

## The Most Important Words In the English Language

For years we've been taught by some that the three most important words in the English language are "I love you." Others tell us that "I am sorry" are the most important. At Family Services, we believe those are great choices but we are kinda partial to two-word phrases. We think "thank" and "you" combined are the most important words available to us.

Before we make our way too far into this new year, we would like to say "Thank you" to our supporters for your many donations of time and money and thought:

- Thank you to those of you whose donations allowed senior citizens to remain safely in their homes.
- Thank you to our Running for Laptops runners and other supporters of our Educational Assistance Initiative for assisting at-risk youth aging out of services in pursuing their educational dreams.
- Thank you to those of you who believe parents can and do need a little support at times, and that we can grow kinder adults by planting the seeds of kindness in children.
- Thank you to supporters of our special events, our golf outing, Act 2 and others.

Finally, to the many unnamed, those of you who we failed to mention yet who assisted us in carrying out our mission to *empower people to reach their full potential*, we say, humbly, "Thank you."



Family Affairs is a newsletter of Family Services of Western Pennsylvania

## Inside this issue

An Xcel(lent) Award...P.2  
Searchin' for Hearts of Gold...P.3  
Upcoming Events...P.4

Pictured: Photographer Eric Rogerson "picturing" you.

## A View Behind the Lens: Capturing the Often Tortured Path of Recovery

Eric long considered himself to be a loner, somewhat of a misfit. He has minimal recollection of friends as a child and, throughout both junior high and high school, he recalls his peers calling him names, making fun of him, or just ignoring him. Eric recalls having symptoms of anxiety throughout his early years which later manifested into symptoms of depression and years of anxiety and low self-esteem.

Eric graduated from high school with hopes for a fresh start. Instead, he experienced his first episode of major depressive disorder and spent the next year isolated in his home. He rarely went out in public, and when he did, he was riddled with anxiety that forced him back into his home. It became a vicious cycle he would experience again and again throughout his life. His fear and sadness overwhelmed him and he felt as if he was making no progress in life. Eventually, he found the strength to make that fresh start he had hoped for a reality.

In February 1981, Eric joined the army and was stationed for the next two and a half years in El Paso, Texas. During this time, he met new people, drove tanks, traveled to Germany and began to live a lifestyle that would help him "fit in." He also began drinking on a nightly basis. At times he was with fellow soldiers doing things that he considered to be "stupid or dangerous." His alcohol consumption increased. He would drink with his peers. He would drink when alone. He was approached by his superiors regarding his behavior on a number of occasions. After a three day drinking binge he went AWOL and, when he returned, was told that he

would be discharged from the service.

Eric spent the next few months riding a wave of emotions and with increasing symptoms of depression as his discharge date neared. The mask of alcohol was no longer working. He was filled with internal struggle. He came back home to Pennsylvania and sunk into a deep state of depression, again isolating himself. After nine months he decided to take a job at a local grocery store in order to get out of his house. He worked part-time for the next two and a half years but decided he wanted something more engaging. He enrolled at a local school where he earned his certification to become a travel agent. Upon completion of his studies, the school provided a week long cruise to all of the graduates. Though he had already begun seeking employment opportunities, Eric didn't want to pass on the opportunity to travel. Once the ship set sail, however, Eric's problems arose again. His social anxiety reached new levels. He was fearful of being near others and he couldn't spend time on the deck without wanting to run to his cabin. So he did exactly that - he stayed in his cabin the entire week, drinking, shut off from the experiences he desired.

Upon returning from the cruise, Eric once again felt like a failure, his self-esteem shattered. To make matters worse, he had not received any response from prospective employers. He felt rejected, lost, alone.

(Continued on page 3)

## An Xcel(lent) Award

The National Association of Case Management (NACM) recently awarded Family Services and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Office of Behavioral Health the Organizational Xcel Award at their 17th Annual Conference in Nebraska.

The Xcel Award represents excellence in case management exhibited by an organization and is in recognition of our initial recovery orientation and mentoring that began here a few years back. From that beginning a county-wide transformation of case management occurred that has yielded strong partnerships with three universities, funding for outcomes measurement, funding for training of staff, the development of undergraduate service coordination degrees in social work and psychology, certificate programs for adult and child service coordination, adult and child mentoring, developing advanced workshops and a four-day new hire training program recently approved by the state mental health authority.

Further, the Xcel Award recognizes our development of a recovery-oriented service coordination, high quality training to improve the recruitment and retention of staff, increased accountability in the system and higher salaries to assist in the retention of staff.

