Celebrating 50 Years of Hope and Recovery
Imagine a world where stigma does not exist, the right services are available at the right time and no barriers prevent individuals living with mental illness from living fulfilling and productive lives fully integrated in their communities… This is the vision of HOPE that PRS has built for our clients and our community since 1963.

It is not every day that a local nonprofit reaches its 50th Anniversary and I am truly humbled to have had the opportunity to lead PRS into its 50th year. 2013 has been an exciting year of client accomplishments, celebratory events, and numerous awards and recognitions for our leadership and staff.

The following pages will take you through our history, detail important milestones, present features of PRS’ incredible staff, and most importantly, highlight stories, testimonials, artwork and poetry from PRS clients, past and present. These personal stories are just a small sample of the hope and recovery our clients have discovered over the past 50 years.

Our passion and exemplary reputation exists thanks to our visionary founder, Vera Mellen, who set PRS on a path of growth, impressive outcomes and ever-increasing community support. It is due to the strong foundation Vera created that PRS provided skills training and supports to over 900 clients in FY2013!

But we still have plenty of work to do. In our next 50 years and beyond, it is my hope that we will help even more clients choose, get, and keep jobs; return to school or to other valued roles of their choosing; achieve physical wellness; and live successfully in the communities of their choice by providing services that support our clients in reaching their recovery goals.

Thank you for playing an important role in PRS’ 50-year history. With your support, I know PRS will continue to provide hope and recovery in our community for the next 50 years and beyond.

Wendy Gradison, LCSW
President & CEO
As I look back over the years that I have worked for PRS, so many thoughts flood my mind. There have been SO many wonderful people (clients, staff and Board) that I have had the opportunity to meet. For me, the people are who make PRS what it is. I have learned so much throughout my years here.

Technology is certainly a huge area in which PRS has grown. When I first began working for PRS, we did not have computers at all. Nor did we have voicemail or touch tone phones. Our Office Manager wrote phone messages on pink message pads for staff. Our phones were all dial phones. Now we have voice over IP phones that operate via the internet and staff can have their voice mail delivered to their email. All information was collected manually. All correspondence was typed on a typewriter.

When we first entered the electronic world, we purchased 4 computers—one for the Merrifield Center, one for the Engleside Center, one for the Administrative Office and one for payroll. None of the computers ‘spoke’ to any of the others; all were stand-alone computers. When we made the decision to move to a Wide Area Network (WAN) where computer data was stored and shared on a file server, many staff said that they did not need nor did they want a computer in the office. Today, however, if we have a power outage staff are immediately asking how long the system will be down.

We also shared computers, using perhaps one computer for three staff. Today all staff have a computer at their desks and all community-based staff have laptops, signature pads and iPhones. PRS now uses data to assess and evaluate services provided to our clients, adapting as needed in these ever-changing times. Through the use of technology, staff can access information immediately, wherever they are—staff meet with clients in the community and can provide the services needed, whether assisting with a job search for a client, assisting with on-line applications for housing or assisting with locating needed resources for a client.

I can’t wait to see what the next 25 years will bring.
**TOM SCHUPLIN**

When I first came to work for PRS, I was inspired and energized by the commitment and focus that staff and clients had on working together to overcome the deleterious effects of mental illness in our community. The term “Recovery” had not been used in this context but there was a strong sense that we were all moving toward a greater outcome and a better community. This only became stronger as we learned better approaches to teach skills that allowed people to become employed, enter school and live independently in their community.

What has made PRS great over the past 50 years is this commitment to trying something different. We knew that, just as there was no single path for an individual’s recovery, there was no single path for us as an agency to promote and facilitate recovery. It took the talents of the bright and committed staff to figure this out, and it took the joining of a likewise committed consumer community to teach the staff about their experience and to develop the services we have today. I am grateful to have had these individuals in my professional life to help me grow and learn.

PRS has never faltered in pursuing its mission. Even though, as an agency, we have faced challenges large and small, we have always come through better than we were. This is due to our focus on mission and the commitment of our staff and clients on making PRS the best. There are challenges ahead of us and I am sure that we will achieve greater growth. I am sure that on our 100th anniversary, we will again be celebrating the accomplishments of our talented staff and courageous clients working together to bring about meaningful change in the lives of people with mental illness.
CLIENT FEATURE—LORRAINE J.

PRS has saved my life…They gave me a life!

I would never be where I am today without PRS.

I was with PRS for 20 years and felt comfortable leaving and moving on to other things. During my time at PRS I ran three groups and served as Activities Director. Kerri Lord got behind me and believed in me. I thought to myself, ‘If someone else can get behind me and believe in me, I need to believe in myself.’ She saw something in me. She saw greatness in me! She changed my whole world! She made the impossible possible.

PRS’ staff was great, wonderful and did a good job. The staff respected me and treated me with dignity. They are Fantastic!

Art has played a significant role in my recovery. I have provided artwork for the White House, PRS, NAMI, and most recently I participated in the Pathway Homes Art Show. The two photos featured here are at art galleries where my art has been displayed.

 CLIENT FEATURE—B.D.

I was in and out of hospitals for psychiatric treatment. It got so bad that I could not remember my Social Security number and I could not write out a check to pay bills by myself. The last time I was in the hospital the head nurse said I should get home-based services so I could stay out of the hospital. That is when I got help from PRS. So now I am a client of PRS.

