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THE RESPECT INITIATIVE
“Giving Hope and Recovery a Voice”



Montgomery Ala.— As the holiday season approaches, we may want to reflect on the courage of so many Alabama citizens who have dedicated part or all of 2018 to recovering from mental health and substance use challenges. Behind every tax dollar the Department of Mental Health invests into this partnership of recovery - there is a story. And it is not just a story of illness, addiction, pain and suffering. Instead, it is a powerful story that highlights our humanity, our resiliency, our strengths and our determination to overcome life’s most perplexing challenges.

To better understand these stories of recovery, The Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) has partnered with Joel Slack and his Respect Initiative program. The RESPECT Initiative supports participants in learning how to articulate their personal stories of recovery from mental health and substance use challenges. One of the program’s objectives is to help participants get clarity to their lived experiences and to realize that their illnesses, addictions or traumas can be placed in the context of a positive story – a story that can inspire and educate decision makers like legislators and administrators, clinical personnel, direct care givers, students and of course peers. Furthermore, when delivered in our communities, these recovery stories effectively alleviate stigma by engendering empathy and understanding.

The RESPECT Initiative training is a 3 ½ day program that many participants refer to as ‘life-changing’. Utilizing a process that Joel began developing in 2001, a group of 10 participants encourage and support one another in developing their stories. Participants who graduate from the RESPECT Initiative feel more confident and more in control of their life experiences once they learn the skills and techniques needed to articulate their personal recovery stories. Above all else, the RESPECT Initiative empowers participants by acknowledging, by honoring and by

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valuing their personal experiences and insights. For example, on the fourth day of training there is a graduation ceremony and an opportunity to showcase their stories.



ADMH is proud to add this innovative program to the menu of services we offer Alabamians. The Initiative has grown significantly since beginning in Spring 2018 at ADMH. Thirty-two individuals have now graduated from the program and gone on to share their stories at special events and meetings. A recent graduate, Larry Snow, was featured in a Montgomery newspaper, telling his story and highlighting the value of peer programs like the RESPECT Initiative.

There is no cost to participate in or to host a RESPECT Initiative training. If you are interested in learning more please contact Mike Autrey, Peer Programs at 334-242-3492 or ADMH Public Information at 334-242-3417, publicinformation.dmh@mh.alabama.gov.

About Us: The Alabama Department of Mental Health serves more than 200,000 Alabama citizens with mental illnesses, intellectual disabilities, and substance use disorders. The department strives to Serve, Empower, and offer support to create awareness while promoting the health and well-being of Alabamians. Visit www.mh.alabama.gov for more information.

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