

DID YOU KNOW?

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A NEWSLETTER FOR AND BY CLIENTS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY FBHPARTNERS' CLIENT AND FAMILY ADVISORY BOARD

VOLUNTEER WORK WORKS!

Volunteer work is, for many, a really important part of their recovery. It has different benefits for different people, but the Boulder Valley Volunteer Connection offers these:

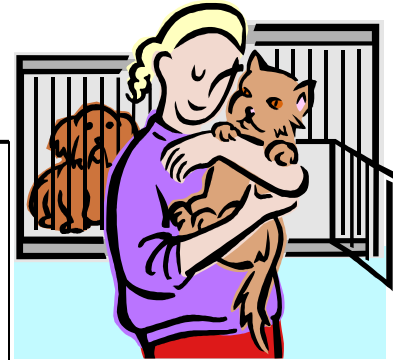
- Get out of the house
- Find purpose
- Get re-acquainted with your skills
- Develop new skills
- Use your skills to be productive
- Improve your resumé
- Explore vocational skills
- Meet new people
- Make new friends
- Be part of a cause you care about
- Help others; make a difference
- Impress yourself
- Feel better about yourself
- Feel involved in your community
- Expand your horizons

Most important, **ADVANCE YOUR RECOVERY!**

The beauty of volunteer work is that clients can often choose what kind of work they want to do, generally set their own schedules and work as much of it as they want. At the same time, volunteer work includes many of the same characteristics as regular employment, like getting along with colleagues, interacting with a supervisor, and understanding assignments and completing them. Still there tends to be less "pressure" in volunteering than in a regular job.

The trick, of course, is to find a volunteer situation that works for you. Volunteering can be done occasionally for single events, or once a month or once a week, and for part of a day or a whole day. Many clients may be able to find something on their own by using the volunteer clearinghouses listed in the next article. Others may prefer to work with someone who can help them navigate the process, support them as they are breaking into volunteer work and help them find a new opportunity if the first one doesn't work out. At Jefferson Center, clients can contact Summit Center at 303-432-5800 and ask for a Clubhouse Generalist. At The Mental Health Center Serving Boulder and Broomfield Counties, the volunteer coordinator position is currently vacant, but will soon be filled and available to help. You can call the front desk at the main office at 303-443-8500 to find out whether the position is filled. In thinking about the kind of volunteer work to pursue, you might want to consider the

It is expressly at those times when we feel needy that we will benefit the most from giving. ~ Ruth Ross



following:

- What do I *like* to do? Is there something I'm passionate about?
- Do I prefer to work as a team or on my own?
- Do I want to work in a service agency, a business, or a faith community?
- Do I enjoy mostly working inside or outside?
- Do I want to work with adults, children, animals or something else?
- Do I want to use skills I've learned from previous jobs or from my hobbies?
- How much time do I want to commit to volunteer work?
- Can I be available for training?
- How far am I willing to travel?

Most of all, remember that volunteer work may take an adjustment period especially if you have not worked in a long time. If you are having problems, you can talk them over with your volunteer coordinator or your therapist.

A Client Volunteer's Story

Michael MacDonald is a former client of The Mental Health Center Serving Boulder and Broomfield Counties (MHCBBC), and he is currently employed there as a Peer Support Specialist. He credits volunteer work as a key part of his recovery.

Michael has a long history of major mental problems beginning when he was a college senior. Despite numerous hospitalizations, some for lengthy stays, he did graduate with his BA, but his mental illness prevented him from getting a regular job. With recovery-focused, intensive treatment at MHCBBC and at Windhorse Community Services, Inc., (continued on page 2)

A Client Volunteer's Story continued

Did You Know?

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a private outpatient provider in the Boulder area, he gradually, in his words, "began to shed my institutional mind-frame" according to which everything is done for or to you as in an institution.

Combined with strong family support and his deep spiritual beliefs, Michael was finally able to get back in touch with a long-held family mantra: *People should work and do for others*. Observing the Peer Support Specialists working at MHCBBC, he decided he wanted to become one. Michael felt volunteering was a good way to get started. He began by just phoning the Salvation Army and asking if they could use a volunteer. He worked three hours a day for three days a week, doing mostly cleaning, taking out trash, and filing. It wasn't glamorous work, but at the end of three months he got a glowing reference letter.

With that reference letter and a résumé, Michael used a volunteer clearinghouse to get a position at Boulder Aging Services which was more in line with his ultimate vocational goal – helping people. He worked one day per week for three years visiting with an elderly gentleman with whom he continues to visit each week. He did develop some vocational skills like how to approach helping someone in need. Michael then moved on to paid work in a family business 10-12 hours per week. It was very hard and demanding work, but he had flexible hours and an understanding boss. Finally, in 2009, he was ready for training to apply for a Peer Support Specialist position. He got it and he loves it.

Michael reports that his volunteer work was critical to his recovery from mental illness. It was a step-by-step process of working, getting approval from people who didn't know he had a mental illness, and building his self-esteem and confidence. He feels that volunteering has many advantages like structuring your day, limiting isolation, interacting with "real world" people while under less pressure than a regular job, helping to set vocational goals and develop skills. Some find that volunteering alone is satisfaction enough with the reward of contributing and feeling productive. Others, like Michael, see it also as a path to regular employment. For them, it is a process that takes patience and planning to build your work stamina, your skills, and your mental health.

Volunteer Clearinghouses Can Help

Volunteer clearinghouses simplify the process of finding something that fits your needs. They identify volunteer opportunities and often classify them according to the kind of the work and time is required. If you need help finding a good volunteer match, see the article on page 1 for how to find help at Jefferson Center and MHCBBC.

Metro Volunteers: Probably the largest in the Denver area. Go to the website, www.metrovolunteers.org, and click on "Volunteer Now." Search by project, browse all the projects listed in alphabetical order, or find projects by date on the calendar. If you go to http://metrovolunteers.org/AboutUs/index.php/pdf/YMC_Booklet.pdf, you'll find a host of volunteer opportunities with various organizations of the Youth Mentoring Collaborative.

Volunteer Connection of Boulder County has a searchable database available at www.volunteerconnection.net. In the center of the homepage is Volunteer Central. Click on activities for adults or for youth. In addition, this organization has experienced Referral Counselors to help you to find a good match. Call 303-444-4904 to make an appointment.

Volunteer Match: This is a nationwide clearinghouse at www.volunteermatch.org. Enter your address or zip code and the kind of volunteer work you'd like to do. Up will come a list

of possibilities within a certain radius of your zip code and a map showing where most of them are located.

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado can be reached at 303-715-1010 or www.voc.org. They conduct work mostly outdoors projects and not in the winter. Many projects last more than one day, and carpools for volunteers can be arranged.

Seniors' Resource Center: The Volunteer Services Director is Ann Ludvigsen. She can be reached at 303-235-6973 or aludvigsen@SRC Aging.org.

Foothills Behavioral Health Partners Announces Resiliency Champion Winners

Clients and staff have nominated Resiliency Champions, staff who do an exceptional job helping children, youth and families overcome adversity and/or mental health challenges. Jefferson Center's winner is Dr. Janice Thomas, a child psychiatrist at the center. The winner at MHCBBC is Marilee Snyder, a clinician who works with children and youth. Each receives a handsome plaque and a cash award.

NOTE: This is YOUR newsletter. If you wish to offer comments or suggestions, please email Lucy Hausner at lucyh@jcmh.org.