



# The Friendship Express

Newsletter of the  
*Pennsylvania Compeer Coalition*



Spring 2008

## ABOUT *Compeer*

Mental-health recovery through the healing power of friendship.

Compeer Inc. is an international, non-profit organization that helps adults and children overcome the effects of mental illness, such as loneliness, isolation and low self-esteem – through the power of friendship. Our volunteer-based programs and services, which serve as a complement to therapy, provide supportive friendships for people in mental-health care – helping them on their recovery journey.

Compeer has more than 80 chapters across the country and around the world.

### By the Numbers

- Approximately 6,500 adults and children served worldwide
- Nearly 5,000 volunteers worldwide provide 190,000 volunteer hours annually
- Compeer is recognized as a best-practices model by the American Psychological Association (APA).



This publication is made possible by a collaboration between the Pennsylvania Compeer Coalition and the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS).

## 2007 Outstanding Compeer Adult Match

By Sarah E. Myers, Compeer Lancaster Program Director

At the 23rd Compeer International Conference in Rochester, NY, November 7-9 Compeer Lancaster's first and longest friendship match received the Outstanding Adult Match Award.

"All my life," says Seth Davis, "I had dreamed of and wanted much just ONE true male friend." That was before he met Doug. Six years ago Doug Smith and Seth Davis became Compeer Lancaster's first friendship match. Their

six-year friendship is, in their words, based on dependability, authenticity, mutual support, encouragement, and most importantly trust.

Every Thursday they get together. It has

become a tradition. Seth says that he goes through the day Thursday in eager anticipation of their time together.

During the past year, because of increased self-confidence, Seth has become a role model, mentor and leader for other individuals where he works and lives. He attributes this in part to Doug's support.

The positive impact of the friendship has not been on Seth alone.

Doug's 26 year journey of dealing with his own mental illness makes him a volunteer friend that can truly empathize with Seth's struggles. Since overcoming

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(L-R) Doug Smith, Seth Davis and Pete Palmero, President of Compeer Inc.

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# Do You Have a Heart...for Volunteering?

The opportunity to live a normal life is a basic right for each of us. The opportunity to meet our own needs of belonging, for companionship, for participation and for independence is also a basic right. Certain barriers may prevent the exercise of such basic rights. A mental illness can be a significant barrier.

An estimated one in four people in America today suffers from a mental illness. A combination of mental health therapy and medication can treat the disease, but social issues are often not addressed. While mental illness may periodically limit the functions of an individual, it does not limit the person's need for a sense of human connection and of personal value. However, a mix of negative experiences, emotional uncertainty, lack of opportunity and social skill deficits can keep an individual from interacting assertively and successfully with others.

Social isolation from the community is often a by-product of a mental illness. It is often difficult to live successfully in the community. The result of isolation is sometimes psychiatric re-hospitalization, homelessness, or even jail. With the support of a trusted friend, life can be more enjoyable, leading to successful outcomes.

All of us are occasionally befriended by someone who touches our lives. That "someone" cares about our well being without expecting anything in return. They believe in us, encourage us to be-

lieve in our selves, and nurture making positive choices.

Friendship can be powerful medicine. A therapist, case manager, relative or employer can provide treatment and assistance to a person with a mental illness, but the one missing component is

volunteer's friendship and support can offset the loneliness and isolation that accompany mental illnesses. What a difference a friend makes! Remember, volunteers receive no salary; they give the most precious gift that can be given -- their time and long-lasting friendship.

In 1973, in Rochester, New York, the Compeer Program was developed in response to the painfully difficult problem of social isolation, which plagued many people with a psychiatric diagnosis. Compeer is designed to cultivate supportive friendships with individuals transitioning through mental health challenges. Compeer matches community volunteers with adult and youth clients referred to the program by mental health professionals. There is no fee for service, free from cost to the client. A non-profit international network of affiliates, Compeer has 80 affiliates across the U.S., Australia and Canada. Nearly 5,000 volunteers worldwide provide 190,000 volunteer hours annually. Pennsylvania currently has fourteen (14) Compeer Programs and encourages additional participation throughout the state.

