

## Why We Do the Things We Do

Have you ever taken a moment or twenty out of your day, pushed the work aside, leaned back in your chair, kicked up your feet and just wondered "Why?" Ya know, why did they pick the morning rush hour to run the streetsweepin' machine across the bridge? Why did the Steelers pass on fourth down with only a yard to go?

Throughout history, we've done all kinds of "things" for a variety of reasons, from the glorious to the mundane.

In 1922, when asked why he wanted to climb Mt. Everest, British mountaineer George Mallory responded, "If you cannot understand that there is something in man which responds to the challenge of this mountain and goes out to meet it, that the struggle is the struggle of life itself upward and forever upward, then you won't see why we go."

By the same token, in 1994, when asked why he had just run across the country and back again, Forrest Gump replied, "I just felt like running."

Ken and Alyssa, Rachel and Sarah, Kathleen and Cathy, Ginger, CJ, Adrian and a host of others feel like running too, running in the Pittsburgh Marathon May 15th as part of the Running for Laptops Team. Why? To help support the educational dreams of disadvantaged youth aging out of the social services system. To find out how you can assist them, check out [www.runningforlaptops.org](http://www.runningforlaptops.org) ■



Family Affairs is a newsletter of Family Services of Western Pennsylvania

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Pictured: Jason performing at agency picnic

## Banjo Man: How Treatment and Music Intersected Along the Path to Recovery

*"Music washes away from the soul"*, wrote poet Berthold Auerbach *"the dust of everyday life."* Jason would probably agree.

Jason was a productive thirty-seven year old, employed at a local steel factory and performing professionally as a bluegrass artist in his off hours. One day, his colleagues at work noticed that he was having a difficult time staying focused and seemed to be acting "strange." His supervisor suggested that he go home for the day and get some rest. Unfortunately, Jason went home and didn't return. During his time off he began to hear voices. He was in the throes of his first psychotic episode.

Jason recalls the voices telling him that he needed to leave Pennsylvania to "be safe." He was having religious and supernatural preoccupations. He wasn't sleeping and didn't feel as though he could trust anyone so he packed his car with plans to head west.

Jason made it as far as Washington County when he began to panic. While trying to make a call to his family to come and get him, the police came by and assumed, because of his actions and agitated state, that he was under the influence of drugs. Even in his declining mental state Jason recalls vehemently denying that that he was using, but he was arrested anyway and spent the next three days in prison.

While in prison, and still in a state of active,

unrecognized psychosis, Jason spent an entire night walking in circles around his cell. When the guards came to him in the morning, he had walked the skin off of the soles of his feet and was in need of medical attention. A nurse treating him recognized that Jason was experiencing a psychotic episode. She requested an immediate referral to a state hospital where he was diagnosed with and began treatment for bipolar disorder.

After months of treatment at the state hospital, Jason was discharged and entered Family Services' Acute Partial Hospitalization Program, an intensive treatment program without the restrictions of a locked inpatient psychiatric unit, and then into a less restrictive treatment setting, the Psychosocial Rehabilitation (PSR) program, where he met Rehab Specialist David Linhart. For sixteen months David worked closely with Jason helping him improve his social and communications skills and develop a greater awareness of his condition. As a result of his treatment, Jason has been able to build trusting relationships with staff and peers who have, in turn, enabled him to build a healthy support system.

Today, Jason continues to work with the agency's Psychiatric Rehabilitation staff gaining skills in self  
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## SAGE:

### Senior Adult Day Center

Today, more than thirteen million baby boomers are deeply involved with the care of a parent or other family member. When the parent or family member is physically and/or intellectually challenged, the care can be daunting. Many boomers feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities.

Starting this year, Family Services' NorthCo Vocational Training Center will offer a state-licensed Senior Adult Day Center that provides a program of social, recreational and health services in a group setting for physically and/or intellectually challenged older adults.

SAGE, as it known (**S**upport, **A**dvocate, **G**row, **E**mpower) assists individuals in maintaining or improving their level of care so that they can remain in their communities, and allows them to socialize, enjoy peer support and receive health and social services in a stimulating and supportive environment that promotes better physical and mental health. The program also provides assistance to families and other caregivers who have responsibility for adults who cannot be left alone and need supportive services to improve or maintain their level of independence.

Our goal is to provide a balance of purposeful activities during the day that meet an individual's social, intellectual, cultural, economic, emotional and physical interests and needs, and includes personal care and health monitoring, counseling and information referral, meals and snacks, recreation, exercise and therapies.

To learn more, contact Valerie Ferguson, SAGE Coordinator, at 412-447-0009 ext. 111 or via email at



Since the advent of the first jail and the first re-incarceration of a man (or woman) for the second or third or tenth time, the problem of recidivism has vexed both prison officials and behavioral scientists alike. Though its costs have long been evident through increasing crime rates, broken family units and higher taxes to build bigger prisons that house more and more inmates, solutions to recidivism and its resultant effects on society have proven much more elusive.

Recently, Family Services of Western Pennsylvania, in partnership with Lydia's Place and Amachi Pittsburgh, began a collaborative effort to deliver family support services to sentenced male and female inmates in the Allegheny County Jail and ex-offenders and identified family members to improve reintegration into society, to reduce recidivism and to improve the odds of a family staying intact during a loved one's incarceration. All three organizations have rich histories of working with the prison population and their families.

For more than thirty years, Family Services, through its Families Outside program, has been providing family visitation and transportation assistance to low-income families in Allegheny and surrounding counties who have a loved one incarcerated in a State Correctional Institution. Lydia's Place was founded in 1993 to support incarcerated women and their children in rebuilding their lives. Amachi Pittsburgh was established in 2003 to mobilize communities of faith to act as mentors to children of incarcerated parents.