With the help from PRS, I was able to write checks and do budgeting to keep a record of how much I spent every month. Recently this year I have been walking for exercise a lot. I try to eat right and drink lots of water.

Most of my life I have been interested in art but because of my mental illness I was not able to work at it. Recently I went to an art museum with a staff member and I have tried to do some drawing.

PRS helped me twice to visit my daughter and her family; first in August of last year and then in May of this year. I flew to see them in Colorado Springs. It was a nice visit. PRS is very helpful in helping those with mental illness recover.
Our Mission

Mission Statement Adopted

At its July meeting the Board of Directors adopted a revised Mission, Vision and Values Statements for The Social Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

President David Redman said: “We have updated these statements to more accurately reflect our services to the community and to ensure we stay focused on the needs of our current and future members.”

The statements are a product of four months of work by a blue ribbon planning committee. Each was developed after careful analysis of our core services, activities, programs and customers.

The Strategic Planning Committee was formed by former Board person and Social Center staff Lin Wilkins. The committee included David Redman, Jane Sherwood, Bob Ladd, Edwina Lake, Max Brown, Marvin Rosenburgh, Vera Mellen, Tom Schapin, Brenda Randell and Susan Silvio. Special help of Maristene Bradley, Barbara Todt, Ron, John Dyson and Emil Franks.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our Mission is to help people with serious mental illness develop the skills and resources needed to recover and live satisfying and more self-sufficient lives in the community.

GOALS are to:

• reduce the need for hospitalization
• develop social relationships
• prepare for independent living
• ensure and sustain employment

We work toward these goals by providing:

• meaningful work
• education and counseling skills
• assistance with housing and other services
• substance abuse services
• job training and placement
• advocacy and public education

Outcomes, Outcomes, Outcomes!

This resolution reflects the values of The Social Rehab Center and of the other members of IAPSRs. During the past year we have continued to assess our work in Fairfax County and to use reports in the literature and from colleagues across the country as a benchmark by which to judge our services. This year we have added measurements from the IAPSRs Toolkit which will give us a much broader base for comparison by the end of next year.

Jean Campbell, Ph.D. and T. Rock Johnson, J.D.

Client Feature—Genean M.

Genean is a 28 year old resident of Washington DC. Genean enrolled in the Recovery Academy in the beginning of April with the goal of obtaining employment and returning to school. Genean’s mental illness has made it difficult for her to find the energy and stay motivated to attend and complete school and maintain employment. When Genean started at the Recovery Academy, she reported that she was ready to make a positive change in her life. Genean attends the Recovery Academy on a consistent basis and always attends class prepared to work. She serves as a role model for her peers and she often encourages her peers to attend the Recovery Academy on a consistent basis in order to prepare for a successful future. Genean began school in the beginning of June and she is currently a Dental Assistant Student at Fortis College in Landover, Maryland. After all of her hard work and dedication, Genean received a “B” in her first class of the program. Genean is excited for her future and states that she will continue working hard so she can be successful. When asked what advice she would offer others, Genean said “Nothing beats a failure but a try.”
How Do We Do It?

By Michelle Hurrell
PRS Recovery Support Specialist

You may be wondering: what is a Recovery Support Specialist? I’d like to tell you in my own words. The most important part of our job is that we are peers, which means we have mental illnesses and substance use challenges, just as our clients do. Our first goal is to show by example that there is hope. Hope is the catalyst to successful recovery, because hope is where everything begins. Our secondary goal is to demonstrate and teach life skills.

We lead groups such as Expressive Art, where everyone can use his creativity to share his story, and other groups, such as Money Management, which teaches practical tools for life. We use lectures, guest speakers, technology, art, creative writing and hands-on activities to help clients express themselves and learn how to get by in the world. Creative groups and practical groups are both necessary because sometimes finding the source of the pain clears the way, so skills of everyday survival can be learned. Tools of daily living can seem irrelevant if you are so ill that you cannot get out of bed.

I have a background in teaching, but that doesn’t make me a specialist—my life experience does. I would like to share a quote from my new favorite book, “To Kill a Mockingbird.” I say “new” because I never read it when I was supposed to in high school. The main character is a wise man named Atticus, who gives his daughter, Scout this advice: “First of all,” he said, “if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

We don’t just sympathize with our clients—we empathize. When we use the word “WE,” it’s not the royal “WE.” Instead, it truly means: you and I, we’ve walked down the same paths, stumbled on the same rocks, dreamed the same dreams, watched some of those dreams die, but began climbing back up the mountain anyway. We can look at each other and say, “Hey, that was a horrible time, but you know, we’re both still here.”

There’s another saying that goes something like this: you don’t really know someone, until you have walked in his shoes. As Recovery Support Specialists, we don’t just walk in our client’s shoes. We have the same size and brand of shoes on our own feet and another well-worn pair in our closets. Now, my husband would argue that I have everybody’s shoes in my closet, but that’s a discussion for another day!

Overall, what I mean to say is that we offer hope, first. There is no recovery if there is no hope. We offer hope by showing our peers that each day we “suit up and show up,” demonstrating mental illnesses and substances don’t own us. There is a client who says to me, “I have a mental illness, but it doesn’t have me.” We are living proof that recovery is possible, that there are ways to cope and our troubles don’t have to lead to a dead end. Next, we offer wisdom. I like to say that I have a PhD in Life Studies from the School of Hard Knocks. Wisdom is something more than just knowledge, isn’t it? Wisdom is knowledge’s wise old grandfather. Wisdom shouts, “Hey, I’ve been on the same path before. Try this way. It’s less rocky. There’s shade and when you get tired, there is a soft place to rest.”

