Thomas M. Wernert Center’s 20th Anniversary: Special Edition

We invite you to celebrate 20+ years of peer support in Lucas County at the Thomas M. Wernert Center

Open House
On Friday, July 26, 2013
From 12pm—2 pm

Our special guests for the day will include:
Tracey Plouck, Director, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Scott Sylak, Executive Director, Mental Health & Recovery Services Board of Lucas County

The regular Friday Afternoon Supper Club will not take place. We will be offering tasty light refreshments throughout the open house.

A Note from Brian Hansen
President, Board of Trustees
Thomas M. Wernert Center

To all Wernert Center Members, Supporters and Friends: I am excited to share with you a special milestone in the history of the Wernert Center. The Ohio Secretary of State approved the Consumer’s Union (Now known as the Thomas M. Wernert Center) incorporation on April 27, 1992. It has been a great 20+ years! Our success could not have happened without the selflessness of the members, staff and Board of Trustees who currently serve as well as those in the past. It has been my privilege to serve on the Board since October 2011. During that time, I have always been impressed by the outstanding programming and peer support offered here. As we look back on the past 20 years, we should feel pride in the things that have been accomplished and the lives that have been touched. As we look forward, we should continue to build on the solid foundation that has been laid down for us. I look forward to continuing to work with the Board of Trustees and the members who are always encouraged to make sure their voice is heard to make the next 20 years as successful as the last 20. Thank you all for the role that you played in making the Thomas M. Wernert Center what it is today.

A Note from Kelly Skinner
Executive Director,
Thomas M. Wernert Center

I was not one of the early mental health advocates who were a part of BOOST or created the Consumers Union of Lucas County that you’ll read about in the following pages. During that time, I left the full time employment that I had for 13 years due to my mental illness and did not work for five years. Seeking employment, but with shaky self-esteem, I was intrigued by a Help Wanted Classified in The Blade in 1998 for a Consumer Advocate; “Mental health consumers encouraged to apply.” Really? I had never seen that in a classified before. I always wanted to work with people living with mental illness and after my personal experience, even more so. I believed then that maybe I could share with others what helped and didn’t help me on my journey of recovery. Little did I know then how explosive the power of peer support, as a movement, would become in mental health systems. The peer support I received from long time members Mariann Forman, Carol Nagy, & Juliann Fegak to name just a few has sustained me for 15 years. That classified ad? I applied and thanks to Margie Shute and Richard Arnold who interviewed and hired me.
A Little History of Where We Came From by Katie Phillips

Much of the information in this article was generously provided by Richard Arnold, a local mental health advocate who has kept historical documents of the consumers movement over the years. Thanks Richard!

Many of you may not realize that the Thomas M. Wernert Center has a long history of development throughout the past years of what is called the “consumer movement”. The consumers movement began in the 1980’s during the “deinstitutionalization” of mental health treatment. Particularly in 1988 with the passage of Ohio’s Mental Health Act, which required the state to move away from long term institutionalization as treatment for the mentally ill, toward treatment in the community. The Mental Health Act was the main force in moving patients from the state hospitals to live in the community and receive treatment from mental health centers set up in the communities.

Now you may ask “Katie, what does all that have to do with the Thomas M. Wernert Center?” Well, because of this shift in treatment, “consumers” (people who receive mental health treatment) and family members of consumers had to find a new and better way of doing things. At that time there was a great need for community advocacy and education to raise awareness and support for the mentally ill, who faced great stigma at the time. People in the community held many misconceptions about the mentally ill. For example, it was difficult finding housing and setting up group homes for consumers as people were afraid to have consumers living in their neighborhoods.

Fortunately, since 1981, an advocacy group comprised of consumers and family members called BOOST (Building On Our Strengths Together) was already working on mental health issues. They set about the task of advocacy for the mentally ill, mental health education and support for family members. In the early days, people like the founders of BOOST, Norma Wanucha, Executive Director, Gert Winters, Lu Lovell, Larry Wanucha, Richard Arnold, Bob Arquette, John Brandeberry, and Connie Koch; to name a few, were working in the community. These early advocates were very active in BOOST activities and working with the Lucas County Mental Health Board to ensure that consumers rights and appropriate treatment was achieved. In fact, Richard Arnold stated that “John Brandeberry was the first consumer to publicly share that he was a consumer (in the media)”. At that time, it was very courageous to announce one had a mental illness as the community still had fears of the mentally ill. Today, we consumers call it “Telling My Story” to help lesson the stigma against those of us who live with a mental health diagnosis. (Sharing positive stories of recovery)

Consumers and family members worked together for ten years and during that time discovered that the needs of consumers were different than the needs of the family members. As a result, in 1991, the consumer advocates started the Consumers Union of Lucas County (Consumers Union) and the family members began the Alliance for the Mentally Ill (AMI) of Greater Toledo, which is now known as NAMI of Greater Toledo. Both groups were still under the umbrella of BOOST until 1992. In 1992, the Consumers Union of Lucas County’s Articles of Incorporation were approved with Connie Koch as our first executive director.

During those days, Tom Wernert was the Executive Director of the Lucas County Mental Health Board. Tom, which he preferred to be called, often responded when addressed as Mr. Wernert, ”Mr. Wernert is my father, I am Tom.” Tom was a real supporter of BOOST and encouraged the consumer movement and supported the advocacy, employment and educational efforts of those living with mental illness. Tom was the first Executive Director of the Lucas County Mental Health Board to fund the Consumers Union of Lucas County as a stand alone agency; which is one of the many reasons why members, staff, and Board of Trustees voted to honor Tom by rededicating the center in his name in 2004, during the grand opening celebration of our new home.

