



# Voices

# of Success

Mental Health and Addiction Services:

**Productive People, Strong Families, Healthy Communities**



...your next door neighbor,  
the child sitting next to you at the ballgame,  
your coworker, a member of your family.



# Aaron Mauro

With his strong throwing arm, Aaron Mauro, 13, is a star on his baseball team. He dreams of one day playing professionally. Barring that, he says he may become a veterinarian because he loves animals.

But when he was 2 1/2, Aaron regularly entered prolonged “rage states.” The family pediatrician said that this case of the “terrible twos” would pass. Instead, Aaron soon began to speak of suicidal thoughts and of images and voices that weren’t there. His life was physically and emotionally excruciating, made worse because he was too young to understand what he was experiencing.

Finally a child psychiatrist diagnosed Aaron as bipolar. He reacted badly to medication after medication. As his body changed, his reactions would change, making it impossible to find a permanent medication solution. It took years before the right balance in therapy and medication was found and Aaron’s moods stabilized.

Today, when he’s not pursuing his passion for baseball, Aaron enjoys basketball, video games and going to the mall.

He doesn’t believe his illness controls his life, and he knows what to do when the symptoms of his condition return. The adversity he faced early in life seems to have made him more mature than the average 13-year-old. But to most people who know him, he’s just the kid next door.

**Ohio’s public mental health system treats some 250,000 people annually.**

# Mary Dohn

When state employees struggle with drug and alcohol abuse, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is there to provide resources and treatment to help them get back to work. Executive Director Mary Dohn says she's sorry something like this wasn't available when she worked for Ohio's congressional delegation in the 1970s.

Like some students, Mary enjoyed recreational drinking in college. It didn't occur to her that she might carry the same genetic predisposition to alcoholism as her mother did.

**About 2.7 million Ohioans – almost one in four – suffer from addictive disorder each year.**

Upon graduation she moved to Washington D.C. and went to work for an Ohio congressman. But the atmosphere on Capitol Hill involved lots of parties and drinking. A few drinks after work commonly turned into closing the bar at 2 a.m.

Soon, drinking was Mary's obsession. She began to carry a fifth of vodka in her purse, and a jar of peanut butter to cover its scent on her breath. When she was finally caught drinking at work, she was fired.

Back in Ohio, a family intervention convinced her to try treatment at Maryhaven in Columbus. Nine months later she knew she wanted to stay sober.

Mary eventually paid back Maryhaven for her treatment and became the first former client to serve on its board of directors. When Ohio's EAP was created she knew she had to be involved. Now 27 years sober, Mary Dohn runs the program.





# Milt Greek

Without Milt Greek, the Financial Aid Department at Ohio University would be lost. Milt is the programmer responsible for keeping the department's complex network of computers in sync with its users. It's not where Milt expected to be when he was a student at OU 20 years ago.

For Milt a career that used his degrees in psychology and sociology was not possible because he struggled with people skills. This was just one symptom of a larger problem – schizophrenia. For several years he had a tough time separating reality from recurring hallucinations.

Friends realized he needed professional help, but at first Milt resisted. Eventually he agreed to hospitalization where medication stopped the hallucinations. It took Milt about a decade of therapy and self-reflection to separate reality from hallucinations.

Tired of being supported by welfare, he took a minimum wage job. Once he started pulling a paycheck, he forfeited his Medicaid eligibility, and the ability to pay for counseling. Determined to pull his own weight, Milt entered a state-funded vocational program where he learned how to work with computers. In 1994 he found a job with health insurance benefits.

He's now a happily married stepfather who enjoys taking walks, dancing and listening to classical music.

**Mental illness alone costs Ohio more than \$5 billion annually in disability payments, lost productivity, absenteeism, homelessness and increased medical care.**

# Tresa Lucas

When not working as an employment specialist and job coach, Tresa Lucas, 38, and her four rambunctious teenagers spend weekends hiking the Hocking Hills. And doing something she never imagined before—house hunting.

**Ohio spends more than \$4 billion each year on health care costs directly attributable to addiction disease.**

“It’s nice not to have to worry about our utilities being shut off or finding an eviction notice on the door,” Tresa says. “My last job was working at McDonald’s. I was fired.”

Twenty years ago, Tresa went to Ohio University on academic scholarship to study pre-medicine. But college overwhelmed her. “It was like trains were rushing through my head. I would have 1,000 thoughts and I couldn’t grab ahold

of one,” she says, describing the first symptoms of bipolar disorder. But misdiagnosis started her on a long addiction to prescription pain medication. Frustrated and scared, she further self-medicated with alcohol.

