



# Florida Peer Network, Inc.

*An independent organization of and for people who are recovering from psychiatric disabilities and co-occurring disorders*

**December 2011 Newsletter**

**Volume 5, Number 3**



## Note from the FPN Board Chair



They're here! The holiday season has arrived and it always makes me realize how quickly time moves forward. For me, in spite of the usual frenzy about buying and selling, this is a time to step back and take stock of where we are and what is most important. In my years of working in the mental health field and getting to know people who have survived their experiences with mental illnesses and the mental health system, I have learned a great deal about the challenges people face over a lifetime. I am always struck by how frequently people say that, as difficult as symptoms associated with mental illness can be, the worst part of their experience was the feeling of being cut off from family, friends, and a sense of community—feeling alone and without a voice! I

believe that this common experience among consumers/survivors and the need to regain a voice has been one of the key drivers of the consumer movement throughout the country. And it is certainly at the heart of the mission of the Florida Peer Network (FPN). Ultimately, everything we do at FPN—the advocacy, the education, the networking—is about making sure that the voice of the consumer is heard. Whether it is in the halls of the legislature in Tallahassee, in the offices of policy makers and program planners, in service provider agencies, in classrooms, or in our homes and communities, it is all about your voice being heard. It is about peers being engaged—peers helping peers.

Each person matters. Each voice needs to be heard. During this holiday season, let us each make a point of reaching out to a person who needs it, perhaps an old friend, or someone you know who is struggling or feeling alone. Support each other. Let your voice be heard. Was it not a voice in the wilderness that heralded the coming of the savior? On behalf of the board of the Florida Peer Network, I wish you all a happy holiday season.

Jim Winarski, Chairman of the Board, Florida Peer Network

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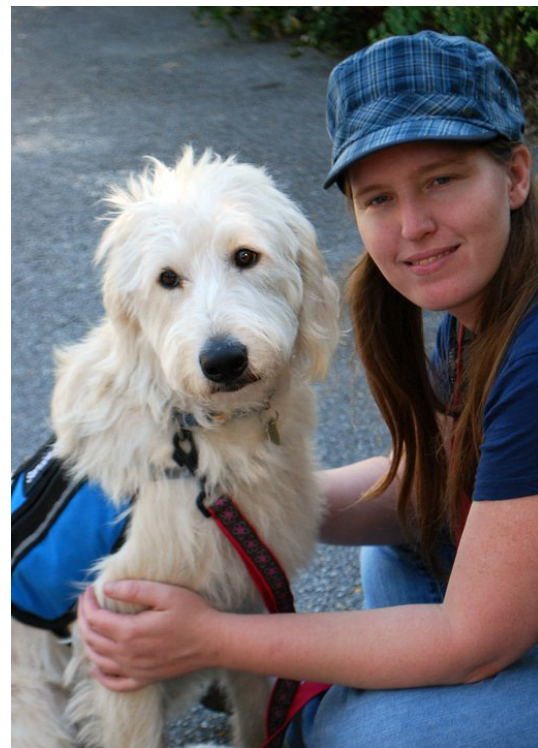
# *“There is no psychiatrist in the world like a puppy licking your face.”*

By Heather Hawk, CRPS

Title/Quote by Ben Williams

Blah! Doggie kisses wake me up every morning right before the alarm clock goes off. If I do not get out of bed, I have a dog dragging my blanket away from me to make sure I am awake. On those days I refuse to get up, here comes a wiggly dog with a squeaky toy harassing me to play and get out of bed. Is a psychiatrist, therapist, or person in your life going to be happy to do this every day to get you out of bed? No, but my service dog Frisco will.

Frisco is my labradoodle and service dog. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service dog is “...any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability...” To be eligible for a service dog, you must have a life limiting disability. These dogs are obedient, well socialized, under the owners control at all times, and able to perform work or tasks to assist the individual with living life. Each service dog is individually trained to assist their owner by doing things such as interrupting behaviors, waking them up, providing deep pressure or tactile stimulation for grounding, and alerting to a panic attack or mood swing. A service dog is a 24/7, lifelong commitment and a lot of work, but for those that own them, it is well worth it.



The majority of service dogs in the United States are trained by their owner with the assistance of a professional trainer. There are a few programs that will train for a person with a psychiatric disability. The Psychiatric Service Dog Society (PSDS, [www.psychdog.org](http://www.psychdog.org)) does not provide service dogs, but assists with education, advocacy, and training facilitation through online support groups. They are a great resource for learning about service dogs and their benefits. PSDS maintains three online mailing lists (listservs) for consumers, veterans and clinicians. Service Dog Friends of Florida is a meet-up group with members throughout the state. We are a group of individuals with an interest in service dogs that get together at least once a month to socialize and support each other in the training of our service dogs. I welcome anyone with an interest in service dogs to join our group on Facebook or feel free to email me directly at [hjhawk@gmail.com](mailto:hjhawk@gmail.com)

## **Resources:**

- Americans with Disabilities Act - [http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII\\_2010/reg3\\_2010.html](http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII_2010/reg3_2010.html)
- Psychiatric Service Dog Society - <http://www.psychdog.org>
- PSDS Listserv - <http://www.psychdog.org/listserv.html>
- Service Dog Friends of Florida - <http://www.facebook.com/groups/ServiceDogFriends>

# River Region Human Services' Drop-in Centers in Jacksonville

By Diann Mayo

The mission of River Region's Drop-in Centers is to enhance and improve the quality of life for individuals living with mental illness, substance abuse, and/or HIV/AIDS in Northeast Florida. The Drop-In Centers provide a "safe haven" for persons with mental illness to relax, socialize, and receive services in a home-like supportive environment.