The Consumers Union met at various locations in the community such as group homes and churches for groups and the sharing of meals known as the Friday Night Supper Club. An early small office location was established downtown and shortly thereafter an office was at the former United Way/Stranahan Building where advocates would gather and determine assignments to visit hospital psychiatric units to speak with patients about their rights and invite them to the Supper Club for socialization and peer support.

In 1998, the Consumer’s Union found a “temporary” home for six years at 3350 Collingwood Blvd, behind Rescue, to house the 3R’s (Relax, Restore, Recover) Drop-in Center. Members, staff and Board of Trustees set about the task of creating a new “recovery home” for Consumers Union by securing funds from the Ohio Depart of Mental Health and the Mental Health Board for a brand new building at 208 W Woodruff, which we moved to in 2004. Since the early days we have grown in our mission and programming. Our educational and support opportunities are a mainstay at the center, but at the heart of it all is the Peer Support that was offered 20+ years ago and continues today that helps us stay well, happy, and thriving in spite of living with mental illness.
The Roots of the Wernert Center by Larry Wanucha, MRC

Larry Wanucha has been a mental health advocate since the BOOST days. Larry has also been employed by Neighborhood Properties Inc. since 1992 and has since earned his Masters degree. Larry continues community advocacy through his volunteer work for NAMI and the Cemetery Project at Northwest Ohio Psychiatric Hospital.

The Wernert Center came on the scene after the agency split from BOOST- Building on Our Strengths Together. BOOST was an agency that brought parents, consumers, families and friends together to learn about recovery and to advocate, support, and educate about mental health treatment and recovery in the community. The new agency funded by the Mental Health Board was called the Consumers Union. The leaders of the Consumers Union felt they needed their own voice and own autonomy to work towards their mission. Located at the Stranahan Building originally, the Consumers Union later moved to a building that also housed Rescue Mental Health Services at 3350 Collingwood.

BOOST was founded by my mother, Norma Wanucha, and two other mothers with adult children with mental illness- Lu Lovell, [who was instrumental in the development of NPI] and Gert Winters, in the early 1980’s. Rick Arnold was an important fixture at BOOST and provided consultation and administration help during this time. BOOST had a popular event called the Friday Night Supper Club that brought members together weekly that continues today at the Wernert Center.

Later, the Consumers Union moved to its current location on Ashland and Woodruff and through funding from the Lucas County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board, a new facility was built. Since then, the Consumers Union is known as the Wernert Center. BOOST later evolved into NAMI of Greater Toledo and shares a similar mission in general with the Wernert Center- to improve the quality of life for people-adults and families with severe mental illness and provide support, education, and advocacy to them and the community at large to reduce stigma and make mental health treatment accessible to all in need.

Past President Carol Nagy Shares her Memories by Carol Nagy

Carol Nagy has been a long time mental health advocate, member of BOOST, Consumers Union and the Thomas M. Wernert Center. Carol is a former Thomas M. Wernert Center-Board of Trustee and Past President.

I began my mental health advocacy efforts in the 1970s as a patient in the State Hospital. Other patients and I formed a small group that addressed patients issues and the stigma patients faced at the time. Then in the 1980s the consumer movement was developing as “deinstitutionalization” in mental health treatment was becoming a reality. At that time I was afraid that this change would cause me or others to not be able to receive treatment in the future.

In the 1980s & 90s the organization called BOOST helped to send us to conventions to learn about the consumer movement, advocacy and to network with other peers about peer support centers, housing and the clubhouse model.

Over the years I have witnessed attitudes change and am thankful to those who worked diligently for mental health recovery in the past, present and future.
THE MISSION
“To improve the quality of life for persons living with mental illness through peer-driven and focused programs which address recovery through education, peer support and advocacy.”

VALUE STATEMENT
The Thomas M. Wernert Center is dedicated to fostering growth in our members living with mental health challenges through peer support and by enhancing recovery with opportunities for education and socialization within a safe, welcoming and diverse atmosphere of trust and mutual respect that leads to a meaningful life.

Thomas M. Wernert Center Membership Application

YES! I want to become a member of the Thomas M. Wernert Center For Mental Health Recovery and Support, a certified peer operated service center whose programs and services are consistent with the Ohio Department of Mental Health’s Best Practices in Mental Health Recovery.

___ Receiver of Mental Health Services- $5
___ Sponsor- $50
___ Provider- $10
___ Honorary- $100
___ Family- $15
___ Advocate- $250
___ Patron- $25
___ Organization- $500

___ In Honor of_______________________________________________________ $_____________
___ In Memory of_______________________________________________________ $_____________
___ I give permission to have my name recognized as a supporter in the Encounters newsletter
___ I would like to be placed on the Wernert Center mailing list to receive the Encounters newsletter

Name___________________________________________________________ Date______________
Address___________________________________________________________________________
City__________________________ State____________________  Zip_______________________
Send Payment to: Thomas M. Wernert Center
208 W. Woodruff
Toledo, OH  43604

• The Thomas M. Wernert Center is a 501 (c)(3) organization. All memberships/donations are tax deductible, based upon IRS guidelines.