



# Connections

for communities that care



## Michigan's River of Opportunity

**Nick Lyon**, Director

Michigan Department of Community Health and Michigan Department of Human Services

*After James Haveman resigned as director of the Michigan Department of Community Health, Governor Rick Snyder appointed Chief Deputy Director Nick Lyon to be his successor [September 2014]. A few months later Maura Corrigan retired as Director of the Department of Human Services and Director Lyon was tapped to take on these additional responsibilities and merge the two departments into the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Although this merger will not be official until sometime in April, Director Lyon's monumental task is in full gear, his responsibilities equaled by few. A signal message regarding this article is the implicit fact that Director Lyon made time to communicate with us. Actions speak louder than words. As Director of the emergent Department of Health and Human Services, he felt it was important to connect. This speaks volumes.*

*Given this warm gesture of treating us as partners, it seems appropriate to acknowledge the personal side of Mr. Lyon. He and his wife, Wendy, have two children. They reside in Marshall, Michigan where he volunteers as a Marshall Soccer Club Volunteer Coach. Lyon earned a degree in economics and political science from Yale University. To read more about Director Lyon's service path, go to: <http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,1607,7-132--97151--,00.html> — Clint Galloway, Editor*

**A**s we have seen over the past few years, we continue to be in a rapidly changing time for healthcare. The importance of working more and more closely with Medicaid Health Plans and physical health care systems to improve overall health outcomes, including prevention and recovery, for persons with developmental disabilities, substance use disorders, and mental illness has never been more vital.

In Michigan, with Governor Snyder, we have made tremendous strides in improving our economic status as well as certain health indicators. Physical and behavioral health integration is at the forefront of our priorities, and while we have much to be proud of, there is still significant work left to do. As we work to ensure our systems are aligned and working together, programs such as Care Connect 360 are crucial to determining where persons are at risk and in need of greater support. I look forward to your continued work to ensure that our healthcare is integrated in a way that best serves our consumers.

This integration of physical and behavioral health is a crucial factor for local community mental health boards and the Department of Human Services offices to partner further in ensuring that residents are receiving the care they deserve. With the creation of the new Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, this partnership provides a platform to work together to better promote health, wellness, safety, and recovery success in our communities. Governor Snyder also asked the department to oversee the ongoing work of the Mental Health and Wellness Commission and I look forward to continuing this important work. By working to ensure that services to our residents are better coordinated, we can help our youth and adults get on the path to prevention and self-sufficiency.

As Governor Snyder announced in his State of the State address this year, Michigan is renewing its focus on people, rather than programs, through a concept called the *River of*

*(see Opportunity on page 2)*

## *Opportunity* (from page 1)

*Opportunity.* Through this, the new Michigan Department of Health and Human Services will be working to better align ourselves internally and in our communities to get services to our residents. By working to reduce administrative layers, and coordinate complicated program systems, we can move towards a new model of providing specialty services to our residents.

This new concept is a great opportunity not only for the State, but also for local community mental health agencies to show how physical health, behavioral health, and human services outcomes improve when services and care are better coordinated. By focusing on the person and trying to remove barriers between providers and agencies, the boundaries between programs become less burdensome and bureaucratic. In doing so, we are better serving our residents' needs and getting them on a path to success.

In the coming months, I encourage you to work with your

partners across programs provided by both local community mental health agencies and in local Department of Human Services offices. We at the State are starting to think across physical space and into collaboration among entities and programs. As we work to instill this new concept of the *River of Opportunity* into the way we provide services, together we will improve health outcomes, reduce health risks, and support stable and safe families while encouraging self-sufficiency.

As our strongest partners in delivering behavioral health services to Michigan residents, your involvement will be vital to ensuring we truly are improving the way services are delivered, and in turn, the lives of those that we serve. As we have more details to share about the structure of this new department and the way we are integrating care for our residents, I will be sure to share those with you. I appreciate your support and feedback during this time and look forward to this new direction together. ❖

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## **Orienting Principles** Clint Galloway, Editor

*"The more things change, the more they stay the same."* – Alphonse Karr (1849)

**P**erhaps the signal question we wrestle with that shapes the quality of our day-to-day experience has to do with our attitude regarding the course of human events. Are we cynics or are we visionaries? Karr, a French writer and editor was well known for his satirical wit, which no doubt, was the intended spin for this saying regarding change. However, the saying is equally valid for those who have a positive orientation. Interestingly, the cynics, citing what's wrong with the world, seem to be unable to avoid focusing on their miseries, while the visionaries roll up their sleeves and work to push the *river of opportunities*. Their eye remains fixed on the vision—in Director Lyon's case—the "triple aim:" better health, better care and lower cost for all of Michigan's citizens.