Each member is viewed as a valuable contributor to the center and the community. Members receive referrals for housing, medical, dental, legal, employment, and treatment services they need. They have access to computers, internet, TV, and board games and there are also recreational opportunities including monthly cookouts and community outings.

Participation in activities and services is on a voluntary basis. Members/consumers attend groups tailored to their needs where they learn beneficial recovery skills. Groups include:

- Bi-polar group
- Psycho-social Rehabilitation group
- Peer Support groups

River Region also has a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program, which was designed to help people who live with a mental illness learn to assist others to move past their illness to the life they want. The training is all about recovery! Participants learn about many tools and resources they can pass along to their peers so that they too can move forward in their lives.

One woman who recently received the training said, "We all make mistakes, and we all need support sometimes. It's ok to ask for help. I am a walking miracle and so are others. Now, I want to share my new-found strengths and empowerment with others. There is a life out there full of love, happiness, fun and laughter."



*The only journey is the journey within.*

***The Florida Peer Network Newsletter is funded in part by Disability Rights Florida, through the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) grant from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).***

# Supported Housing: Some Thoughts from Alachua County

By Mike Demers

In the Alachua County area, there are at least three forms of supported housing for people living with mental illnesses; however, there are other forms of housing that are less than desirable and point to the need for better, more cost-effective housing alternatives than currently exist.

For those transferring from a long-term hospitalization, they may find that they are limited to what are being called assisted living facilities, or ALFs. These are focused supports, usually small supported housing “group homes” that help residents with daily living needs, access to healthcare, and daily social and vocational programs, if they exist. Within Alachua County, both a day rehabilitation program operated out of Meridian Behavioral Health Care is available, as a well as an opportunity to join a small clubhouse called the Gainesville Opportunity Center. Some of these ALFs exist in rural areas of our county and make it difficult to provide convenient and independent transportation.

Some other people who live with mental illnesses are provided “wrap around” services from our local FACT team. By “wrap around,” it is meant that all needed services are provided

by this one team, no matter if it is getting help with meds, going shopping, getting a job, or finding a place to live. Still this support team doesn't provide social or peer level support opportunities. That is when Social Clubs and Clubhouses are very helpful!

Also located in Gainesville is Bridge House. Bridge House is a long-term facility that provides support for those coping with drug and/or alcohol abuse together with mental illnesses. It is one place where having both concerns can be addresses as one opportunity for recovery. A couple of members of the G.O.C. Clubhouse (Gainesville Opportunity Center) are just now starting a DRA (Dual Recovery Anonymous) weekly recovery meeting that addresses both addiction and mental illnesses in one recovery method. DRA is based on the twelve steps & traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous and has been very successful. You can find out more about this program at <http://draonline.org/>

During my experience operating a clubhouse here in Gainesville, we have also provided a new program for those who do not have immediate access to housing resources. We call it the “Pay It Forward” housing support

program. In this program, run by G.O.C. members who need a place of their own, a member gets help finding a job, at least part-time. With this job they are able to pay rent for a small "S.R.O." which means a *Single Resident Occupant* apartment. Usually, these are studio apartments which are generally the least expensive of any apartments. These small apartments are sought after rather than boarding rooms due to the need and desire that most of us have: to have a personal space all our own to leave in reasonable safety, comfort and peace. The program works by attaining moving in expenses from the club and then paying it back over time into a reserve fund that funds the next member who needs a place. The club's responsibility is to

provide funds to secure the apartment (first, last and security) and assistance with securing a job and moving assistance. Helping with transportation may also be necessary. Although these resources are helpful, future development needs to address the gap of supported housing in our area. Many people living with mental illnesses who want to return to a more independent life have little hope of finding supported housing. People who are homeless, coming out of jail or prison, hospitalized and most recently veterans, are stuck in less than desirable living situations. It would cost less, not more to address these long overdue needs for our brothers and sisters who still lack a warm, safe and decent place to live.



The Florida Peer Network is pleased to announce that **Ms. Amy Peloquin** assumed the position of Acting Executive Director effective immediately. Please feel free to reach out to Ms. Peloquin in this new role at **info@floridapeernetwork.org**.

**Application for Membership**

The Florida Peer Network is an independent organization for people who are recovering from mental health and co-occurring disorders.

