people with mental illnesses from going to jail because of their symptoms, or to reduce the length of time individuals remain incarcerated.

The model was developed by Drs. Mark R. Munetz and Patricia A. Griffin in a collaboration with an Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Service Board in Akron, Ohio and the National GAINS Center for People with Co-occurring Disorders in the Justice System.

Quoting from a paper co-authored by Munetz and Griffin, "Ideally, most people will be intercepted at early points...The interception points are law enforcement and emergency services; initial detention and initial hearings; jail, courts, forensic evaluations, and forensic commitments; reentry from jails, state prisons, and forensic hospitalization; and community corrections and community support.

Using the model, a community can develop targeted strategies that evolve over time to increase diversion of people with mental illness from the criminal justice system and to link them with community treatment."

Community Advocates received training on this model from the PA Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in collaboration with The Main Link, the Pennsylvania Mental Health

Community Advocates is working in partnership with various agencies in Montgomery County to develop forensic peer services based on the Sequential Intercept Model.

We believe that 2010 will be a year of much growth in our peer advocacy services as we pursue our goals of supporting individuals wherever they are, in working out problems that interfere with their life dreams and pursuits.

For more information about the Sequential Intercept Model, go to:

www.gainscenter.samhsa.gov

Community Advocates connect with The Main Link

By Jeff Shair, Editor

D.J. Rees, of The Main Link, a drop-in center in rural central Pennsylvania, is an expert in forensic peer support. In his job as Forensic Peer Support Coordinator, he coordinates a team of peers who cultivate supportive relationships with inmates in their county jail and maintain those relationships when they are released from incarceration.

Rees encourages peers to be educated about the criminal justice system by attending trainings, and being involved in government planning on the county and state level.

"With a little knowledge and opportunity, anyone can grow," Rees said.

Recently, Rees and co-worker, Connie Grant, conducted a three-day training on this topic for Community Advocates and two other local teams.

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Community Advocates connect with The Main Link

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Rees emphasized at the training that once individuals are incarcerated, they experience a series of losses such as in finances, housing, employment, and personal belongings.

In addition, Rees said when individuals are released from jail, they face challenges like discrimination in being hired for a job, and finding housing in the community. Despite these challenges, peer support can reduce the recidivism rate of people returning to jail.

Rees said he is pleased about the forensic peer service being established in Montgomery County, PA and would like to see other agencies provide this service across the state and the country.

By spreading awareness of how peers can be instrumental in the recovery of people who have been through the criminal justice system, forensic peer support will become widespread and available to all who need it.

Time for gratitude

We would like to give special thanks to **Robbie Altendor**, Special Assistant to Deputy Secretary Joan Erney, for creating the wonderful opportunity for Community Advocates to participate in the first team training for Forensic Peer Support. This was an invaluable training not only for its great trainers and incredible content, but for our team to attend and learn together, meet other teams doing the work, and to develop realistic action plans when we returned to the job. The synergy was perfect.

A heartfelt thank you to the **Pat Kind Foundation** which granted us the money to

begin developing the service. Without that grant, we could not have started the service.

We are grateful to the **board of NAMI Montgomery County** for giving us funds for education and training. We used that money to send four advocates to the 2009 PA Forensic Conference. It was a great conference.

Thanks to **D.J. Rees** for continuing to answer our questions long after the training ended!



Recovery Principles for Montgomery County's Partnership in Recovery

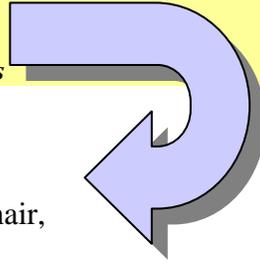
For each publication, we will highlight a recovery principle. What better way to kick off the debut of *The Interceptor* than to focus on the first principle:

Hope

Hope is the foundation for recovery – the belief in an individual's potential to experience a full and satisfying life and the belief that change is possible.

According to literature from the National Gains Center, of the U.S. Center for Mental Health Services, "...perhaps the most important function of Forensic Peer Specialists is to instill hope and serve as valuable and credible models of the possibility of recovery.

Other roles include helping individuals to engage in treatment and support services and to anticipate and address the psychological, social, and financial challenges of reentry."



About the editor - My name is Jeff Shair, and I am currently a consultant for the Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health. This position gives me the opportunity to voice my perspective as a consumer at transformation meetings of day services in the city. In addition, I am a Compeer Philadelphia volunteer, writer, and board member.

My involvement with Compeer, an international organization whose principles are grounded in friendship and recovery, has given me opportunities well beyond my imagination. For instance, after given the responsibility of writing a monthly column about various venues in the city that I attended with my friend, I had the motivation to return to the Community College of Philadelphia. I eventually became a movie critic for their college newspaper. Subsequently, I transferred to Temple University where I majored in journalism and became a staff writer for one of their student newspapers as well. Today, I am grateful to still contribute to the Compeer Philadelphia newsletter where my writing skills first emerged.

It is an honor to be the editor of this new publication. We will be bringing awareness of our peer service, for people who have been involved in the criminal justice system, every other month. My goal for this newsletter is that you will find it to be both informative and entertaining. Join me in exploring this innovative peer service for people in recovery coming out of the criminal justice system.

Community Advocates is an affiliate of The Consumer Satisfaction Team of Montgomery County.

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The mission of Community Advocates of Montgomery County is to help people who have experienced mental illness by providing advocacy services which promote recovery through choice, self-determination, and empowerment in collaboration with all community members.

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