Taking on the task of integrating public services in a manner that is congruent with the complexity of caring for the whole person is a formidable challenge! It is a noble endeavor that leaves no room for kibitzers. Lyon is issuing a call to all of us. It is the same as always, we must transcend our differences and include everyone. "Transcend and include" is a mantra I learned from the philosopher Ken Wilber. Current events don't alter this principle. It has remained the mission of *Connections*.

Envisioning the future enables us to identify the means that will make it a reality. There are three complementary themes that occupy our current issue, all essential elements in navigating the river: utilizing social media, building social capital, and developing mindfulness. You will be hearing more about these themes for they have the capacity to transform our future, hallowing out a quality of life that has existed in our visions. The vision is our orienting beacon. Together, we can create its reality for everyone in our communities.



*"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."* –T. S. Eliot

# Cast-aways

PAM HEANY

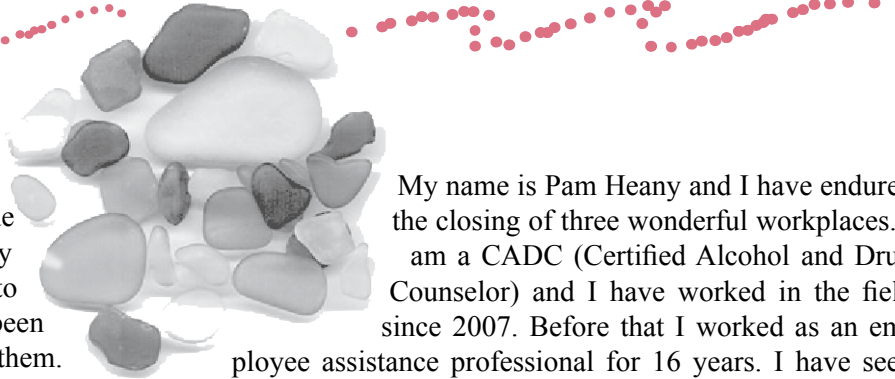
Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor

**C**ast-aways are delicate works of art made from tumbled pieces of broken glass—mostly liquor bottles. Had no one taken the time to work with them, they could easily have been thrown away. But someone saw potential in them. Tools were made available, and value, worth and beauty were discovered. When I found several pieces of polished glass (similar to sea glass) and began working with them, I couldn't help but compare them to many people in society who are easily stigmatized, especially people with addiction. It is very easy to judge someone when they are broken, have sharp edges and lack resources. It's easy to point fingers and justify not helping them by saying "they did it to themselves," or "they never learn," and "why waste time and money trying to help them?"

Indeed, it is very difficult to imagine the transformation that is possible. But I have seen it happen a hundred times. I hope *Cast-aways* demonstrates this. People with substance use disorders can be transformed into the functioning, caring person they were before they became controlled by the powerful need for a drug, through no conscious choice of their own. (Using is a choice; addiction is a process no one would choose.) It could be a high school athlete who has a football injury and needs pain medication. It could be someone in long term recovery from alcoholism. If a person develops a medical issue requiring pain medication, brain chemistry can be disrupted. It could be an unwary senior citizen with health issues, who is lonely and bored and begins to use alcohol or prescription meds abusively to make it all go away. It could be an innocent child growing up in a family or a neighborhood where drinking, smoking weed, etc. is "normal" or at least appears to be when they have nothing else to compare it to. A thousand different scenarios can change a person into something they are not.

The mystifying part is that *not everyone* becomes addicted to drugs whether they use them socially or out of medical necessity. That seems like evidence that there is something different going on with those who do become addicted; not just physically dependent, but also emotionally and mentally obsessed, and socially as well as spiritually bankrupt, due to their use.

I had a burning desire to advocate and offer tools to these victims, but no real place to do that anymore.



My name is Pam Heany and I have endured the closing of three wonderful workplaces. I am a CADC (Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor) and I have worked in the field since 2007. Before that I worked as an employee assistance professional for 16 years. I have seen transformations take place in human beings many, many times with tools such as information, understanding, compassion; and connection to appropriate community resources such as detox, residential programs, counseling and Twelve Step groups.