Wisdom also gently whispers, “Just trust me.”
At this point I would like to share a poem:

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
IN FIVE SHORT CHAPTERS
by Portia Nelson

Chapter One
I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost ... I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter Two
I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I am in this same place. But, it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter Three
I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it there. I still fall in ... it's a habit ... but, my eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.

Chapter Four
I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

Chapter Five
I walk down another street.

There is hope in this poem and self-discovery. The power of change is in this poem. Recovery is clearly within these words, but wisdom... wisdom is what is in the last chapter. We share our stories of recovery, not for our own catharsis or any other self-serving reason; we simply are the fire-tested phoenix, hard evidence that not only is there another street, but it is possible to walk down it; there is no need to crawl.

I'll close with another quote from Harper Lee, who again speaks through Atticus: “Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started, there is no reason for us not to try to win.” For many of my clients, my peers, illness struck when they were very young and because of that, they feel that they have already been beaten a long time ago. We've all lost dreams to the fire: our relationships, our families, our education, and our jobs.

Unfortunately, some have lost everything and that includes their homes. I can only imagine.

As for myself, I, personally, have spent about 365 days in the hospital, not consecutively mind you, but in total over a period of 10 years. I watched many things slip away as I sat looking out the window of a locked ward. Once I was there so long, I watched the leaves change from green, to amber, until eventually, they all blew away. But I know I’ve been fortunate by comparison. I never wondered where I was going to sleep or where my next meal was going to come from. What can I say about so much sadness? What do I say to someone who’s homeless? Nothing. That is when I listen. Then, when they are done speaking and there are no words left to say, I gently point out that putting one foot in front of the other despite all that's lost is where recovery starts. We are all still here. There’s another page, in fact, there is a whole other chapter. Mental illness and substance use disorders are nasty thieves that rob us of so much, but we still have a future. Of course, the dreams we have must be different than those we dreamed before, because face it, we can't go back in time. We can though, still win and there is no reason not to try.
CLIENT FEATURE—CHRIS E.

I went to the first PRS at Hopkins Lane but I didn't really belong there and I just went to see what it was about in 1972. In 1974, I started at Springfield at the United Methodist Church and Virginia McCleary was the director. There are still 3 of us who are still part of that center. While at that center, I was working at JCPenney and came on Wednesdays to play bridge and lunch. They had art, cooking, nutrition units—it was basically a social center. They also had a job group and activities on the weekends.

I chose to get involved with PRS for support after leaving the hospital. After getting involved I realized I really needed it because I was doing a swinging door with the hospital. When PRS moved to route 1, it was in a real estate office, I didn't move with them but when I ended up in Mt. Vernon Hospital, Tom came and suggested I started going back to job group and Engleside. After Engleside I moved to the Recovery Academy at Sacramento. I was very involved in PRS—I even taught groups on diabetes, women's group, and went to several conferences.

I learned a lot through the Recovery Academy. I’ve taken computer classes, cognitive behavior, anger management, medicine informational classes, art therapy, music therapy, trivia, money management — which helped with balancing my checkbook. I learned how to lose weight by attending a conference.

PRS has given me support and friends.

I think PRS helps the community because people who are getting out of the hospital have a place to go and learn how to be active in the community itself. Through the Recovery Academy, they can grow to do volunteerism and even get a job.

PRS has helped me tremendously to grow (as) a person.

SMILE
By Chris E.
A smile is something
Nice to see
It doesn't cost
A cent
A smile is something
All your own
It never can be spent
A smile is welcome anywhere
It does away with frowns
A smile is good for everyone
To ease life’s ups and downs

FAMILY FEATURE

For a number of years, I knew of PRS as my cousin was being assisted through your housing program. He had struggled for many years with homelessness and of course, difficulty in the medication management for his severe mental illness. PRS assisted him while he was being stabilized during a prolonged hospitalization more than 9 years ago. After that stabilizing period; you provided supportive housing that was a perfect fit! Each time I see my cousin, I am reminded of the nurturing, respectful and supportive environment in which he is allowed to live. This is due entirely to PRS and its dedicated staff!

Just over a year ago, I thought that was the closest to PRS services that my immediate family would find ourselves. Little did I know that my son, who had struggled his entire life with a neurological disorder, would require hospitalization and then a day program to assist in his recuperation. Although he was not sure that PRS was what he needed, the staff was supportive and thoughtful as he began taking classes at the Recovery Academy. It has now been 8 months and he is on a track to begin volunteering in the community, with the goal of employment looming on his horizon. PRS and its incredible staff provide a safe and productive environment for persons with mental illness. The educational track that they provide encourages each and every client to reach his full potential! What a gift to all!

On behalf of myself, my husband, and all our family members, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the compassionate services that Wendy and her entire staff provide! You have changed the quality of my son’s life! How can a parent thank someone for that?

Congratulations to PRS on your 50th anniversary!

With heartfelt thanks,
A Grateful Parent
**CLIENT FEATURE—DANIELE D.**

1999 2000

Recognition by the Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy as one of the top 24 supported employment programs in the nation. PRS Employment Services utilizes choose-get-keep model of supported employment.

