

***“What would life be like if we had no courage to attempt anything?”***  
***Submitted by Tamara Smith, LMSW/ABMHC***

Those are the famous words of Vincent Van Gogh. To many, Van Gogh is considered the greatest Dutch painter after Rembrandt and grew to become one of the most well-known and influential artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite having a mental illness and spending time in the asylums at Arles and Saint Remy, he produced 900 paintings and 1100 drawings during a ten year time-frame. WOW!!! What if he didn't have the courage to paint?

Many of our clients experience fear when diagnosed with mental illness and during the recovery process due to the symptoms associated with the illness and the stigma associated with having a mental illness. It takes a lot of courage to walk through the front door of the mental health center and ask for help. What if our clients didn't have the courage to ask for help?

With this in mind and to celebrate Mental Illness Awareness Week October 7-13, 2012, ABMHC sponsored several events during the month of October. On October 11, free depression screenings were held at all ABMHC facilities, Margaret J Weston Community Health Center-Clearwater, SC, the YMCA of Aiken County and Lucy Lu's in Barnwell, SC. Mental Health Professionals were at each site to discuss the screening and offer referral information and educational materials. Educational materials included a national resource list, explanation of services offered at ABMHC, a community resource guide and Halloween mental health fun facts. A total of nine screenings were done; however, twenty-eight contacts were made with the public which included answering questions about mental health issues and providing information about ABMHC and treatment resources. Our Hartzog office located in North Augusta, SC also offered free green ribbons during the entire month to call attention to mental illness and decrease stigma. An on-line mental health screening tool is available throughout 8/31/2013. Information about the on-line mental health screening tool was made available to all of our community partners, faith-based organizations and primary care physicians. Halloween Mental Health fun facts were handed out to consumers at our main office starting 10/22/12-10/31/12.

The Peer Support Recovery Zone Drop-In Center sponsored a trip to the South Carolina State Museum to tour two exhibits “The Lives They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic” and “Bull Street: Life Behind the Wall.” Participants had the opportunity to pay tribute to the unique stories of persons with mental illness and learn from their courage. A special thanks to the SC State Museum for providing free entry for our clients and to Joe Stertz Jr, CPSS and Victoria Wilson, CPSS for coordinating this event.

The “Celebration of Courage” project launched September 21, 2012. Several master gardeners are working with Our Recovery Zone Peer Support DIC members to plant a flower garden in recognition of Van Gogh's painting “Irises.” Van Gogh painted Irises while living at the asylum at Saint Paul-de-Mausole (France). Van Gogh called the painting “the lightning conductor for my illness.” By painting, Van Gogh felt like he could keep himself from going insane. The ABMHC flower garden's main focal point will be purple Irises with additional flowers added. Prep work is now being done to the soil. The bulbs, which are being donated by local resources, will be planted in January. In Spring 2013 everyone will be able to enjoy the beauty of the garden. Our website will have pictures of this on-going project.

Van Gogh's brother said, "It strikes the eye from afar. The Irises are a beautiful study full of air and life." Our clients are beautiful people that are full of life much like those Irises. It is important that we convey to this our clients to offer hope and encouragement along their pathway of recovery as well as our community so that people will have a better understanding of mental illness and access to treatment.

Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective & People Recover!!!!



Cindy Motycka, LPC-S  
YMCA-Depression Screening



Terry Miller, MHP  
Depression Screening-Hartzog Center/North Augusta



Celebration of Courage  
Peer Support clients & staff preparing soil for garden  
Jan, Cyndi D (CPSS), Kennedy, Horace & Willie (L to R)



PSS Trip to SC State Museum  
Pictured (L to R)  
Jan, Kennedy, Willie, Stephanie (Front row)  
Tonya, Milton & Bernice (Back row)