When the economy began to flounder it became more and more challenging to find resources for people to get the help they needed. As things grew increasingly worse, many places closed. I grieved the loss of the work I loved that has been so meaningful and rewarding to me. I must admit, I was beginning to despair of ever engaging in it again.

One day my husband and I happened on what appeared to be sea glass. We later learned they were actually old liquor bottles lovingly broken, tumbled and polished by a very humble Native American gentleman. Much credit belongs to him, because without his vision of what can come from something most people would see as beyond hope, none of this could have happened. He asked only that I pass on a scripture— Matthew 25:35: "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

I was amazed at how smooth and shiny each piece was. "No two are alike" I thought "just like people." I was struggling to know what to do with myself and all my unwanted free time. I decided to buy some wire and see what I could create. The tighter I could wrap the wire, the more



Pam Heany wearing one of her cast-away necklaces

(see *Cast-aways* page 10)

# SPREADABLE MEDIA:

*Creating Value and Meaning in a networked Culture*

By Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green

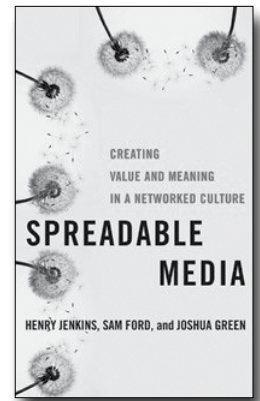
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## REVIEW BY CLINT GALLOWAY

**T**wo years ago, the U.N. reported that six billion of the world's seven billion people have access to mobile phones while only 4.5 billion have access to working toilets. A year ago the Pew Research Center reported that 90% of American adults have a cell phone, 58% have a smartphone, and 42% own a tablet computer. There is no doubt that we live in a culture that has been irrevocably changed by the way we connect. What remains unanswered is the value and meaning of living in an electronically networked culture. [To see how it has changed the life of one person living with a disability, read the testimony of Bonnie Gonzalez in this issue.] Informal discussions are likely to generate more knee-jerk emotions than knowledge, which is not surprising given the explosive popularity of these devices. Accumulating knowledge requires time to do research and engage in thoughtful dialogue—enter “Spreadable Media.” What is unusual about this book is that the writing of it mirrors the phenomenon of what they are researching, a networked culture. The authors took off their professional blindfolds to capture a glimpse of the elephant in nearly everyone’s kitchen/bedroom/et.al.

What you will find in this book is the result of over five years of academic research by the Convergence Culture Consortium led by MIT’s program in Comparative Media Studies. They were able to bring together experts representing diverse perspectives of how media is used, including media scholars (academia), communication professionals (PR and advertising) and individuals who use, create and share media (social media). The findings of this collaborative venture challenge some pervasive myths and illuminate the emergence of a powerful participatory culture. The era of communication content being controlled

by powerful media giants is rapidly eroding. Spreadable Media illuminates how information is being created and circulated in the emergent networked culture. Understanding this is vital if we have a vision, mission or values that we want to communicate. Our efforts at advocacy will be greatly diminished without this knowledge. However, the caveat is a big one: We have to listen before we speak in a participatory culture. It won’t spread if it doesn’t resonate and if it doesn’t spread it’s dead. People don’t listen to the networks that make them feel uncomfortable; they tune into the ones with whom they agree. “Birds of a feather flock together.” The influence of the media giants of yesteryear—a time when choice was limited—is waning. In a participatory culture, we are more influenced by one another. We have always been most deeply affected by the people with whom we have close relationships. Technology has immersed us in a much broader networked culture in which our individual influence is increasing. In a networked culture, we are it!

Have you scattered any seeds lately? ❖❖

Note: If you would like to see how spreadable media is being used in a statewide advocacy plan visit:

[https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B\\_7XonSDI pWUdWVXR2Qyc k9ZdXc&usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B_7XonSDI pWUdWVXR2Qyc k9ZdXc&usp=sharing), or go to:

<http://www.occmha.org/> (Oakland County CMH) and click on “Advocacy Resources” Then click on “Advocacy Information” and you will find several documents utilizing social media including “legislative social media contact information” and “social media messaging” that includes tweets and Facebook messages that are updated every two weeks. Thanks to Christine Burk, Manager of Communications and Community Outreach at OCCMH for developing this material.