**COMMUNITY PARTNER**

PRS and the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (CSB) began their work together almost 50 years ago. Since then, the two organizations have grown and partnered in their work toward a shared mission to provide services and resources to people living with mental illness, substance use disorders and/or intellectual disabilities. The Fairfax-Falls Church CSB provides essential wrap-around services to their clients and PRS works alongside to help fill identified gaps in those services.

In 2010, in partnership with the Fairfax-Falls Church CSB, PRS’ Recovery Academy was launched at both PRS Day Program sites (McLean and Mt. Vernon) offering a curriculum-based program to support clients’ movement into meaningful community-based activities including work, volunteering and education. The majority of Recovery Academy clients are referred from the CSB Case Managers and their support of the transformation of the Day Program was essential to its success.

PRS and the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board share the same mission to serve our community. PRS looks forward to continuing to work very closely with the CSB to develop and provide needed services for the changing population that these organizations jointly serve.

**COMMUNITY PARTNER**

PRS and the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (CSB) began their work together almost 50 years ago. Since then, the two organizations have grown and partnered in their work toward a shared mission to provide services and resources to people living with mental illness, substance use disorders and/or intellectual disabilities. The Fairfax-Falls Church CSB provides essential wrap-around services to their clients and PRS works alongside to help fill identified gaps in those services.

In 2010, in partnership with the Fairfax-Falls Church CSB, PRS’ Recovery Academy was launched at both PRS Day Program sites (McLean and Mt. Vernon) offering a curriculum-based program to support clients’ movement into meaningful community-based activities including work, volunteering and education. The majority of Recovery Academy clients are referred from the CSB Case Managers and their support of the transformation of the Day Program was essential to its success.

PRS and the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board share the same mission to serve our community. PRS looks forward to continuing to work very closely with the CSB to develop and provide needed services for the changing population that these organizations jointly serve.
“I would like to say that all the staff and teachers are the best that PRS has. Every teacher here is the best, so I can't choose one. We got a good group and I just want to let you know. Thank you.”

“He is always there when I need him, and you really feel that you can confide in him.”

“Just when I am most alone, I need only to remember her... and I know that I am truly blessed. My life would never be the same without her. I look forward to the times when we visit. Her hard work is inspiring to others. She is indeed an inspiration to me. She keeps me smiling—a new day is on the way. Every time I need encouragement, she is there for me. When I need to talk things out, she is there for me. Every time something bad happens in my life, she is there for me. I'm going to make it through this time, stronger than ever. She makes me proud and you should be very proud of her, too.”

“...She is very punctual and takes me to all of my appointments. She is consistent... My daily planner. Also, she takes care of my appointments with the doctor and prescription drugs. All these things she does so I am very thankful for that.”

“Thanks for getting me to participate even when I didn't even want to.”

“She has helped me with everything that I need in my life that I could not have done on my own. She is very friendly and genuinely caring. I feel very comfortable with her allowing me to express myself and share personal things with her. She helps me with my language barrier as well as in other ways when I do not understand something by being patient and understanding. She keeps me organized and helps me manage my illness. Because she is so great, I wish that I could have her in my life forever.”
Community Support Services program is formalized providing customized community-based intensive skills training and supports to clients.

PRS serving over 700 clients every year, providing a broad array of supports and services.

Receives Blue Diamond Award from Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce for being an outstanding Corporate Citizen and demonstrating exemplary commitment to the community above and beyond its business contributions.

What Our Clients Say About PRS Staff

“… is spirited, compassionate, kind, and understanding of the needs of my son. I feel that she is committed to improving his life skills. We appreciate her work and efforts on the behalf of my son. I would recommend her to any other persons in need of life coaching.”

“… she puts up with my bad moods. We laugh together and have a good time. When stuff is serious I trust her and can depend on her. When stuff is fun and light-hearted she’s funnier than a crutch. What started as my thinking, ‘What can this young kid do to help me?’ has switched to, ‘She’s my rock. She’s quite literally a lifesaver.’ I couldn’t have done all this had it not been for her being with me all the way.”

“… highlighted my strengths, gave me lots of uplifting affirmations, and made me feel like a person again. She empowered me to find joy in life even with my condition. I had to learn how to switch between two belief systems in my life; this process is painful and initially involved extremely intense and deadly anxiety. I retained tools in my toolbox, like safety affirmations, common sense about people, and facing my fears surrounding my responsibilities by breaking tasks down. After talking to her I felt and believed I could tackle what was overwhelming me… she stuck by me the whole time, even when it was the hardest to get through to me. Today I can get past my symptoms free of pain.”

“She never makes you feel like you’re asking too much of her. She is a professional in every sense. I may have not landed a job yet but I am NOT the hopeless, drowning wreck I was before her. She has given me hope, a chance for the future. I have a child to raise. So you could imagine how much she has meant to me.”
Dear Wendy,

Each time you use the word “hope” in your PRS e-mails, newsletters, and fund raising letters I have wanted to write to you. Yes, I still get these messages even though I am no longer a member or on the Board of Directors. I now live in Leesburg and have not been involved in any psychiatric rehabilitative activities other than bridge.

I was an Engleside member during the changing late eighties and sometimes turbulent decade of the nineties. We had gone from a small mental health “clubhouse” in a church basement to three locations: Engleside, Merrifield and Reston-Faraday.

