



NETWORK NEWS

SUMMER 2009

PLANNED LIFETIME ASSISTANCE NETWORK OF PENNSYLVANIA

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Along with the beautiful green grass and lovely flowering shrubs and bulbs that late spring and early summer brings, comes a sense of renewed life and energy. The atmosphere around PLAN is in sync with the season. The office is buzzing with staff responding to the needs of our clients, the board of directors is planning for the future and new initiatives are in the works. You may remember the announcement about the grant PLAN of PA has received from The Philadelphia Foundation for building a comprehensive database and outcome measurement tool. The staff and board have been busy meeting with our consultants - Julie Friedman for outcome measurement and Rosemary Hughes of NPower PA for database development. We're also working in small groups to crystallize our data collection items and to clarify needs in order to evaluate the impact our services have on our PLAN client families.

There's more big news. PLAN of PA has hired Melissa Dougherty as development director. Melissa brings considerable experience and has been learning about PLAN, developing some terrific ideas and moving forward with some new funding proposals. She will have

the time to focus on acquainting the larger community with PLAN services and mission. Melissa will be speaking and available to answer questions at PLAN of PA's Garden Party in June. Melissa's position is being funded through a generous gift from Anne Zetterberg.

I wish all the goings on at PLAN of PA were so energizing. Like most other non profit businesses, PLAN of PA has been hit hard by the struggling economy. Former funders did not grant to us this year. Others continued to fund PLAN but in decreased amounts. Others closed their application process and are not committing to when they will re-open. However, through struggle comes creativity and opportunity. I believe PLAN will initiate collaborative efforts with other non profits in related services and come out stronger as a result.

Cuts in arts, human services and education are a painful new reality yet presenting opportunities for those generous of heart and spirit to shine. Recently, I was at a meeting and a participant mentioned her involvement with a non-profit singing group that was performing locally. Another participant commented that we need to support the arts, that music is good for the soul, especially during bad times and purchased two tickets to the concert then and there. These challenging times can bring out the best in those that are still able to share with others.

OUR MISSION

The mission of Planned Lifetime Assistance Network (PLAN) of Pennsylvania is to provide assistance to families in the development of an individual life plan to assure that care, support and special needs of a relative with mental illness or other lifelong disability are met when families are no longer able to do so.

BOARD NEWS

PLAN of PA regretfully announces that Richardson T. Merriman, MBA has retired from the Board of Directors and from the Board of the PLAN of PA Foundation. In his 3+ years of service Rich has been Chair of the Develop-

ment Committee and a committed member of the ad hoc Governance Committee. He was the prime mover in PLAN's development of a new, updated logo and new marketing materials, as well as the semi-annual approach to donation appeals. Rich was a

member of the Foundation Board since its inception. In addition, he has been an extremely generous donor to PLAN. We will miss his enthusiasm, expertise and active support as a member of the Board and want to thank him for his hard work on behalf of PLAN of PA.

MOVIE REVIEW: THE SOLOIST

When I was asked to review the new movie, *The Soloist*, for this edition of the newsletter I had some reservations. I tend not to like the typical Hollywood movie and as I'm new to PLAN of PA I wasn't sure that I was tuned in to the issue of mental illness enough to write about it in a way that would resonate with our readers. It didn't bode well when I nodded off twice during the movie.

That's not typical for me, although it was an overcast, rainy day. The kind of day that makes you want to curl up and nap. In all honesty I can't say that I liked the movie. I thought they took a good story and put the typical Hollywood spin on it. Good looking, down on his luck, recently divorced, unwilling to commit, lots of regrets type main character who desperately wants to fix something in his bro-

ken life. An over reliance on soaring music, seagulls, and psychedelic colors in an attempt to create in the viewer a sense of wonder in the awe inspiring music that Nathaniel Ayres is capable of producing while trapped in his schizophrenia. As if the music of Beethoven and Bach being played on two strings by a homeless man struggling with mental illness in downtown Los Angeles needed the help of slick camera angles and camera cranes to uplift and inspire.

All that being said the movie did something for me. I was struck by the underlying theme of rescue, the belief that with the right medication and a clean safe apartment, the schizophrenia that struck down this talented, intelligent young man in his early twenties could be dealt with and he could go back to his normal life. A normal life that generally translates into being

much easier to deal with by society.

This is in contrast to the theme of acceptance of reality by folks on the front line. Acceptance that perhaps the living on the streets, the forays into violence and despair, the unwillingness to take one's medication often is the normal life for someone with mental illness. But that with an acceptance of their struggles and a willingness of society to provide the necessary support small changes can and do occur.

I think that this is what PLAN of PA is about, seeing first hand the harsh reality of the struggles and frustration felt by those dealing with mental illness and /or disability, and their families. And not trying to fix it but providing the support, friendship and sense of stability and security that can and often does bring about small changes in the lives of PLAN of PA clients and their families.