Our family-focused interventions will be provided in the Allegheny County Jail, in the community at our respective offices, in ten Family Centers and five Family Foundations/ Early Head Start locations, and in the home, as needed. Services will include parent education, teaching life skills, child mentoring, service coordination, identifying community

## A Collaborative Effort: Maintaining and Strengthening the Family Unit and Reducing Recidivism

linkages, transportation for families to the jail for visitation and individual and family counseling.

Family support services aim to improve the health and well being of children whose parents are incarcerated in the Allegheny County Jail by reducing the repeated separations, the emotional upset and the deterioration of family connections that can be a consequence of their parents' incarceration. Family support services begin six to eight months before discharge and will stay with the inmate and their family for up to one year post discharge.

Additionally, we will work with the incarcerated parent to discuss re-entry upon their release. The incarcerated parent must understand that the family has continued on while they were away and they must be prepared to face their adjusted role in the family. We will help them to develop strategies to re-engage with their children and their families, identify pitfalls and areas of concern prior to their release and work with their families to help them understand re-entry and the importance of communication *prior to release* about issues that may arise.

John Murphy, Family Support Coordinator for Family Services, believes the team is off to a good start with the family work. "I have met with most of the families of the inmates who are enrolled in the program thus far. Each family is open to part if not all of our menu of services. I know that the other family support people are making the same kind of headway as well." Added Murphy, "This is just the beginning of what we all hope is a fruitful and beneficial partnership."

If you would like to learn more about family support services at the Allegheny County Jail please contact John Murphy via e-mail at [murphyj@fswp.org](mailto:murphyj@fswp.org) ■



## Banjo Man: How Treatment and Music Intersected Along the Path To Recovery



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-awareness, developing healthy boundaries and increasing self-confidence. Recently, he has even expressed the desire to live independently again. And what of his love of music, his talent for playing his musical instruments?

Jason had been playing the banjo, fiddle, and guitar since he was a young child. His father, who is also a musician, crafted all of Jason's instruments for him by hand. Each year Jason performed at the Mountain Top Bluegrass Festival in Tarentum, Pennsylvania as well as with local and national bluegrass acts. But, when Jason had his psychotic episode, he not only lost the desire to play his instruments, he lost his ability. Jason recalled picking up the banjo after he was released from the hospital and not knowing where to start. He was frustrated, frustrated with his inability to play as well as with the side effects new medications were having on him. Jason lost total interest in his music.

One day when he was at PSR, Jason picked up a guitar that had been sitting unattended, plucked a few strings and, with staff and peer encouragement, began to practice at home and in group treatment settings. Slowly, he began to regain his skills and, as his medication reached therapeutic levels, his recall improved. Jason began to bring his banjo to PSR groups and play for staff and peers during lunch. He openly shared his story with his peers about how he lost his roles in life due to mental illness and how he began to regain them.

Being able to break free from the stigma of bipolar disorder was a huge step for Jason; it demonstrated his ability to overcome his

fears of rejection, criticism, and disappointment—both from others and from within.

Last summer, Jason was presented with the opportunity to perform at the agency's annual picnic. The staff who had worked with him at PSR felt that this experience would enhance his recovery, providing him with an opportunity to use his newly discovered strengths and means of coping in a positive, reinforcing, productive manner.

On July 31st, 2010, at Squaw Valley Park in Fox Chapel, Jason unpacked his case again and with banjo in hand, a friend accompanying him on standup bass, staff and other interested park patrons looking on, performed brilliantly for nearly three hours. Back in the open air playing the music he loves as he had done so many times in the past. *The highlight of the picnic! Since then, his rebuilt confidence has allowed him to accept various musical gigs within the program and out in his community.*

Jason's steps along the path to recovery continue, his experiences an inspiration to his peers and to the staff who work with him. They have seen him successfully use his professional and natural supports in order to be able to live the life he once knew so well—a life rich with music. ■

To learn more about  
Family Services Psychosocial  
Rehabilitation program,  
please visit us online at  
[www.fswp.org](http://www.fswp.org).

## Bipolar Basics

Bipolar disorder is a serious mental illness characterized by extreme changes in mood, from mania to depression. About 5.7 million U.S. adults are living with bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder affects men and women equally, as well as all races, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic classes. Experts believe bipolar disorder is partly caused by an underlying problem with the balance of brain chemicals.

People diagnosed with bipolar disorder usually have one or more major depressive episodes along with one or more manic or mixed episodes. During a manic phase, patients tend to feel euphoric and may believe they can accomplish anything. This can result in inflated self-esteem, agitation, reduced need for sleep, being more talkative, being easily distracted, and a sense of racing thoughts. Reckless behaviors are common. Having three or more of these symptoms nearly every day for a week may indicate a manic episode.

The periods of depression can be equally intense. Sadness and anxiety affect every aspect of life -- thoughts, feelings, sleeping, eating, physical health, relationships, ability to function at work. There may seem to be no way out of this overwhelming mood.

Treatment for bipolar disorder most often includes a combination of a mood-stabilizing drug and psychotherapy. Although drug treatment is primary, ongoing psychotherapy is important to help patients better cope with the condition. ■

Celebrating 125 Years of Caring



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 15, 2011

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).

### Fifteenth Annual Family Services Charity Golf Classic, June 3, 2011

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.

## 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!

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**Administrative Office**  
3230 William Pitt Way  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238  
412.820.2050 ph  
412.820.2060 fax  
fswp@fswp.org email  
www.fswp.org website

**Bulk Mailing Center**  
104 Beta Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
PERMIT NO. 29  
NEW KENSINGTON,  
PA 15068