# My Use of Mindfulness in Clinical Practice

Denise L. Brooks, PsyD, PLLC



*Denise Brooks has been my wife's very close friend for over forty years. She's a woman whose life is an enthusiastic embrace of the full experience of living. She is a compassionate and wise individual with deep appreciation for the gift of life.*

*When I asked Denise to contribute to a Connections article on mindfulness based on her experience as an outpatient*

*therapist in private practice, she immediately replied, "I'd love to do this!" Mine was a simple email request for a quote or two, and a story from her experience. The following day I received a second email from Denise. It contained over three pages of text, her writing obviously fueled by the fire of passion. Her email was a complete, fully-formed testimonial of the role of mindfulness in the therapeutic process ...a complete article, ready to go.*

*In response to my thanks and praise, Denise apologized for "just spilling it out" in the email. We're pleased to offer this close-up of one therapist's view of the importance of mindfulness in the healing process.*

*—Robert McLuckie, Connections Editorial Group*

**W**hen I was a very busy doctoral student, our curriculum director decided to test-drive a one-credit course called "Mindfulness." The entire cohort was rather chilly on the notion, given our already overloaded internship and course work schedules. Me, I was downright crabby about it, especially after seeing the syllabus with all the papers our instructor, Dr. Donna Rockwell, had assigned. But, ever the "A" student, I buckled down and participated fully, turning in my papers, while regularly registering my protest.

As so often happens, by the end of the term, that very thing I so resisted had become a basic staple of life: I have continued mindfulness meditating ever since, and recently apologized to my dear teacher for my past, regrettable reactivity.

Additionally, in my psychotherapy practice, I teach every

client who is open to learning—and has even a minimal tolerance for affect—a simple mindfulness meditation during either the second or third session. I have found this practice a useful addition to the several other modalities I use, depending on the individual's diagnosis.

The goal of psychotherapy is change. Whether the client is experiencing intrusive or compulsive thoughts or behaviors, suffering from overwhelming levels of emotion, or even long-term anhedonia or depression—the desired outcome is change. In order to change, in any way, the person must be able to stop—even for a fraction of a second—whatever behavior he or she is engaged in. In order to change, the person must be able to pause long enough to recognize and attend to his or her current condition, which is the first step to accepting it, which seems to be the next step of change: accepting the current condition.

Mindfulness is the act of consciously pausing to witness our thoughts and feelings, accepting them just as they are, and learning to have compassion for ourselves and our discomforts. I find this practice is also helpful in establishing therapeutic alliance because it helps clients to more accurately characterize their symptoms, and articulate their particular discomforts and dysfunctional ways of being.

Prior to teaching the mindfulness meditation, I speak to them a little about how directing our own thoughts and feelings is possible, with some amount of instruction, attention and learning, much like driving our cars: We wouldn't get behind the wheel without learning to drive and direct our car, but we haven't been taught to drive our selves. Rather, we let our impulses drive us. When we learn to pause and witness, then accept, gradually we can begin to learn to direct our thoughts and feelings rather than reacting to them, automatically.

Additionally, I talk a bit about the evolution of our human brain, the organ that evolved both to direct and control our other physiological organs, but also to protect us. Because humans are (however defended by a healthy amount of denial) uniquely aware of our own mortality, our brain prioritizes protection. It is inclined to focus on negativity, to be scanning for threats. Bringing this to awareness normalizes some of the client's symptoms and reactions, because it becomes understandable how we humans are uniquely vulnerable to anxiety and depression.

(See *Mindfulness* page 11)

# The Importance of Social Media and Technology in Our Lives

## Bonnie Gonzalez

Bonnie is a member of the HealthWest (formerly CMH Services of Muskegon County) board of directors. She was awarded the 2013 **The Arc Muskegon Robert & JoAnn Hommes Award of Excellence**. The award is presented to an individual who has made a significant difference in the lives of children or adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Muskegon County and aligns with the mission of The Arc Muskegon. She also is the author of a blog, "Inspire the Difference" which has this banner statement:

*"Life can be a challenging journey for us all. Living with a disability brings interesting twists to that journey. I hope that in sharing some of my experiences, it will inspire you to get through your challenges with some more hope and laughter in your lives."*

Using social media as a part of our social lives has become a part of everyday life. However, the technology behind social media provides much more than the way we gossip or keep in touch with family and friends. As it becomes an even greater reality in our lives, the meaning of these changes grows each day. I doubt that any of us truly realize the great impact social media and technology have on our lives and in our communities.