P L E A S E A N D T H A N K Y O U ! !

We are always in need of stamps, envelopes, standard size paper for printing and faxing, pads of all sizes, paper plates, cups and plastic ware. In addition, we need documents shredded. If you know of anyone who can help us out, please call the office. As always, if you have some time available and can help PLAN with filing, please let us know. Thank you to Jeannie for her ongoing gifts of books to our small but distinctive library and to Susan, our newest volunteer who has been of tremendous help in getting our filing under control in addition to being a warm hearted and delightful lady. If you don't like having to add those \$.02 stamps to your \$.42s due to the recent postage increase, please follow in the footsteps of one of PLAN's best friends and give the old ones to us. We don't mind adding the extra postage!!!

THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN AND PLAN OF PA

The economic downturn has affected PLAN of PA and its clients in several ways. This article explores the most significant effect the economic downturn has had on the organization in the past fiscal year of 08-09 and what PLAN's supporters can do to help. At PLAN of PA, grants for FY 08-09 are down 40% from the previous year. This has little to no effect on the case management and trust services PLAN of PA provides to its fee-paying clients. But it has had a great impact on our Representative Payee program.

The Rep-Payee program is funded in part through the \$37 the Social Security Administration allows us to deduct from each client's SSI or SSD monthly check. It costs PLAN of PA approximately \$77 per month per client to fund this program. The remaining \$40 must come from grants and donations. While \$40 per month does not sound like much, for our 200 clients that results in costs to PLAN of \$8,000 per month for a yearly total of \$96,000, which this year grants will not fully cover.

As readers are probably aware, foundations have suffered large declines in the value of their assets, which in turn has led to their having less money to give. Many have reduced the amount of their

grants, and many are not accepting grant applications from any organizations to which they have not previously given. As a result, organizations like PLAN are receiving less money and are having less success finding new grants to replace lost funding.

For lack of grant funding, PLAN has had to lay off the part-time staff member who had the main responsibility for setting up Rep-payee accounts for newcomers to the program. Once set up, the bill-paying program for those with social security and social disability benefits brings much-needed stability to the lives of those with mental disabilities. But the setting-up of new accounts is a labor-intensive process (requiring 6-8 hours per client) that the remainder of PLAN's Rep-payee staff struggle to find time to accomplish in addition to administering the existing accounts. One of the consequences of the downturn is that those who need Rep-Payee services are finding that the waiting list is longer, and services are harder to secure.

For currently enrolled clients, any possible loss of services due to lack of funding would be quite serious. Not only would they stand to lose the life-style stability that budgeting and bill-paying provide, as their rent, electricity, gas, telephone, etc. would no longer be paid for them, but a significant number of PLAN's clients would temporarily lose their

benefits as well. For them a Rep-Payee provider is not a choice, but a requirement in order to receive their benefits. Most would find it difficult, if not impossible, to find an alternate Rep-Payee provider.

While this economic downturn will not last forever, it is obvious to the PLAN of PA Board and staff that immediate steps will need to be taken to find alternative sources of funding if we are to keep the Rep Payee program going. The most likely source is individual donations. PLAN's supporters are aware of the fundamental importance of Rep-Payee services to those with mental disabilities. For as little as a \$40 donation, a client could be assured of services for another month. For just under \$500, a client would have services for a year. If a donor wished, he or she could be a lifeline for one or more persons who are at special risk in this downturn.

Please contact Nadine Hoch at the PLAN of PA office if you have the desire and ability to help support this program or a client on this program. You, or someone you know, could make a real difference in the lives of one of the more at-risk segments of our community, especially in this time of need.

C L I E N T C O R N E R

Michelle is a 38 year old woman with bi-polar disorder. She is currently living in a shelter in West Philadelphia. She has a 12 year old daughter she sees regularly, takes her medication and is in a vocational training program to learn data entry. Michelle's Recovery Coach, Linda, called PLAN of PA to request representative payee services (budgeting and bill paying for disabled persons who need assistance managing their social security benefits.) for Michelle. Linda

has located stable, affordable housing for Michelle, a key component to recovery, but is unable to move Michelle in because she has no available funds. Michelle's sister Marcia is her current representative payee and has refused to give Michelle any money or produce bank statements showing how Michelle's funds are being used. When Marcia writes checks to cover Michelle's bills, the checks bounce. As representative payee, PLAN of PA assures prompt payment of bills for

basic needs and then helps develop a realistic, individualized budget for any remaining funds. Sadly, Michelle will need to remain in the shelter until she finds a new representative payee. Because of foundation funding cuts, PLAN has needed to reduce staff and is unable to meet the demand for service. There is currently a waiting list of 27 people easily meaning a six month delay in service.



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