



# Starting and Maintaining an Effective It's My Life Peer Partners Support Group



Patrick Hendry  
Dennise Babin



MHA  
Mental Health America  
**B4Stage4**





One of the leading risks for overall poor health is social exclusion and loneliness.

In order to combat the devastating effects of loneliness and to assist people seeking connections to the community and a fulfilling social life, MHA created the It's My Life: Peer Partners.

Peer Partners is structured as a support group that is facilitated by a peer specialist who works with the members to develop a social plan that reflects the type of life they would like and are willing to make substantial life changes to achieve.

It's My Life: Peer Partners is a unique combination of peer support, self-directed care, and psychiatric rehabilitation.

Heavy on the peer support!

When surveyed to become new members of the group, the nearly unanimous goal was to have at least one friend.

- Mental health problems are one of the leading causes of loneliness and isolation.
- Sometimes it is because we are afraid to be around other people, and sometimes it is because other people are afraid to be around us.
- Research has shown that social connectivity is an extremely powerful tool for achieving recovery and creating opportunities for having a life that is meaningful to the individual.

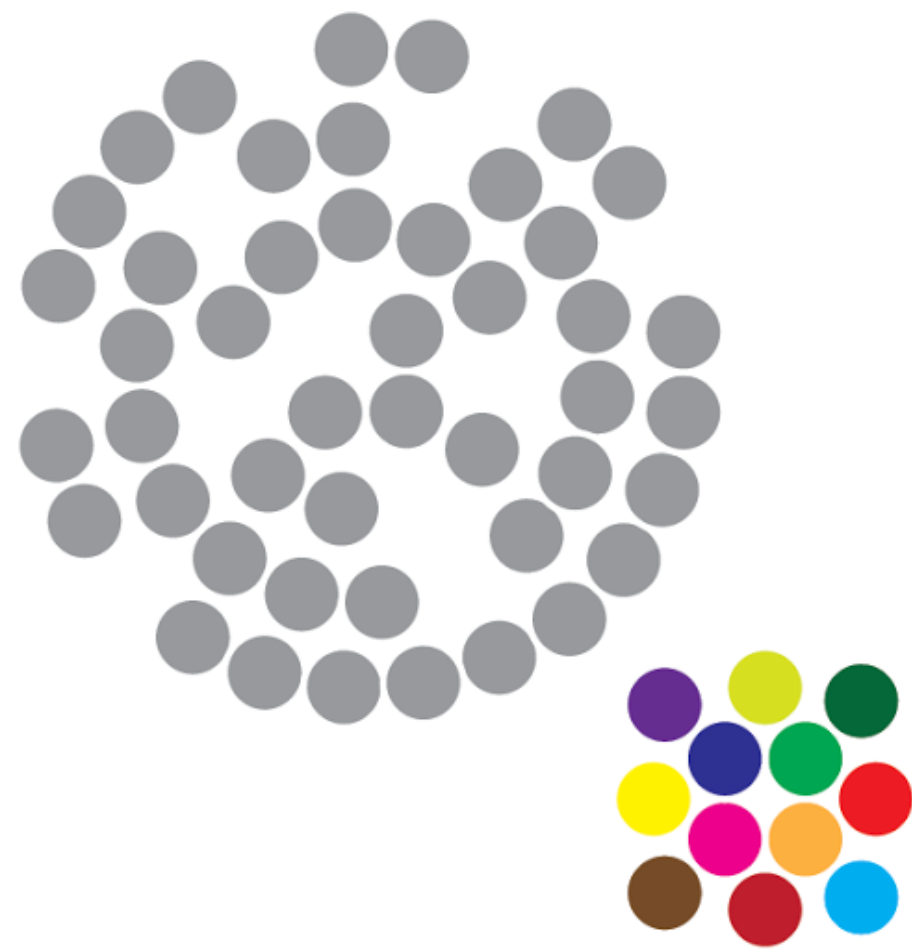
*“Traditional approaches such as medications, hospitalization, and dynamic psychotherapy have a limited effectiveness when applied to the socialization and work aspects of individuals with psychiatric disabilities.” (Chan et al. 1998)*

Our goal with Peer Partners is to help build networks of friends and intimate relationships, thereby creating a strong social support system.

Positive social connections increase self-esteem and our feelings of self-worth. Self-esteem and self-worth are critical to self-love.

