

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **ABMHC Wins State Champion for Mental Health Award**

The Peer Support Program at Aiken Barnwell Mental Health Center received the “Champions for Mental Health Outstanding Program” award by Mental Health America- South Carolina on Friday, April 4, 2014. During the presentation, Joy Jay, Executive Director with Mental Health America South Carolina, noted there were many nominations in this category; thus making the selection process very difficult.

The Peer Support Program was established at ABMHC in 2004 thus celebrating its ten year anniversary. Peer Support Services (PSS) are offered in the clinic and community and are designed to give the client an opportunity to direct their own treatment and learn skills to enhance personal responsibility for treatment. Certified Peer Support Specialists operate a Drop In Center in Aiken and Barnwell; provide individual and group activities; coordinate the Peer Support Mentoring Program to train consumers interested in becoming a Peer Support Specialist; facilitate Double Trouble Groups; provide assistance with Psychiatric Advance Directives and Wellness Recovery Action Plans; operate a Shared Decision Making Center (HERO) and assist with public relations activities to decrease the stigma associated with mental illness. ABMHC employs 7 peer support specialists.

Cindy Smith, Certified Peer Support Specialist/ABMHC, said, “I started my recovery journey as a client at ABMHC. Not only was I active in my addiction, I was a very sick and angry person. Clients of mental health struggle to fit in and to feel accepted. Peer Support and ABMHC gave me that chance and I have not stopped talking about recovery sense. Treatment focuses on recovery and independence. Peer Support works!”

Victoria Wilson, Certified Peer Support Specialist/ABMHC, said, “There are three main reasons as to why I believe we have an Outstanding Program. First, we have an incredible supervisor and leadership at Aiken Barnwell Mental Health. Also, we have a fantastic team. We all have individual strengths which work together to create a cohesive team that we can be proud of. Most importantly, we have an outstanding program because of the amazing clients we are privileged to work with daily. Their resilience inspires me to try again even when I do not succeed the first time. Their successes teach me to try new things even when I am hesitant. They remind me every day that recovery is possible. A special thanks to Mental Health America of South Carolina for awarding our team for doing something we love!”

“People struggling with mental illness aren’t expected to succeed. There’s still a dark cloud of stigma we struggle to overcome, so when we do succeed, it’s a big deal. I’m fortunate to be a part of a program that believes people recover, and it’s a real honor to be recognized by an organization with a 60 year history of championing recovery like MHA” said Joe Stertz Jr, Certified Peer Support Specialist/ABMHC.

Aiken Barnwell Mental Health Center is one of the seventeen Community Mental Health Centers operating under the South Carolina Department of Mental Health. ABMHC provides an array of Behavioral HealthCare Services for the residents of both Aiken & Barnwell Counties. If you or someone you know needs Behavioral HealthCare, please contact ABMHC at 803-641-7700. For additional information about Aiken Barnwell Mental Health Center visit [www.aikenbarnwellmhc.com](http://www.aikenbarnwellmhc.com).

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