



## **HIKE FOR MENTAL HEALTH**

*Together, we can make a difference by promoting awareness and recovery in mental health.*

Tracy Carney, past Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association board member

Ms. Carney created the *Hike for Mental Health* to bring awareness of mental health recovery and raise money for the Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association (PMHCA).

### **Hike for Mental Health 2013 - in her own words**

*Tracy Carney tells us:*

This October, I will embark on another long-distance hike to raise awareness and seek support for the PMHCA Education Fund. This hike will take me 71 miles through the Great Smoky Mountain National Park at the southern end of the Appalachian Trail (AT). The highest peak on the Appalachian Trail is in this park, Clingmans Dome in Tennessee stands at an elevation 6,643 ft. Hiking has been a wellness tool I have used in my nine-year journey towards mental health recovery. Like hiking, recovering from a severe and persistent mental illness takes hope and perseverance. Last summer, while hiking the 100-mile wilderness and to the summit of Mt Katahdin in Maine, I recognized the priceless gift of friendship and peer support, a gift that has transformed my life.

July 25, 2012 was a day of celebration. After a 5-hour climb, we reached the summit of Mt Katahdin (5, 269 ft) in Maine. For my hiking companion (her trail name is Trip) this was the end of a nine-year journey. As many of you know, the Appalachian Trail runs 2,184 miles from Springer Mt, Georgia to Mt Katahdin, Maine. My friend, Trip, walked every inch of the trail and when we reached the summit her dream, her goal, her journey was complete. You can't fully appreciate this accomplishment unless you've spent some time on the Appalachian Trail. Hiking across fourteen states with high mountains, rocky terrain and unpredictable weather make this a remarkable accomplishment. Yet step by step, year after year, Trip kept trekking determined to reach her goal. What a mixture of emotion when we reached the summit sign. Her nine years of determination and perseverance paid off: her journey was complete.

I have learned so many things from Trip and I am so thankful she invited me to hike with her. You see, without Trip I wouldn't know anything about the

Appalachian Trail. My own journey never would have begun. She was and is my mentor, teacher and friend. Trip's life and journey make me believe that if I keep hiking, I too, can reach my goal and complete the entire Appalachian Trail by my 60th birthday.

And so it is with the gift of peer support on my journey to mental health recovery. I have met so many people through organizations like the Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association. People who have walked this recovery path ahead of me and hold out the candle of hope that says, hike on, your perseverance will pay off. You see, without my peers I would never have heard about a path called mental health recovery. My peers have become my mentors, teachers and friends. I have been so blessed to have people who are willing to teach, support and encourage me toward wellness. They give me hope that goals can be achieved and obstacles can be overcome. Their lives are proof that mental health recovery is a reality.

This past year, I reached a milestone, 'Half way there!' I have now hiked across 7 states, a little over 1,095 miles. Who would have thought that first step in 2009 would have taken me on this wonderful and challenging adventure? I didn't start out confident that I could reach this milestone. I was just persistent and hopeful that is I kept moving toward my goal, I might reach it.

Once again, the *Hike for Mental Health* will focus on raising money for the Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association Education Fund. A fund designed to help individuals cover the cost of trainings, workshops and conferences related to mental health recovery. I am hopeful that we can continue to provide educational opportunities to individuals in recovery and persistent enough to keep asking... Please consider sending a tax-deductible donation to the Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association (PMHCA). Every person's participation and support counts so much. Together, we can make a difference by promoting awareness and recovery in mental health.