In the spirit of friendship and to promote volunteering, we ask that you contact us at the numbers listed in this newsletter. Learn how we can assist with developing a Compeer Friendship Program in your area. As Compeer representatives, we look forward to hearing from you! Thank you.

**Friendship is a powerful tool.  
Memories may fade but the impact of  
A trusted friendship lasts a lifetime.  
Be the kind of friend that you remember.  
Volunteer to become a friend  
To someone recovering from a mental illness.**

**In the spirit of friendship,  
Contact Compeer for more information**

**Ginny Mastrine, Pennsylvania Office of  
Mental Health and Substance Abuse  
Services  
Phone: 717-772-7926**

**Joe Cruice, Director of Compeer, Suburban  
Philadelphia Area  
Phone: 610-631-1009**

**Elaine Callihan, Compeer Program  
Coordinator in Butler County  
Phone: 888-329-0468 (toll free)**

friendship. Volunteers give the benefit of friendship to those undergoing treatment for a mental illness. In Pennsylvania, Compeer is considered a "best practice" and a valuable adjunct to therapy. A vol-

## 2007 Outstanding Compeer Adult Match

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6 clinical depressive episodes and 5 required hospitalizations, Doug has dedicated himself to the mental health field in Lancaster County, giving back to the system that saved his life.

Doug says that his and Seth's friendship has been a catalyst that has given him tremendous self-confidence—something that he says he lacked his entire life. With

this new confidence Doug is working full time for the first time in 11 years. Since 2006, Doug has been a Certified Peer Specialist. The one constant through all these years (2001-2007) has been Doug and Seth's Compeer friendship.

Doug and Seth's friendship keeps them in recovery. In the spring and summer of 2004, they both experienced a difficult

time. Due to their commitment to each other, they never missed a Thursday evening together. They agree, "It would have been easy to give up, but our friendship kept us going until we were able to get back to a much better recovery." What began as a one year commitment has now evolved into a life-long friendship.

## A Letter of Support

The following is an excerpt from a letter of support for Compeer Chester County, written by Dr. C. M. Smith, Director of Mental Health Services for the Chester County Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

"Compeer has developed over the years to its present status as being one of the foremost consumer support organizations in the County. Not only do Compeer staff work constantly to match people in need with a friend who can help reduce their sense of loneliness and social isolation, but they have been partners with other key agencies in the county in helping with our mission of transforming the county treatment and support system to be more recovery-oriented. It has proved its worth over and over again, - one has only to attend the annual Compeer lunch and listen to people's testimonies of their experience of Compeer, to realize how much the service is valued by the people who use it."

Thank you Dr. Smith!

## Debbie Dobbins Named 2007 Outstanding Program Director

Debbie Dobbins, Director of Compeer of York and Adams counties, was recently named Compeer Inc.'s 2007 Outstanding Program Director. Ms. Dobbins was nominated by Samiah S. Slusser, Director of Operations for Mental Health America which is the organization that runs Compeer in York and Adams counties.

Ms. Dobbins was nominated for both her accomplishments since becoming a director as well as her attitude towards fulfilling her day-to-day duties. Since becoming Compeer Program Director in early 2006, Ms. Dobbins has overseen the opening of a secondary site, and has been responsible for a 100% increase in both volunteers and in the number of one-on-one matches made by the program. Below are a few of the other highlights from the nomination written by Ms. Slusser.

"Debbie's persona; experience as a sister and care-giver to a brother who has mental illness and cerebral palsy led her to Compeer's doors, seeking a volunteer match for her brother. After falling in love with the program's philosophy, Debbie sought and began employment in the program in October of 2004 as the York Coordinator. Once in that role, she began to instill a sense of excitement and enthusiasm within the participants that we hadn't seen for literally years.

Debbie worked out a 9-month physi-

cal match, 3-month pen-pal calling match component to help involve transient college students in the program as one-on-one volunteers. This innovative approach to what a "match" could entail, coupled with her concentration on proven recruitment techniques (fliers, brochures, letters to seek speaking presentations and community out-reach) has revived and enhanced the participation in the program.