In 1994, before the name change to PRS, all components of the organization—the administration, members, staff, directors, volunteers, advocates, government, community, and family—were called in to Engleside for a presentation to introduce the concepts of vision, mission, and values statements, and the need for critical change and mass participation.

We went through a list of maybe ten values painfully consolidated into Recovery, Members, Dignity and Respect, Community Support and Continuous Improvement. The last value on the old list was “HOPE IS THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT.” At one point there was a move to eliminate “hope” as a value because it was not quantifiable!

In 1998 I took over the writing of a project called the “Bridges to Recovery,” a 35-year history of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services. I wrote the following “bottom line” conclusion.

“One might say that the story of today’s Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services has been Vera Mellen’s story. This is true, but it has also been more than that. It is a story of how a sprawling community concerned with the problems and effects of serious mental illness came together. It is a story of people with a conviction that recovery is possible and that things can get better. It is a story of staff, administrators, volunteers, governments, advocates, families, directors, professionals, and members themselves working together in a field of constant movement, change and obstacles. It is a story of one small daily success after another that sometimes, many times, leads to even bigger success. Most of all it is a 35-year-old story that has been permeated throughout with the often illusive and immeasurable quality called “hope.”

Edwina K. Lake

June 9, 2013
Named Nonprofit Member of the Year by the Vienna-Tysons Regional Chamber of Commerce for exemplifying exceptional commitment to the betterment of the Chamber and its goals while improving the quality of life for members in our community.

In partnership with the Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board, PRS’ Recovery Academy is launched at both PRS Day Program sites (McLean and Mt. Vernon) offering a curriculum-based day program to support clients’ movement into meaningful community activities including work, volunteering and education.

Receives the Champion in Partnership Award from the Leesburg office of the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services recognizing PRS’ community-based Work Adjustment Training Program for young adults living with Asperger’s Disorder in Loudoun County.
The millennium came and went. The world did not end, and by outward appearances, I had successfully navigated the quagmire of a bitter divorce and a devastating custody battle. I had wrestled with depression throughout my adult years, but had seemed to stay ahead of any major upheaval. After the divorce, I flowed in and out of therapy, made occasional medicine changes and immersed myself in the busy-ness of being a single parent.

If you had observed me back then, you would have said what my friends, family and co-workers said: “You are handling all this so well…you are such a great role model for your children…I don’t know how you keep it all together…” The truth was that I was hiding the reality of what was happening inside me. No one knew about the escalating, terrible physical pain I was suffering as I slipped backwards into serious depression. My psychiatrist tried increasing meds, then changing meds, and more frequent therapy, but I just kept getting worse. I wore a smiling mask, went through the motions at work and home, but feared every day that if anyone knew the carefully guarded secret of how desperate and scared I was feeling, I’d lose everything. And that is very nearly what happened.

Finally, the chaos and nightmare I was living made it impossible to hide my illness any more. My carefully crafted façade was crumbling at home and at work. When I got to the point that I could not go on for one more day, I was checked into an excellent psychiatric hospital and began the slow work of healing. Unfortunately, my insurance ran out before I was anywhere near ready to be safely released, and I ended up back at home without the support I badly needed. Over the following year, I was in and out of out-patient hospitalizations, and I pretty much lived in bed or on the couch, pretending to be ill, hoping that my children wouldn’t realize that I had just given up. My despair and depression had taken over, and the reality of my suffering with mental illness was what now ruled our daily lives. My therapeutic team said that I would never work again; managing my symptoms with meds and therapy would help me maintain my balance, but they really did not offer much hope for my future. My life was about treading water. And then PRS called me.

The PRS Day Program Director explained the various resources that were available, mostly paid for by Medicaid. Without much hope, I agreed to visit and just observe the Day Program. Anxiety attacks had prevented me from going out very often, but I was desperate for something to turn the tide. What I found was a system that made sense, with a written plan for small goals and group sessions of all kinds. The biggest surprise that day was my tour with a very welcoming peer—someone else living with a mental illness. Over the next few months, with a deliberate plan that PRS and I developed together, I slowly reached my baby-step goals. I worked hard to re-build my badly deteriorated socialization skills. It took months to overcome the daily trauma of putting my lunch tray down at a table where other peers were sitting. Small conversations were exhausting and confusing. But one day I realized I actually was able to attend group sessions for more than just the first 5 minutes—I could stay in the rooms, listen, and eventually, I could participate. Working on small projects in the craft room turned out to be an important therapeutic opportunity which slowly helped me open up, take risks, and develop relationships again. Subsequently, PRS’ Home Based Services staff came into my home and helped me regain my parent role and begin to reorganize my household. Then I got the unexpected invitation from the PRS Board of Directors to come share my story at one of their meetings.

I felt terrified as I stumbled and stuttered my way through my recovery experience at PRS, trying to explain my gratitude for the measurable recovery I was experiencing because of their very caring and supportive staff. With great respect and interest, the Board members listened attentively, asked thoughtful questions, and seemed to value my opinions about the recovery model they were building. The biggest surprise came a month later when they invited me to become a Board member. I did not recognize it at the time, but my involvement with the Board played an important role in my recovery by helping me focus outside myself. Through the Board, I was able to be an advocate for recovery in my community, supporting consumer issues. I hope that my consumer perspective helped the Board, too, and that I made a difference by highlighting the challenging issues that adults with mental illness face every day.