**Please cut out form and return to:**

Florida Peer Network, Inc.  
400 Capital Circle SE Suite 18316  
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-3839

Or email: info@floridapeernetwork.org

Attn: Executive Director

Name:		
Mailing Address:		
City:	State:	Zip:
Home Phone:	Cell Phone:	
Work Phone:		
Email Address:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Consumer <input type="checkbox"/> Non-voting Associate <input type="checkbox"/> Peer-run Program <input type="checkbox"/> Provider		

## New Vet Centers in Florida

- **Daytona Vet Center (Volusia County):**  
(386) 366-6600  
1620 Mason Ave. Suite C, Daytona Beach, FL 32117
- **Claremont (Lake County) Vet Center:**  
(352) 536-6701  
1655 East Highway 50, Ste. 102, Clermont, FL 34711
- **Marion County Vet Center:** (352) 317-2563  
612 Southwest 1st Ave., Ocala, FL 34471
- **Pasco County Vet Center:** TBA 2011
- **Polk County Vet Center:** TBA 2012



## Upcoming Events

### Miami VAMC

Relaxation Meditation Classes, Kundalini Yoga Classes, Wii Bowling Tournament, Jam Session, and Drum Circles  
Class schedule and time are posted at [www.miami.va.gov](http://www.miami.va.gov) under Calendar/Events.

### West Palm VAMC

**What's Your Time Worth?** eBenefit enables you to access benefit information more efficiently using self-service tools.

**Time:** 8:00 AM- 3:00 PM (EST) - See website calendar for different dates [www.westpalmbeach.va.gov](http://www.westpalmbeach.va.gov)

**Location:** West Palm Beach, Veterans Benefits Administration, Building #10, Room 128, VBA

No appointment needed, or visit the eBenefit link at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov)

Stay in charge and informed with eBenefits, your gateway to benefit information. eBenefits is your one-stop shop for online benefit related tools and information. This portal is designed for Wounded Warriors, Veterans, Service Members, their families, and their caregivers. We invite you to explore eBenefits and become a registered user. Register today in Bldg #10 Room 128, VBA

### Jupiter Vet Center

#### Yoga Group

**Time:** Weekly on Thursdays from 9:00 AM- 10:15 AM (EST)

**Location:** Jupiter Vet Center, 6650 W. Indiantown Rd., Suite 120, Jupiter, FL 33458

RSVP now for the Jupiter Vet Center Yoga Group! In collaboration with "Connected Warriors"

- Wear comfortable clothes
- Bring a water bottle (optional)
- A gentle & beginner program for combat veterans & their families.
- Helps reduce stress, diminish anxiety and create calm and relaxation.
- Accessible for Veterans of all ages and fitness levels!

For more information or to RSVP, please contact Rondina Marcelo, MSW, at 561-422-1223 or RSVP at 561-422-1220

# What is SOAR?

## (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery)

**SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR)** is a strategy that helps states increase access to mainstream benefits for people with mental health diagnoses who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through training, technical assistance, and strategic planning.

The SOAR model is different because it includes:

1. training case managers and other interested individuals to assist applicants and gather medical evidence PROACTIVELY;
2. a step-by-step explanation of the application and DISABILITY DETERMINATION process;
3. collaboration and strategic planning among key stakeholders; and
4. avoiding APPEALS (do it right the first time!)

For upcoming trainings and a list of Florida's SOAR trainers go to the following website and select Florida: <http://www.prainc.com/soar/>

You may also contact **Denise L. Barber**, Florida SOAR State Team Lead, at [denise\\_barber@dcf.state.fl.us](mailto:denise_barber@dcf.state.fl.us) or **850-717-4329**.



We are all inventors, each sailing out on a voyage of discovery, guided each by a private chart, of which there is no duplicate. The world is all gates, all opportunities.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

# ***Florida Peer Network, Inc.***

## ***Mission Statement***

The Florida Peer Network, Inc. is an independent organization of and for persons with psychiatric disabilities and co-occurring disorders. Our mission is to promote recovery, quality of life, advocacy, education, mutual support, peer directed services, and participation in mental health policy design for consumers throughout the state of Florida.

## ***Membership Information***

### ***Join Online***

[floridapeernetwork.org/application.htm](http://floridapeernetwork.org/application.htm)

### ***Join by Mail***

#### **Florida Peer Network**

400 Capital Circle SE, Suite 18316  
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-3839

**Phone:** 850-922-0090

**E-mail:** [info@floridapeernetwork.org](mailto:info@floridapeernetwork.org)

**Florida Peer Network, Inc.**  
**400 Capital Circle SE - Suite 18316**  
**Tallahassee, Florida 32301-3839**

*The Florida Peer Network, Inc. is a non-profit 501c3 organization of and for persons with psychiatric disabilities and co-occurring disorders. Our mission is to promote recovery, quality of life, advocacy, education, mutual support, peer-directed services, and participation in mental health policy design for consumers throughout the state of Florida. For more information, visit our website: [www.floridapeernetwork.org](http://www.floridapeernetwork.org), call 850-922-0090, or [info@floridapeernetwork.org](mailto:info@floridapeernetwork.org)*