This is the second award related to the transformation of our case management services that the agency has received in the past nine months. Last May Family Services received the Behavioral Health Pacesetter Award from the Annapolis Coalition and the Hitachi Foundation in recognition of the large system changes we implemented in recovery and recruitment and retention of Bachelors-level staff in behavioral health. ■



**A**lthough the Community Outreach through Resources and Education (CORE) Program at Family Services is relatively small, it does big things. CORE is designed to help young adults transition into adulthood and establish independence. Entry into the program is voluntary, as are all services and activities provided by CORE.

Currently, CORE is made up of four workers - three CORE Facilitators, and one Peer Support Worker. There are about sixty-five clients currently utilizing the program and it is continuing to grow.

Each Facilitator or Peer Support Worker works with individuals one on one to achieve certain goals chosen by the individual. Common goals include obtaining employment, assistance with continuing education, learning independent living skills, developing friendships and other relationships, accessing community resources and much more. Each client and their facilitator create a unique goal plan, referred to as an Individualized Service Plan, or ISP. Individuals are seen at least one to two times per month, although some are seen more often depending on the level of care each individual needs.

CORE workers also facilitate group activities that directly relate to the clients' needs. For example, CORE recently held a driver's education group at the agency's Giving Tree Drop-In Center in Greensburg, PA for clients who are working on obtaining their driver's permit. It was an opportunity for those clients to engage in activities that pertained to the Pennsylvania Driver's Manual while building relationships with others who share that common goal. CORE also holds activities such as monthly movie nights and holiday parties and works with the Giving Tree Drop-In Center to organize small social outings.

## Community Outreach through Resources and Education:

### Assisting Youth In Their Transition Into Adulthood

CORE provides transportation to most activities. Brittane Corbin (pictured) has been an active member of CORE since May of 2011 and participates in many of the activities offered by CORE. Brittane remarks that she's had "a good experience with the CORE Program." She is working on goals such as obtaining a driver's permit, wellness, socialization and graduating college.

"I like that CORE offers activities like the movie nights and the one-on-one outings. I also really feel that the driver's education group has helped me out a lot. I learned a lot about the book and it was an opportunity to make new friends. That is one of my favorite things about being in CORE," says Brittane.

CORE also offers an opportunity to do volunteer work, which is something many of the clients take advantage of. A favorite place for the clients to volunteer is at Animal Friends of Westmoreland County in Youngwood. CORE has also volunteered at the Westmoreland County Food Bank and with the Salvation Army this holiday season.

The CORE office is headquartered in Greensburg; however CORE workers are always on the go. Clientele is served from anywhere in Westmoreland County - from Ligonier, New Kensington, Irwin, Smithton and everywhere and anywhere in between.

To be accepted into CORE, individuals must currently reside in Westmoreland County, be between the ages of 16-24, have a primary mental health diagnosis, and be open to Westmoreland Case Management and Supports, Inc (WCSI).

To learn more about the CORE program, contact Marci Sturgeon-Rusiewicz at 724-335-9883 ext. 5526 or via email at [sturgeonm@fswp.org](mailto:sturgeonm@fswp.org) ■

## A View Behind the Lens:

### Capturing the Often Tortured Path of Recovery

*(Continued from page 1)*

As the years passed, Eric had minimal contact with the outside world. He walked his dogs each day before dawn so no one would see him. He attempted to make small trips to the store with his mom but would leave before they were finished. He ignored his physical health. In 2008, a few weeks following his father's death, Eric attempted suicide. He took large amounts of sleep medication with alcohol. He was semi-conscious when his mother found him. He remembers asking her why he wasn't dead.

After a stay in the intensive care and inpatient units of a local hospital, Eric was discharged to Family Services Adult Partial Hospitalization program, a goal-focused, time-limited, intensive treatment program designed as an alternative to inpatient care, or as a transition from inpatient to outpatient care. He remembers Partial being "so crowded and anxiety provoking" but he slowly began to trust his therapists, so much so that he shared his suicidal thoughts with them, a milestone along his path to recovery. Following a setback and a return to the hospital, Eric began participating in the agency's Psycho-Social Rehabilitation program (PSR), a voluntary day program built on the proposition that individuals should actively be involved in their treatment. He remembers barely anyone speaking to him in group settings at PSR, however, he acknowledges that he was not going out of his way to speak with others. In the evenings, he also began participating in a more intensive outpatient program within the agency. There, he learned to organize his recovery in stages and to set targets. For two months, Eric attended both day and evening programming learning new coping skills, rebuilding his self-esteem, and maintaining a sense of structure and balance in his life. His recovery was finally taking hold.