*“To love oneself is the beginning  
of a life-long romance.”*

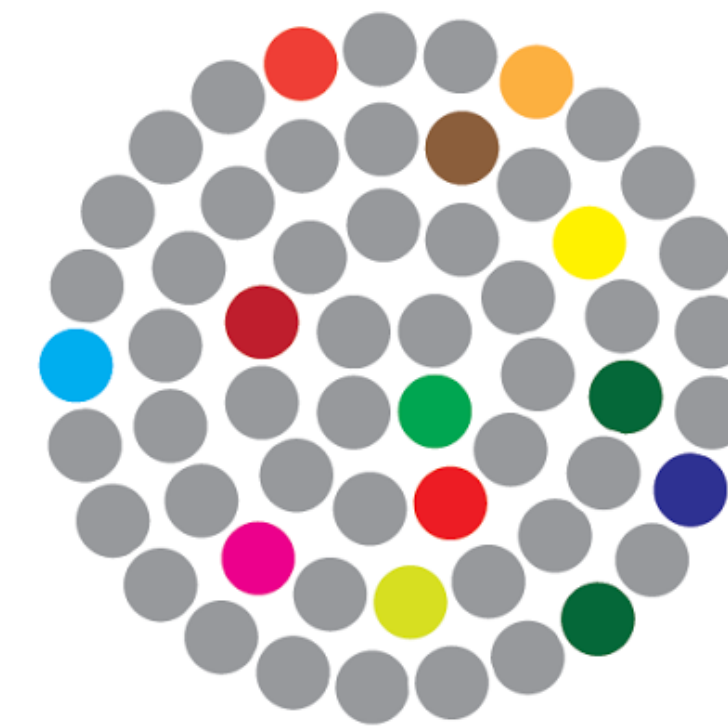
*Oscar Wilde*



Separation



Integration



Inclusion

Separation is what we have, imposed by society and ourselves. Integration means we can live, work, and play in the community but we are often not a real part of it. “Community housing” is often a gateway to integration without inclusion. What we want is **INCLUSION**.



# It's My Life: Peer Partners is Unique

Because Peer Partners is based on a support group model it can be difficult to initially enroll a full group of 10 – 12 people.

- There are currently 7 groups at various stages of organizing.
- Most have encountered a variety of barriers to develop a fully engaged support group.

Today, we will hear about the type of issues that one group at MHA Passaic County in New Jersey has faced. Through a group discussion we will brainstorm creative ideas about how to face and overcome these barriers.

# Facing the Challenges of Building a Successful Peer Partners Group

Denise Babin from MHA Passaic County will lead us through the process they have used to develop their program. Denise will discuss successes and barriers and through her descriptions we will begin to develop a strategy to improve the program.

# Getting Started

“Realize what you’re getting into”

- Talk to others in your agency to let them know you will be forming a new peer group
- Brainstorm with others in your agency or program
- If you are holding the group in a shared space or where other programs are taking place, it’s nice to get some buy in
  - Give a date, time, and list of who will be coming to the building



# Getting The Word Out

- Create an introduction letter
- Create an appealing flyer
- Share with other peer programs, professional groups, etc.
- Social media

## NEW FREE PROGRAM

### It's My Life: Peer Partners Self Directed Social Exploration

Are you a person diagnosed with a mental illness?  
Come join the fun if you are interested in being connected to the community, making new friends and learning new social skills!

Learn how to communicate better, use listening techniques, building a stronger support system and better connections to your community.

It's My Life Program is a one year peer-led evidence based practice developed by Mental Health America.



**Starting Tuesdays, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 from 3:30-4:30pm**

A small stipend will be provided to help you pursue your social goals

Contact: Dennise Babin at 973-478-4444, ext. 117

Or Email: [dbabin@mhapassaic.org](mailto:dbabin@mhapassaic.org)

Mental Health Association in Passaic County  
404 Clifton Avenue, Clifton, NJ 07011





# Preparation

- We needed some resources (practical things)
- Understand that it will take time to familiarize yourself with the lessons and program requirements
- The initial intake forms, POMs take time
- I would suggest you double the amount of time you think you need
- This is a great time to reach out to Patrick and Emily for technical assistance
- Each member is unique – keep in mind that for some, these are big steps

# Resources

- We noticed very early on that transportation was a big problem
  - Lower Passaic County has a lot of transportation available; Upper Passaic County does not.
- Consider accessibility when choosing a group meeting location
- Since we share our cars and vans with other programs, we had to pick a day and time where we could utilize the vehicles.
- Logistics



# Lessons Learned

- We had several starts to the group – don't get discouraged and have confidence to reach out to Patrick and Emily for support
- We had several members that had dropped out due to having symptoms.
- Remember some family members/significant others will have increased concerns regarding their loved one's independence and progress.
- Sometimes members who initially paired up will not be a good fit
- Encourage members to bring up concerns during group instead of in individual sessions with Life Coach

# Lessons Learned

- Individual Life Coach sessions are more productive when individual goals are worked on together
- I thought that members could start socializing right away. It was a humbling experience as I got in touch with my own insecurities about being social and connecting to others in the past.
- Don't think you have to know everything. It's okay to say: "I don't know – let's find out together"
- What do others in the group think?
- Do some of the tough work together.



# Share Your Experiences With the Program

Our goal is to assist people in becoming active members of their community of choice and to develop friendships and connections with the members of that community.

Please write down your comments, suggestions, and experiences with the program!

Any comments that we do not have time to address today will be posted to a new area of our Center for Peer Support.






@ centerforpeersupport.org

Thank you for joining us in our  
efforts to end loneliness and  
isolation through the power of peer  
support



# Contact Us



-  Mental Health America  
500 Montgomery Street  
Suite 820  
Alexandria, VA 22314
-  [Facebook.com/mentalhealthamerica](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthamerica)
-  [Twitter.com/mentalhealtham](https://twitter.com/mentalhealtham)
-  [Youtube.com/mentalhealthamerica](https://www.youtube.com/mentalhealthamerica)
-  Patrick Hendry  
[phendry@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:phendry@mentalhealthamerica.net)
- Dennise Babin  
[dbabin@mhapassaic.org](mailto:dbabin@mhapassaic.org)