Am I recovered? For me, the roller-coaster of recovery is still a learning process, but the difference is that because of the great work I did in the PRS Day Program, I recognize the slippery slope much earlier now. I also have a big Bag of Tricks that PRS gave me to help me overcome obstacles that come my way. It seems like a miracle that my life has returned to a place where I feel happy and fulfilled again.

What about that prediction that I’d never work again? Through careful support and supervision, PRS Employment Services helped me build a foundation so I could return to work after a three-year absence, and I’ve been happily employed by an IT company for 8 years! Although my journey has taken me out of Northern Virginia and away from PRS, I will forever be grateful to the staff for walking with me in the darkest times, for guiding me through the recovery process, for staying with me until the light shined brightly once more.
FAMILY FEATURE

My family has been receiving services from PRS for about two years, since July of 2011. We came to PRS because my son was destroying things in the house and causing injury to himself and our family. From PRS, he receives services of counseling, basic life skills and proper socialization. Since he started receiving these services, I have seen many improvements. The destruction of things in the house has stopped and he is much calmer. With his PRS clinician, my son works on activities including socialization skills, computer skills, cooking skills, and academic skills such as reading and playing games, and he also volunteers at Sunrise Senior Living. With PRS interventions, my son is less dependent on us, his parents. PRS has helped my son overcome obstacles to participating in community life, like work, volunteering, shopping and social interaction. His clinician continues to work with him on overcoming these obstacles. PRS is different from other services my son has received in the past; the PRS staff are passionate about their work and follow ups with clients. I feel as if I can talk to the staff that works with my son easily, they have open-door communication and are willing to help at all times. My favorite thing about PRS is the bond that the staff develop with their clients and their willingness to intervene when problems arise. I feel absolutely more hopeful for my son’s future. If he continues to improve at this pace, I see a light at the end of the tunnel.
We first became involved with PRS in the early 1980s. I was a young, assistant professor of psychology at George Washington University. Assigned to teach undergraduates about serious mental illness, I sought out opportunities for my students to get beyond their preconceptions about people with mental illness. People are not their diseases, but without personal, caring experience of people with mental illnesses, my students could not understand the challenges and the triumphs that people with these illnesses, their families and their friends experience. Vera Mellen graciously agreed to come to my abnormal psychology classes to talk about PRS, and many of my students did brief internships at PRS. From those beginnings developed a long and deep relationship with PRS, its staff and members. We received a grant from the Meyer Foundation that supported one of the country's first collaboratively developed family psycho-educational programs about serious mental illness. Undergraduate Mason students, PRS members and their families, and PRS staff worked together to develop and deliver a series of programs that were early versions of NAMI's Family-to-Family program.

I joined the Board in the mid-1980’s and served for five or six years. In addition to the incredible, thoughtful leadership of Vera Mellen and Martha Long during that time, the purchase of the building for the Route 1 program is a significant milestone that stands out to me. It was very risky for a program that operated on a shoe string to take a leap into a big mortgage, but it was the right thing to do. The Board, led by Allen Jensen, strongly supported—even pushed—PRS leadership to take the steps necessary to buy the building.

Terry joined the Board when I left. At the time, PRS operated a Thrift Shop on the first floor of the Merrifield program. Terry became very involved in reorganizing and modernizing the operation of the Thrift Shop, turning it into a stronger retail job training program.

Both of us strongly believe in PRS and its vital mission of supporting the recovery of people with serious mental illnesses and addictions. Over more than 20 years, we continue to be impressed and inspired by the staff’s dedication to create an environment that supports members, their families and friends in achieving full lives in their community. PRS has a firm commitment to quality. It is continuously at the front nationally in using the results of research to assist members to be gainfully employed, to enjoy their friends and communities, and to sustain recovery from their illnesses.

We are proud of our long affiliation with PRS, and wish it many more years of building caring communities for people with mental illnesses and addictions in Fairfax County.

Eric and Terry Goplerud
THE RAGE
2007
It’s called
Paranoia. But
To me it’s a rage.
Each day it
Visits me, often
Several times.
It sneaks up
Quickly, usually
After good news,
Even after a tiny
Piece of light
In my sky.
The paranoia
Comes riding in
To my awareness
And takes over.
When it’s there,
The rage tells me
I feel it twisting
My thoughts,
Distorting my
Mind, focusing my
Anger on some
Person, some
Situation.
I fight it,
Rounded boxing
Gloves, a flurry
Of blows, and
Then it comes back,
Invading my being,
Taking charge.
Seeking to dispel
The attack, I think,
Yes, think! Reason,
The greatest
Weapon of all.

I CAN’T WRITE
2011
I can’t write.
Can’t put one word
in front of the other.
Beauty? As lovely
as a Vampire’s
teeth. That
warmth inside me
that cooks
creativity? The
stove is cold
as steel in the
snow.
Issues; issues—
there will always
be issues. I’ve
decided there’ll
be no clean
planet living a
common good.
Church towers
touting hypocrisy.
Or are they the
best we can do?
Can’t write. My
hands are frozen;
brain stiff as mud.
I look for rhyme;
it eludes me.
Depression. When
will it lift? What
secret padlock
will free the
spirit?

THE KALEIDOSCOPE
2012
Is my fate as a writer
a hopeless one, my
work distorted by a
fickle mind, not to be
trusted?

