

"Putting Community First at Aiken Barnwell Mental Health Center"  
Submitted by Tamara L Smith, LMSW

Hosting recovery & community events and networking with our community partners is a great opportunity for Aiken Barnwell Mental Health Center to unite our community in the support of treatment and recovery for people with mental illness. These events and activities provide an opportunity to increase the public awareness mental illness, health reform and support options offered at ABMHC and to build and strengthen our partnerships with our stakeholders. With this in mind, Aiken Barnwell Mental Health Center adopted SAMSHA's Recovery Theme 2012, **"Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, and People Recover"** and participated in or coordinated the activities described below.

Beverly King, CAF Coordinator, participated in the Parent Resource Fair on March 3, 2012 in conjunction with Aiken County School District. She provided information about ABMHC's services to the parents, families and caregivers in attendance. Rick Acton, Interim Executive Director/ABMHC, met with Dr. Everitt, Aiken County School Superintendent to discuss ways to enhance behavioral care for the students in Aiken County.

Rick also participated in Margaret J Weston Community Health Center's Strategic Planning meeting held on March 3, 2012 at the Wilcox Inn. Rick had the opportunity to discuss the Integrated Primary and Behavioral Healthcare Project with MJWCHC. As a result of this meeting, ABMHC staff met with Aiken Center for Alcohol & Drug Services to discuss ways to enhance behavioral services for clients with co-occurring disorders. A representative with the Department of Environmental Control has been invited to our next Integration meeting to explore resources and opportunities for DHEC to be part of the Integration Project.

Aiken Barnwell MHC held an Open House March 20, 2012. Stakeholders invited included clients, family members, caregivers, community partners, Legislators, the Press and the general public. Guided tours of our facility were provided by Senior Management along with a brief description of services provided at the agency. Stakeholders had the opportunity to meet with Rick Acton, Interim Executive Director/ABMHC, Randy Snellings, Quality Assurance Director, and other center personnel to share thoughts about what we do well as well as what we can improve upon. Guests also enjoyed an opportunity to meet and greet various staff members. Our guests represented our stakeholders and included: Family members, Residential Care Facility Operators, Guardian ad litem, Aiken Center for Alcohol & Drug Services, Community Medical Clinic-Aiken County, Helping Hands, Aiken County School District, Right at Home, Limestone College, South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation, Aurora Pavilion, Axis I-A/D services/Barnwell County, ABMHC Board of Directors, and private practitioners. Results from the survey will be utilized as part of our strategic planning process.

Upcoming Events include: Movie Fridays- April/May 2012 sponsored by Peer Support Services. Each movie will have a mental illness theme and will be followed by a panel discussion on mental illness and recovery. Several ABMHC staff will also participate in the Prime Time Expo sponsored by St. John's United Methodist Church, Aiken on May 22, 2012. Aiken Public Safety will provide a fire safety class and demonstration to clients in our Psychosocial and Peer Support programs on May 23, 2012.

ABMHC has been very proactive in networking with community partners and participating in community events and meetings. Developing and strengthening these partnerships are vital in helping our clients move forward in their recovery.