In March of 2009, Eric took the next step when he attended an outing hosted by PSR to Phipps Conservatory. This was his first outing since joining



Photo by Eric Rogerson

PSR; he was too fearful to attend in the past. The Conservatory was having an orchid show. Eric had been taking some pictures around his home of his pets and thought that the show would provide him with a nice subject for pictures. And did it! Eric's photos were amazing! He brought them to PSR to share with other consumers and staff. Everyone was in awe at his eye for photography. The attention at times became anxiety-provoking but Eric began to use his love of photography as a means to distance himself from the symptoms and irrational thoughts that had haunted him in the past. Taking pictures, editing, matting and framing—these all became Eric's wellness tools for coping with his symptoms.

With support and encouragement from family, friends and staff, Eric enrolled in an eight week photography course at the Community College of Allegheny County. This was a huge accomplishment for him; not only was he committing to engaging with strangers in an area that is only somewhat familiar to him, he also had to take two buses both to and from the city in order to attend the course. Eric remembers the anxiety that he felt each time he stepped on the bus bound for Pittsburgh, however, he was able to maintain his desire and motivation to continue with the course. He was permitting himself to experience life in new ways!

*Today, Eric continues to struggle with symptoms of anxiety and depression but they no longer overwhelm him. He relies on the coping skills he learned at Partial and at PSR to assist him in challenging times. His photography, well, that still plays a huge part in his recovery, too. His pictures adorn the walls of the PSR offices; Employment Solutions for People with Disabilities asked if he would contribute photos to their 2012 calendar. Eric is also participating in a project with Westmoreland County, submitting photos of his community that show what recovery means to him, and has committed to submitting photographs to be displayed at local libraries ■*

## Searchin' for Hearts of Gold

In a classic song written more than thirty years ago, singer/songwriter Neil Young travelled to Hollywood and Redwood and crossed oceans in search of his heart of gold. Fortunately for area seniors, they need look no further than Family Services for theirs. Maybe the trip isn't as glamorous as the bright lights of Hollywood or as awe-inspiring as traversing thunderous ocean waves but, hey, we're a lot closer!

This past November, at our *Open Your Heart to a Senior* party honoring volunteers who donate their time to assist area senior citizens, the volunteers established a fund, the **Heart of Gold Fund**, with \$1000 in seed money that will provide support to senior citizens so that they can remain in their own homes where they would like to be. Since most of the seniors Family Services helps are on fixed incomes, they can't afford some of the basic comforts of home that many of us take for granted. When this happens, the **Heart of Gold Fund** aims to assist where it can.

No, we're not adding wings onto houses or installing whole-house home entertainment systems. That's not what's needed. We are talking about simple safety modifications that can help older adults avoid a slip and fall or a fire, an extra blanket to keep them warmer in winter, a microwave to cook their food, etc.

To learn more about the **Heart of Gold Fund**, or to help support it, please contact Laura Latini at 412-820-2050 ext. 412 or via email at [latinil@fswp.org](mailto:latinil@fswp.org).





Family Services of Western Pennsylvania is accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children, Inc.

Family Services of Western Pennsylvania is a non-profit organization declared tax-exempt by the federal government (under section 501 C 3 of the IRS code) and the Commonwealth of Pa.

A copy of our official registration may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free from within Pennsylvania 800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement All donations to Family Services of Western Pennsylvania are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

Family Services of Western Pennsylvania receives funding from the United Way's of Allegheny, Washington and Westmoreland Counties.

## Upcoming Events

### Running for Laptops, May 6, 2012

Running for Laptops walkers and runners who participate in the Pittsburgh Marathon or Half Marathon can raise money to purchase laptop computers for youth who are aging out of the social service safety net and who wish to pursue their educational dreams. Part of the agency's *Educational Assistance Initiative*. For details on how you can support Running for Laptops, contact Alyssa Cholodofsky at 412-820-2050 ext. 428. Check out the Running for Laptops website at [www.runningforlaptops.org](http://www.runningforlaptops.org).

### Sixteenth Annual Family Services Charity Golf Classic, June 8, 2012

It's never too early to think about golf. At Churchill Valley Country Club. Foursome package includes: Greens fee, use of locker room and driving range, cookout lunch, on-course beverages, dinner and program, \$50 lottery ticket for each golfer (\$5,000 prize to winner.) To register your foursome, or to join us as a sponsor, contact Dennis Kowalski at 412-820-2050 ext. 409, or register online by visiting our website at [www.fswp.org](http://www.fswp.org), clicking on the **DONATE NOW** button and selecting **Charity Golf Outing** from the dropdown box.

## Donate Now

Did you know it's easier than ever to make a safe, secure donation to Family Services? Whether it's in memory of, or in honor of, a loved one, dedicated to a specific program or event, or a continuing donation, you can do it by visiting us on-line at [www.fswp.org](http://www.fswp.org) and clicking on the **DONATE NOW** button. Of course, we will still accept donations through the mail, too. Whichever way you choose, thank you for your support!

Family Affairs

*Empower people to reach their full potential...*

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