

cover story

Services

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vices, the state-funded Morris Community Wellness Center in Parsippany and more.

"I would be remiss if I didn't thank many people in this room and programs I went to in this county who have literally saved my life," said Johnny Charles of Kenvil. "I'm talking about the Transitions program at St. Clare's, which I recently graduated from; the Mental Health Association of Morris County, which has taken me to events and activities and shown me fellowship and community and love; and the Morris Community Wellness Center, which has rescued me in so many ways — emotionally, physically, spiritually."

But there also were suggestions for improvements and additional help, including more employment services, more affordable housing, a program that specifically addresses rape and incest, and opportunities to gather primarily for social and creative — not clinical — reasons.

Another topic, which endures from year to year, raised its head again.

"I will say one word: transportation," offered one woman who, like many of those gathered, preferred anonymity.

"What about it? Too much?" teased Peter Bas-to of the Rutgers University School of Health Related Professions, who facilitated the evening. Laughter rippled through the audience.

At that point, Lauren Burd, director of special transportation for the Morris Area Paratransit System, known as MAPS, urged people to sign a "Will I Have A Ride Tomorrow?" statewide cam-

paign petition asking Gov. Chris Christie to supplement transportation funding, which has been dropping. Many people in the room said they depend on MAPS to get them to their mental health and substance abuse services.

"The funding for transportation in our county comes from casino revenue," Burd said. "As we all know, the casinos in Atlantic City are not doing well, so it affects our funding. In fact, we've lost 52 percent of our funding from 2008 to now. For Morris County, that equals \$750,000 for transportation in one year."

"So what we're asking the governor's office to do," she added, "is supplement our program with a subsidy of \$6 million, to be split across every county in the state, to be put toward transportation so that we can get you to your services."

One Rockaway woman, the mother of a drug addict, called on the county and court system to better direct the families of addicts.

"What I have learned from Nar-Anon is that families of addicts are a large part of the problem in their recovery," the woman said. "I have a paragraph here from Nar-Anon literature and I want to share it: 'In all cases a change in the family is necessary before any change in the individual may be anticipated.'"

"The court systems have sentences for the addict, which involves treatment programs, but the family is not pointed in the right direction," she added. "I notice in the literature distributed tonight that, under National Self-Help Organizations, AA and NA are listed, but Al-Anon and Nar-Anon are not. I think it's important to list them."

One man emphasized the need for job opportunities, describing himself as a 29-year-old who, be-



Barbara Ward, chair of advisory board.

cause of his past, has had only three jobs his whole life.

"I am capable of working now. Full time, actually," he said. "I'm healthy. I haven't had any setbacks. Now that I'm fully capable, mentally and physically, I can't find a job. I'm strong. I like to do factory work. I've been turned down. If we can have more resources, especially for people who are fully capable, that'd be great."

Becker noted his concern and reminded the group about St. Clare's Supported Employment program. Ann Marie Flake, team leader of career services at St. Clare's Health System, was available to field questions from individuals.

Creative options

The theme of this year's forum, titled "The Many Faces of Recovery: Creative Expressions," echoed a general call for more gatherings and programs that help people find their voice through art.

"It would be nice to have a poetry and coffee program, maybe monthly," one woman suggested. "It would be a nonalcoholic gathering, just for sharing."

The programming included presentations by two mental health consumers who shared their stories through writing. Both went only by their first names.

Cynthia, who is recovering from anorexia, bu-

limia, self-harm, bipolar disorder and suicidal depression, told of a difficult childhood and young adulthood that left her unconvinced that she even deserved to live and unable to articulate what troubled her.

"Unfortunately, I was using behaviors to express my pain," she said. "Because I had no voice, no one knew what the heck was going on in my heart and mind. I had to stop allowing others to hurt me, but at the same time, I had to regain my voice. In order to recover, I had to relive my past. But this time, I had to express my feelings in a healthy way."

So, too, Mary Ellen, who told of seven hospitalizations over the course of her lifetime and achieving, after decades, a peaceful life, talked about the role of journaling and how it helped her new psychiatrist treat her. "I took my meds religiously and wrote a few words each day describing my mood," she said, "and Dr. Patel used this journal to adjust the strength and frequency of my meds. Miraculously, within a few weeks, I began to feel calm and comfortable with myself."

In keeping with the spirit of self-expression, the "Mind My Art" art exhibit, sent by the National Alliance on Mental Illness and A Space on Main, a Cranbury gallery, lined the walls of the arboretum's Haggerty Education Center. Each work depicts the artist's recovery story.

Stanhope singer/songwriter Kathy Moser, who is in long-term recovery, had the assembly singing, laughing and clapping as she sang a song she wrote about self-acceptance.

"Creativity was a big part of what saved my life," she said. "It gave me a voice and enabled me to speak."

In closing, Becker said

she heard Tuesday about how important it is for people to feel like they are not isolated and how they'd like to explore music and art as part of their recovery. She said some programs in the county offer such services privately. "We're going to learn more about what resources are available," Becker said, "and be sure to get that out to you. There are some places now where you can have a cup of coffee, talk to others, do some song, poetry, writing, drumming and crafts."

Moser has a Music for Recovery program. Also present at the forum was Vicky Mulligan of Rest Stop Rejuvenate, whose LIFE Center Stage in Rockaway presents the twice-monthly Journey Through Song program, among others.

A dozen service providers gathered at the arboretum Tuesday, each staffing a table that forum participants could visit.

Freeholder Director Kathryn DeFillippo assured the crowd of the support of the freeholder board.

"We continue to recognize the importance of supporting a broad range of prevention, education, treatment and recovery services, with the goal of providing a safety net for everyone in need of help," DeFillippo said.

She noted the Morris County Task Force on Opiates, a local collaboration started last year and now some 50 members strong, has many local activities planned for this year.

"The single, most important goal of this group is to deter children and adults from the misuse of this potentially deadly drug," DeFillippo said.

Becker noted two more developments: an assisted outpatient treatment program for both Morris and Sussex counties, soon to be rolled out by the Mental Health Association of Morris County, and funding for five more housing opportunities, primarily for people coming out of state hospitals, recently awarded to New-Bridge Services.

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