There is literally something for everyone out there; all you have to do is jump online and find it. This is wonderful for those who find it difficult to get around physically; they can still develop social connections. Businesses now use social media to market their products. Social media has enabled education to expand in so many ways! I would like to talk about that a little bit more.

I attend an online university. There are many universities of this nature to choose from, but learning online takes a different set of skills than classroom learning. I think what many view as our obsession with social media has essentially provided us with these skills. Many of my exams are videos, most embedded with codes tied to some form of social media. I specifically like the various assignments dealing with TedTalks\* because I can watch them on my phone if I am away from home, or even on my TV if I want to share my learning experience with others.

Elementary and high schools are offering alternative online educational opportunities for students. While I believe that the social skills we gain in educational classroom settings are vital, it is equally important for the development

and growth of our society, and to access career opportunities, to develop technological skills.

It is important that people understand their audience when interacting on any social media network. What you say is more widely viewed than traditional communication. This is great if you value transparency but it intimidates those who guard their privacy. Perhaps we should be careful what we say no matter what.



Bonnie Gonzalez

I have so many social media accounts I can't follow them all. Some of them that I keep open are related to research I'm doing, others are there in case someone needs to reach me. I have been trying to create a LinkedIn account for about two months for a project and educational/career portfolio, but when can one find the time! I love to read, but you'll rarely find my face in a book and I don't have much time to watch the tube because there's a tweet in my ear about clicking this link which gets me back on track to my next "insta-learn" experience. I can't imagine life without this technology. It would not begin to be as full and meaningful. It enables me to connect with the people and ideas that I value. ■■

You can connect with me at:

<http://inspirethedifference.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.facebook.com/mexxi75>



\*TED.com is owned by a nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation. Their stated agenda is to make ideas accessible and spark conversation: "Everything we do—from our TED Talks videos to the projects sparked by the TED Prize, from the global TEDx community to the TED-Ed lesson series—is driven by this goal: How can we best spread great ideas? TED is a global community, welcoming people from every discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world. We believe passionately in the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and, ultimately, the world." TED Talks can be found on Facebook and other social media sites. For more information about this organization visit [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com).

# SOCIAL CAPITAL: *Future Implications*

Al Condeluci, Ph.D.

*"The key is to keep company only with people who uplift you, whose presence calls forth your best." Epictetus*

**I**n any exploration of *Community and Social Capital*, it is only fitting that we consider what the future might hold. Certainly, any such effort is risky, as the future is so difficult to predict, yet people are drawn to think about the future if only to have fun speculating.

In the future, however, we believe one thing is predictable: people will continue to build and develop social capital. These relationships will be both actual and virtual, and people will be better because of them.

## The Role of Social Media

For those of us interested in social capital, forecasting can be helpful. We know of the enormous benefits of people building, sustaining, and maintaining relationships. In fact, the incredible influence of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn have dramatically broadened people's lives and begins to beg the question of virtual community and virtual social capital.

The research on social capita—as explored by sociologists—suggests that three major values are associated with social capital. These are: 1) Instrumental value, 2) Emotional value, and 3) Informational value. When you look at Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn today, some people actually reap all three of these values from their virtual friends. People post or give status updates on their problems, struggles, careers or interests and their friends/connections weigh in with advice, counsel or suggestions. Certainly, the information that is exchanged, whether it is accurate or bogus, is amazing. People share intimate details and photos, and they literally log in where and when they travel.

This amount of sharing with social media "friends" or "followers" cannot be dismissed in an exploration of this concept of social capital. For many people with disabilities or mobility limitations, Facebook or Twitter becomes their entire life. Through the virtual dimensions that level the playing field, a person who might not command direct attention can be deeply embraced by his or her Facebook friends or Twitter followers.

Recently, I participated in an international conference of augmentative communication (AC) users. Augmentative communication is when a person uses a computer or

another talking device to express his or her thoughts, concerns, or issues. For many people who experience speech impairments brought on by disabilities or medical issues, these communication devices are gateways to other people. Certainly, we know that the fuel of social capital is communication, and if a person experiences limitations in this area, his or her development of social capital is lessened. With AC devices, people can engage, setting the stage for developing relationships.

