

**“A Historical Summary:
Certified Peer Specialist in Alabama”**

The vision and the reality of consumer providers has come a long way since the first general planning meeting in the spring of 2007. The big picture shows a spectrum of consumers providers being trained. The Alabama DMHMR trained the first CPS in the fall of 2007. And it became the first employer of CPS from community mental health centers in 2008 and gave program funding. Let us remember that CPS in Alabama are sustained for the future from the commitments that have been made for this work to continue. *The long-term plan of Alabama’s DMHMR is to continue its’ training and hiring CPS and to have CPS successfully serving across all communities.* APSA as a professional group has the current resources to help us evolve and fulfill a mission for our members and public we will serve. It is most exciting that we are on the precipice for developing ourselves and our destiny.

- Peer Specialists in Alabama have several attributes. As individuals our means are small and our lives often vulnerable.
- We serve a diverse populations that can often see wellness returned if given the proper treatment and /or supports.
- Their mental health has become a voice louder than ever before stating a clear fact we most individuals are effectively treated, each family is then supported in maintaining wellness and communities remain healthier. These MH and human service facts support the need for the public to become informed! The evidence is there to support a new education and advocacy champagne. The logo can simply be “Remember Me”. Reporting it is a new day in world of mental health services. With proper support by all stakeholders, our communities will spend less on mental health services and will offer the supports that are effective and efficient thereby creating a greater access to health treatment for all persons. More than “Hope” we have a “Recovery Plan”. APSA is one instrument that will support recovery for individuals, agencies and communities.

APSA can be a new messenger and advocate for those we serve. We are “called” to this job so let us rally our group forward for the greater good of our communities. Peer Specialists and service providers can learn many lessons from the consumer movement in Alabama. Certified Peer Specialists (CPS) have been referred to as the *new community professional*. We are serving the front lines and meet persons at their point of need. The effectiveness of our mental health system will in large part be determined by the efficacy of our work. New programs are needed with an ease of access by all persons with mental health problems. Peer to peer services have been shown to be effective and will be expanded in Alabama. CPS in Alabama is one provider of many peer services to develop to serve future needs. Some consumers will take the road of volunteering and others will decide to climb a career ladder. Each provider has worth along the continuum of care. Current and future mental *health* needs of the people will best be met by diverse group on newly trained

workers at every point of need from the institution to successful community living. An analogy expressed by President Bush in his proposed “Thousand Points of Light” volunteer program is a picture that providers are urged to create at every level of care. The system is being transformed and Alabama mental health system has begun the process of being reconfigured. CPS can drive our services responsibly and effectively if we organize and align with proper resources and supports to fill our mission. Let us be about this task for our own survival and the welfare of our peers and our community. The following is a *summary list of events that brought CPS and peer providers to Alabama*. The events include the following:

- 1) The national movement for peer providers.
- 2) Medicaid granting Certified Peer Specialists the status of being and evidenced based practice from which states could bill.
- 3) A history of Alabama’s mental health consumer organizations not fulfilling the goal of services to fellow peers.
- 4) A small group of consumers and supporters met to discuss possible options for peers to give service to peers.
- 5) A collaboration then started between interested consumers and a strong foundational set of mental health agencies from Alabama, other states, and national technical assistance giving the support needed to begin developing peer support services.
- 6) **Today the largest number of consumers in state institutions are facing transition into the community in the history of our mental health system.**

Alabama Certified Peer Specialists, and future peer providers, owe a debit of gratitude to many un-named pioneers that have supported the Alabama consumer movement and consumer providers. There is an mandate for peer providers to build an independent and credible platform. This will act as a mechanism to more effectively create the communication between our members and other stakeholders. The future of the new Al. PS Association will be determined *by our leadership and our effectiveness to engage and partner with* current and future resources.

* The list of Peer Specialist Supporters:

- Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MHMR)
- DMHMR Office of Consumer Relations
- DMHMR Office of Policy and Planning and its Coordinator of Outreach
- Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program,
- Alabama Department of Mental Illness Planning Council
- The University of Alabama in Birmingham and their
- Department of Psychiatry
- The Alabama Community Council of Community Mental Health Boards, Inc

- **Jefferson, Blount, St Clair Mental Health Authority, Inc.**
- **The Greater Birmingham Mental Health Taskforce**
- **The National Alliance on Mental Illness Alabama**
- **National Depression and Bi-Polar Support Alliance, Inc.,**
- **Wings, Inc.**

sscott, 2008