Indeed, to this manic-
 depressive, it sometimes
seems so. A poem may
bring no response, even
from friends. Is my honest
work merely to be an
embarrassment? For
sure, I live on quicksand,
in a struggle with
uncertainty, not knowing
whether my poems are a
swamp of shadowy half-
thoughts
rising up to trick
and confuse me and the
reader.

Hark, I say: The thoughts
of the mentally ill can be
both quicksand and
diamonds. The
troubled mind can produce
words which shine with
splendor, with stabbing
insight. Never mind that
illness may undergird: The
insane can wrest beauty
from the grasp of the mire.

Why this strange divergence
in some human minds,
isn’t speaking in one
corner while the rational
sings in another? The
answer eludes this
nonscientist. I only know
that for me there may
be hope, as my fellows
sort and sift the meaning
of my kaleidoscopic
mind and of those similarly
afflicted.
Pathway Homes has enjoyed a close history and rich partnership with PRS for over 33 years! Back in the late 1970’s, some concerned family members involved with the Northern Virginia Alliance for the Mentally Ill (at that time called Pathways to Independence), including the great advocate, Mr. Ed Brazill, partnered with Vera Mellen of the “Social Center” and the Fairfax/Falls Church CSB in recognizing the lack of permanent supportive housing in Fairfax County. The result of their vision and hard work was the incorporation of Pathway Homes, Inc. in 1980.

From its birth and initial nurturing by Vera and the Social Center (including the use of two rooms for its first “administrative office”), Pathways has grown through the years alongside PRS, serving many of the same consumers and always prioritizing the coordination and continuity of care between our two vital organizations. Today, Wendy and Sylisa carry on this tradition. PRS has been a sister organization. Always prepared to share their wealth of knowledge, practice, and service quality. All of us at Pathway Homes salute, with the highest respect and gratitude, the remarkable 50 years of service of PRS, and their commitment to always be in the forefront of standards of care in their programs and services!

CLIENT FEATURE—SCOTT R.

The services I received at PRS enabled me to gain new confidence in finding a job, an area that had long been a nagging source of personal frustration. Working with Kathy Fairchild, I learned an array of new skills that emphasized locating job openings, tailoring my resume toward a position, preparing for interviews, and doing proper follow-up. With Kathy’s help, I eventually was able to secure a job after persistent effort. I am now happily employed as a Historic Interpreter at George Washington’s Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens.

I first began working with Kathy in June of 2012. We usually met at the Mount Vernon office, but we also went to other locations as well. On one productive day we walked around Old Town Alexandria to inquire about employment opportunities at local antique stores. We prepared beforehand on how I would express my interest in working at a store, which gave me confidence in a task that would have previously intimidated me.

On another occasion Kathy and I met at the Alexandria campus of Northern Virginia Community College, where I have been taking classes. We spoke with a guidance counselor about possible further classes that I could take which would fit with my career goals. Kathy would often advise me on how to balance my school schedule with various other commitments so that I could give sufficient attention to each.

Kathy taught me the importance of carefully reading job descriptions in order to tailor my cover letter and resume toward the candidate strengths the employer was seeking. We went through several mock interviews, with Kathy giving me tips on how to effectively converse with an interviewer. After having applied to a position at Ford Ward Historic Park in Alexandria, I went into the interview confident in my ability to present myself well. Although I was not offered the position, the application process was a valuable experience.

One of the key benefits of working with Kathy was the simple reassurance of becoming familiar with all the steps of finding a job, which I had previously found stressful and overwhelming. Kathy would often encourage me to fill out applications, and make follow-up phone calls, right there at the office. I never would have had the motivation or initiative to do such tasks on my own. It was such a lack of confidence that had long kept me from striving toward my goals. My time with Kathy enabled me to become proactive in my pursuit of success.
CLIENT FEATURE—JOSEPH F.

When asked how PRS has changed his life, Joseph responded, “Before PRS came in to my life it was a living hell. I was always in trouble; I was in a bad place.”

Joseph has been battling mental illness and intellectual disability his whole life. Aside from these psychiatric barriers, he has been challenged with end-stage renal disease which lands him a seat in a dialysis chair three days a week for 3-5 hours at a time. Before receiving PRS Home-Based Mental Health Support Services, Joseph got through life the best way he knew how… surviving. He did what he could on the streets to survive: ate when he could, slept where and when he could and did whatever he needed to do to stay alive. One thing has remained constant in Joseph’s life for several years, the dialysis chair. Joseph had no understanding, other than he has bad kidneys, as to why this consumed so many hours of his week. He had no direction, drive or understanding on how to “get better.” He was doing what he knew, surviving.

PRS Home-Based Supports began working with Joseph about four years ago. They connected Joseph to the transplant team with John’s Hopkins University. He was told he was too overweight to be considered for a transplant at that time, but would be put on the kidney transplant list if he could reduce his weight. It took a lot of education on healthy eating and exercising and a lot of hours of walking, but Joseph lost 70 pounds in the course of eighteen months and is now eligible for the kidney he needs to truly survive. He now has a better understanding of the importance of health and nutrition and continues to work toward his health goals in a positive manner. As most of us are, Joseph is a work in progress. However, he has inspired those around him to no longer just survive— but to live.

CLIENT FEATURE—JUDY

In 2011, Judy lost her job, and struggled to find new employment. Having previously worked with PRS, Judy returned to PRS Employment Services in August 2012. She had been working at a gym that was later closed, but when it reopened, PRS helped her regain employment there.