Debbie brings a wealth of community resources (people and funding) to the program. Since her involvement, the program has held several successful fund-raisers which are consumer driven and operated. The monies raised at these events are used for events or travel adventures that Compeer members decide upon. Now under her direction, the Compeer Advisory Council meets monthly and most CAC members have become comfortable enough with the program that they also attend various club activities."

Congratulations Debbie - keep up the great work!



## Pennsylvania's Compeer Coalition Annual Retreat

Please join us at Camp Hebron, near Halifax, PA (Approximately 15 miles north of Harrisburg.)

May 13 through May 15, 2008

For additional information please contact: PAOMHSAS, Ginny Mastrine at 717-772-7926; or Compeer Regional Representatives Joe Cruice, 610-631-1009; or Elaine Callihan, 1-888-329-0468

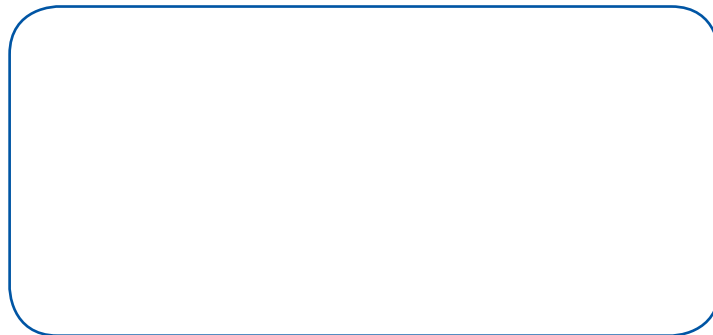
The members of the Pennsylvania Compeer Coalition encourage counties and provider agencies to inquire about this wonderful opportunity to network and collaborate face to face with Compeer program leaders from the entire state. It also gives a chance to work in partnership with OMHSAS personnel staff, to develop a plan of action for future community integration and expansion of Compeer Friendship Programs throughout Pennsylvania.

This year's theme is "Partnering For Recovery."

We welcome your interest and your participation - please join us in May!

The Pennsylvania Compeer Coalition  
3125 West Ridge Pike, Suite D  
Eagleville, PA 19403

*\*\*Mark your calendar\*\*  
Pennsylvania Compeer Coalition Retreat  
May 13-15, 2008!*



## Compeer Beaver County Off to a Good Start

Compeer Beaver County, which is sponsored by the Mental Health Association of Beaver County, submitted a start-up proposal to Compeer Inc. that was approved in April. The thought of starting this wonderful program was exciting because the Mental Health Association felt there was a need within the adult mental health population for supportive friendship.

The Compeer Beaver County program began actively recruiting volunteers and accepting referrals in June. Since that time, we have made three adult matches, and anticipate two more adult matches in the near future. The Mental Health Association also has a Warmline peer telephone support line that is available in the evening. The Warmline Peers who operate the Warmline have been a tremendous support for the individuals who have been waiting for a Compeer adult one to one match. In addition, the Compeer Beaver County program is currently working with a local Long Term Structured Residential facility. Geneva College students currently enrolled in the Human Services program have been recruited to visit the LTSR during the week to facilitate a social activity for the residents. So far, this has been a success for the residents at the facility, most of whom are experiencing serious mental health issues.

The Compeer Beaver County program will strive to continue recruiting volunteers, obtaining referrals, building adult one to one matches, and offering much needed friendship support to individuals with mental health issues.

## The First Camp Compeer

The first Camp Compeer, a sponsored program of the Mental Health Association of Central Susquehanna Valley, was held this past fall on September 14, 15, and 16, of 2007. The camp is for children with mental health disabilities and who are in the Compeer program. The children were given the opportunity to share friendships with other children who have similar problems. In a very relaxed setting, they were able to be themselves and not worry about being teased or judged because of their illness. The purpose of Camp Compeer is to improve socialization skills and self-esteem through skill building activities and teamwork. There was much fun and laughter; kids encouraging kids when doubt entered; and age had no boundaries. Eight children (ages 9 to 17) and 6 counselors participated.

A few years ago, Camp Compeer was a goal for MHA and that goal became a reality. It was a huge success and we are planning for the second camp to be held again this September at Camp Victory in Millville, PA. Making friends and changing lives is what Camp Compeer is all about.