Tresa quit school, married and divorced twice. Only after being arrested on a drug charge and having her children taken from her did doctors accurately diagnose her and prescribe appropriate medication. State-funded mental health, substance abuse and children’s services supported her recovery.

Tresa eventually finished her degree at OU and found a job. “When you go back to work, you get better faster,” she says. Instead of taking Medicaid and welfare, Tresa now gives back as a volunteer, helping people with mental health and addiction problems. She dreams of writing a book about her experiences. The trains in her head have stopped.





# Keith Justice

When his grandfather died of liver cancer after a lifetime of heavy drinking, Keith Justice, a sophomore at Columbus Alternative High school, decided he wouldn't drink or do drugs. He never has and doesn't plan to.

Through Youth to Youth International he's met other kids his age who have made the same decision. Students in Youth to Youth learn about the dangers of addiction and substance abuse and how to deal with peer pressure. They also plan and participate in activities that serve as fun alternatives to using drugs or alcohol.

Keith recalls a time when in the bathroom of his school he was offered an alcoholic beverage featured in a popular rap video. It wasn't hard to say no. His experience in Youth to Youth and understanding of what it means to be genetically predisposed to alcohol addiction make decisions like that easy.

He hopes to make the Northland High School track team in the spring. In his spare time he likes to participate in his church's youth group and volunteer at COSI. And having faced down the curse of addiction, Keith looks forward to college and a long lifetime in a medical career.

Prevention programs like Youth to Youth stop addiction before it happens, reducing the number of people who need more expensive addiction treatment services later in life.

**One-fifth of Ohio students face diagnosable mental illness, substance abuse or addiction. Fewer than half receive treatment.**

# Laura Wissler

**Mental health and addiction services help people hold a job, return to school, stay out of trouble and support themselves and their families.**

Laura Wissler no longer needs the \$1,300 a month the State of Ohio once paid to support her family while she struggled with depression and substance abuse. It's amazing what a medication that costs \$40 a month can do.

It's not that Laura found a magic pill that made all of her troubles disappear. But she did find one that helped her shake many of the symptoms of depression and

bipolar disorder that had prevented her from holding down a job in the past.

Laura struggled with depression from an early age. Her teenage years were filled with attempts at suicide and running away. After a number of lost jobs, a failed marriage and almost losing her son, she became totally dependent on Medicaid and Social Security. Depression made her feel like she was drowning in wet cement that was hardening around her. Alcohol was the only thing that seemed to help.

As her son began to develop the same problems, Laura knew she had to get better to help him. With the help of several mental health community organizations and the right medication, therapy began to yield results.

Today Laura pays her own way working the first job she's ever been able to keep. She says the more she works, the better she feels. Laura's recovery also means that she is better able to help her son and ensure his success in school and in life.





# Tova Black-Durant

As Tova Black-Durant was handed the Columbus East High School Scholar-Athlete trophy, her first thought was that it should go to someone else who deserved it more. Her principal disagreed.

When doctors diagnosed Tova with bipolar disorder as a child, they said she would not graduate from high school. They said she would probably end up in a residential treatment center and be in constant need of care for the rest of her life.

Tova's mind was filled with rapid thoughts, an emotional roller-coaster of mood swings, intense feelings of loneliness, depression and thoughts of suicide. She faced bouts of eczema and hives so severe she sometimes couldn't put on clothes. At one point she asked her mother to help her die.

Finally Tova landed at Columbus East, where she found caring teachers and administrators who were prepared to deal with special needs students. She received help from a number of mental health agencies.

Now an advocate for mental health issues who has shared her story with the Ohio Legislature, Tova starts her second year at Columbus State soon. She wholeheartedly embraces life.

**Mental health and addiction services are part of the fabric of our social service system –**

# Garth House

Garth House is giddy. He's in love for the first time in years and there may be wedding bells in his future.

When his first marriage ended, he thought he would never love again because he doubted he'd find someone who could understand his mental illness.

Twenty years ago while in law school, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia and later with bipolar disorder. He experienced psychotic depression, which means he faced all the symptoms of clinical depression, with distorted ideas about why he was ill.

He abandoned law school and spent the next several years in and out of the hospital. He lost his home, his car and his pets. He self-medicated with marijuana,

which he likens to “throwing gas on fire” for a depressed person.

“Ohio’s public mental health system was really there for me,” he said. He was able to beat his drug addiction with the help of a 12-step program and later his own spirituality. His mother attended a NAMI Ohio course to learn how to support his recovery.

Today Garth works part time, speaks as an advocate for mental health issues and is a published author. He's currently working on two more books. He and his girlfriend, who is also bipolar, enjoy taking nature walks, going to movies and listening to music.