Through work with her Employment Specialist, Judy has learned computer skills, such as using email, and has become more comfortable being in the community. She continues to meet with her Employment Specialist to receive support as she transitions back to work.

Judy is a customer service representative, using the computer to check-in gym members and register new members. She answers the phone and monitors equipment as well. It is a person-oriented job and customer service is very important. She comments that the gym was looking for a friendly person, which fits her personality well. Judy recently learned that she will be working more consistently at 20 hours per week instead of 8.5 hours. She shares that working has helped her to be happier and gain more energy. She was discouraged when she couldn’t find work, despite her consistent work experience and good resume. She says her Employment Specialist has been a ‘great encouragement’ through the process.

One of the benefits of Judy’s job is she can attend classes at the gym for free and use the gym during open hours when she is not working. She has started taking yoga classes twice a week, which helps her feel happier and healthier.

Judy has chosen not to disclose her mental illness to her employer because this time she is in a better place mentally and physically and is able to handle bumps in the road. Her symptoms have not been negatively impacting her as much and she has not missed many days of work since returning to employment at the gym.
Fifty Years and Beyond

PRS’ clients continue to reach impressive outcomes. In FY2013:

► 98% of persons served were not hospitalized.

► 67% of Employment Services clients actively seeking employment were employed (over twice the national average for these populations).

► 89% of those employed who were employed as of 7/1/2012 were employed for at least 12 months or more.

► 100% of PRS Community Support Services and Community Housing clients maintained their housing and avoided eviction.

CLIENT FEATURE—RON

Ron came to PRS in 1996 through a referral from the Department of rehabilitative Services. He began working with a PRS Rehabilitation Services Coordinator in the PRS Mentor Program. As Ron began to attend group classes and seeing his Coordinator on a regular basis, his confidence grew. He participated in mock interviews and learned practical skills to begin his search for employment. Ron also learned how to cope with his illness and symptoms in the workplace.

In 1999, Ron was hired as a Management Information Systems Assistant in the PRS Falls Church office and was employed with the organization for five years. His supervisors taught him computer skills as well as hardware and software maintenance which led to Ron returning to school to study computer systems at Stayer College.

Ron shares, “The two medications I take for my bi-polar condition have now stabilized my mood swings. I finished my degree at George Mason University in computer systems and business. For me, as a client and an employee, PRS was like finding new glasses that gave you dramatically increased sight for distance. After participating in the Mentor program and being a PRS employee, I believed that I was more than just a person with a mental illness. I was a person despite the mental illness with gifts and abilities to share. It was in the sharing that I grew and became healthier. The medication was critical to recovery but it was also about relationships that helped and healed. Before PRS, my life was in need of growth and positive change. PRS helped me greatly to make these changes. I chose to get better, accept my condition as one I could manage and contribute to our community.”

CLIENT FEATURE—TINA

Tina completed her GED through PRS’ partnership with Fairfax County Adult Education Program. She graduated in the Fall of 2013.

All client stories, poems, letters and photographs printed with expressed written permission.
Surrounded by about a dozen of his peers, Jason Packs takes roll call for his weekly “Star Trek” class, one of many classes he leads at PRS, Inc., a 50-year-old community behavioral health agency in Northern Virginia and Washington, DC.

Just seven years ago, Packs had no idea that he would be any kind of leader. He was homeless, with a mental illness and no direction.

At 12 years old, Jason was diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder (ADHD). “I used to be a handful for my teachers because I’d talk out of turn and was hyper,” he says. Twelve years later, he learned that he actually had bipolar disorder, which is commonly misdiagnosed in youth as ADHD, according to Tom Schuplin, director of the Recovery Academy at PRS.

“Recovery means never looking back, always looking forward and never to the past.”

In adulthood, with no social supports, he wound up homeless.

“I was at a shelter and I was directed to PRS because they recommended it would be helpful to me because... I was just idling without purpose,” recalls Packs.

One of his first connections at PRS was rehab coordinator Byron Roberson, who used to be Packs employment specialist. He guided Packs to the PRS’ employment program where Packs trained in readiness skills like communication, interviewing, resumes, and anything else he needed to get and keep a job.

Packs now holds a regular job as a newspaper handler for USA Today. He is also a peer mentor in the Recovery Academy, a day program that consists of up to 16 classes a day, including an array of topics such as Packs Star Trek enthusiast’s class, cultural awareness, walking for health, budgeting, dealing with depression, and psychosocial skills. For Packs, the Recovery Academy continues to be a lifetime to developing social skills, relationships, confidence, and leadership.

“PRS had a real big influence on me,” says Jason. “I’d like to be a counselor like the counselors here at PRS. Take on my own clients.”

PRS staff is on the same page. Jackie Domperereh, rehab coordinator at PRS, says, “We’re trying to get [Packs] to take the peer counseling training and become a certified peer counselor. We want him to build some more skills and slowly transition out of the day program. That’s what we hope.”

Schuplin agrees: “Jason is very focused. He’s learned from his recovery how to work with others who are at an earlier stage of recovery, and he recognizes with them the journey that they’re facing. And he’s very supportive and offers his assistance constantly to his peers in the program.”

Packs shares that forward-looking mentality, saying, “Recovery means never looking back, always looking forward and never to the past.”

JASON PACKS, JACKIE DOMPEREREH, BYRON ROBERSON, AND TOM SCHUPLIN
PRS, Inc.
McLean, Virginia