**– as important and  
indispensable as any  
other public service.**



# Productive People, Strong Families, Healthy Communities

**Mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction are not someone else's problem. Ohio's public mental health system treats over 250,000 people annually. About 80,000 are treated for addiction disorders. Thousands more Ohioans are on waiting lists for these services.**

People with mental illness and/or addiction disorders are your neighbor, the child sitting next to you at the ballgame, your coworker, a member of your family. Mental illness alone costs Ohio more than \$5 billion annually in disability payments, lost productivity, absenteeism, homelessness and increased medical care. Ohio spends more than \$4 billion each year on health care costs directly attributable to addiction disease. One-fifth of Ohio students face diagnosable mental illness, substance abuse or addiction. Fewer than half receive treatment. Yet without treatment, children may become lifelong dependents.

The voices of success in this booklet speak for the powerful difference mental health and addiction services make in people's lives. They help people hold a job, return to school, stay out of trouble and support themselves and their families. They offer hope to sick children. They strengthen families.

Strong families and a healthy workforce are cornerstones of a healthy community. That's why mental health and addiction services remain part of the fabric of our social service system – as important and indispensable as any other public service.

Community services for children and adults with mental illness are supported in the Ohio budget by Ohio Department of Mental Health line items 408 and 505. Community services for people who need substance abuse or addiction treatment are supported by Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services line item 401. Members of the Ohio General Assembly and the administration must continue to adequately fund and strengthen those services that help put people with mental illness, addiction disorders or substance abuse problems on a path to good health and productivity.

Mental illness and addiction may hit Ohio's working poor the hardest. Many forfeit Medicaid support if they take even

low-paying jobs. Medicaid buy-in legislation would allow people struggling to pull their own weight to buy Medicaid coverage for treatment services and medication that will help them keep their job. These people want to be taxpayers, not welfare recipients. We encourage lawmakers to make Medicaid buy-in a reality for working Ohioans who need it.

The Coalition for Healthy Communities (CHC) also supports discussions of tax structure reform and is open to helping identify new funding mechanisms, such as an excise tax on alcohol sales in Ohio. The CHC is a resource to help find ways to fund mental health and addiction services in a new tax code, and provide further information on these services throughout Ohio.

**As you begin crafting the 2006-2007 state budget, consider the many people who are waiting for these services. Theirs too could be voices of success.**

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are waiting for these services.

Theirs too could be voices of success.

**The Coalition for Healthy Communities urges policy-makers to support productive people, strong families and healthy communities by strengthening mental health and addiction services.**

- **Increase and strengthen community treatment services for people with mental illness by adequately funding Department of Mental Health line items 408 and 505. Support for these line items will help ensure that necessary medication and treatment are available to help people return to productive lives.**
- **Increase and strengthen community treatment services for people who have addiction disorder or substance abuse problems by adequately funding Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services line item 401.**
- **Support services for children and adolescents with mental illness and/or addiction disorders to prevent life-long dependency on social services and help kids grow up to become productive members of society.**
- **Support Medicaid buy-in legislation so that people struggling to pull their own weight in low-wage jobs can buy Medicaid coverage for services and medication that will help them stay employed and off welfare rolls.**
- **Include the Coalition for Healthy Communities in discussions of tax structure reform. The CHC is open to helping identify new funding mechanisms, such as an excise tax on alcohol sales in Ohio.**
- **Use the Coalition for Healthy Communities as a helpful resource for information on mental health and addiction services in Ohio. Contact the Coalition for Healthy Communities at 614-224-2700.**



## Coalition for Healthy Communities Membership

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Ohio Advocates for Mental Health

NAMI Ohio

Ohio Federation for Children's Mental Health

Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities

Ohio Council of Behavioral Healthcare Providers

Mental Health Associations of Ohio

Ohio Citizen Advocates for Chemical Dependency  
Prevention and Treatment

Ohio Psychiatric Association

Ohio Psychological Association

Ohio State Medical Association

Ohio School Psychologists Association

Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio

Ohio Alcohol and Drug Policy Alliance

Ohio Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare Association

District 1199 SEIU - AFL-CIO

Family Service Council of Ohio

EAP Association of Southern Ohio

IAPSRs, Ohio Chapter

Buckeye Art Therapy Association of Ohio

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance of Ohio

Mental Health Advocacy Coalition

National Association of Social Workers

Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies

Ohio Clinical Social Work Society

Ohio Nurses Association

Ohio Mental Health Counselors Association

Ohio Counseling Association

**The Coalition for Healthy Communities is a consortium of 27 statewide organizations advocating for quality mental health and addiction services. Members of the CHC are happy to serve as a resource for information about mental health and addiction services throughout Ohio. Please contact the CHC at 747 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43205. Tel: 614-224-2700.**