But the downside of AC is that of spontaneity. For many AC users, spontaneity in communication takes time. The AC user has to plug in the appropriate letters or symbols to get the word or thought he or she wants to express. This is tedious and can certainly affect the development of a relationship, especially in our fast-paced society.

With Facebook, however, the AC user can post or communicate at his or her own pace and not adversely impact the relationship he or she is developing. Additionally, because people can choose the profile pictures they post, what they display can create an initiation that can often be positive or engaging, further baiting the developing friendship.

At that AC conference I attended, a full session on the use of Facebook for AC users was presented. It was amazing how active and passionate most of the AC users were with Facebook. It was a clear testimony to how important community is in people's lives. It was also interesting to me that most of the people in the session had 500-plus "friends" logged on Facebook.

The notion of virtual relationships and connections has also been influenced by text messaging. More and more people are communicating with their friends via text. People from earlier generations often have a hard time understanding the world of text messaging, wondering how it is not easier and faster to just call the person, instead of typing out a message.

But these critics don't fully understand the lore and utility of texting. For many people, texting has not taken the place of face-to-face or real conversations but has supplemented and, in many ways, enriched the relationship. People can text when a verbal conversation is impossible; furthermore, given the character limitation of a text, they are able to get the essence of the point more quickly. A recent article suggests that receiving texts boosts morale and spirit,

(See SOCIAL CAPITAL page 8)

## SOCIAL CAPITAL *(continued)*

good things for people to have boosted.

Another virtually enhanced trend is found with Instagram and Pinterest. These media are primarily designed for uploading and sharing photos. Of course, with the smartphones we all have, a camera is instantly available to all of us, at any time. This phenomenon has a number of ripples both good and bad. First off, the uploading of photos and videos on to social media outlets can help us see and learn, but can equally embarrass or indict. Photos of people doing unsavory things posted in a public format, can end a career or be used against them in a variety of ways. Of course, on the flip side, these posted photos or videos can enhance or continue to sustain important relationships that may be marred by distance and time.

### **The Need to Meet**

One phenomena that has emerged with the advent of social networking on the Internet, be it Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and others, is the powerful need to meet and connect. Virtual connections are good to start a relationship, but clearly, at some point in the connection, people want to engage face-to-face. This is fueled by anecdotal stories of people finally connecting after years of internet communications. Some of these stories have good endings and some have bad ones. Either way, you cannot discount the powerful urge for direct relationships.

It is interesting that an entire website, [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com), is dedicated to this strong need to be face-to-face with other like-minded people. The concept of [meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com) is simple. People type in their zip code and interests, and the website matches the interest with a group of people who gather around the interest topic. So even though virtual sites create a start point, the human drive of meeting together is a concept that continues to carry the day, and there is no reason to suggest that the future will mitigate this energy.

In a basic human way, it is natural for people to want to personally meet. There is such a powerful and primal nature to seeing someone, to reading his or her face and body language, to actually seeing his or her reactions. Although virtual social networking sites give us the quick and easy tools to connect, the face-to-face needs still linger, even with the use of emoticons.

Recent technological developments have attempted to seize on this energy. Once we acquired phones and computers, it was a quick transition to using these tools in relationship building. The first big development was Skype, which allows users to not only see each other but to connect at no cost! I know this development well, as my son, Santino, who met a young lady while studying in France, has main-

tained a long distance relationship with her through Skype. Still, they work hard to find ways to be together face-to-face and he believes this is the key reason why their relationship has continued for the past four years.

Apple has continued the powerful development of face-to-face with the addition of “FaceTime” on the iPhone and iPad. This application allows people with an Apple product and a Wi-Fi connection to see/watch each other as they communicate by phone or pad. There is so much enrichment to a conversation when you see and hear each other. Even with businesses, the application of remote meetings where people can see each other and engage has enhanced the vitality of organizations that use this technology.

Webinars, as well, have become a mainstay for professional development opportunities. With simple applications, a student can attend a webinar seeing the presenter along with other members in an easy to use format.

Another manifestation of the desire for personal connections is found in smartphone apps like “latitude,” “four-square” and “Life360.” People can follow the comings and goings of their friends and family with the GPS technology built into the phone. Sometimes the user is even given a discount at the places they most frequent. Although this might seem creepy or stalker-like, remember these are mutually accepted apps and if you accept a friend’s invitation you agree to keeping connected in the fullest sense of the word.

In a way, Facebook offers a similar feature when you “check in” on the site. Once you post your location, everyone on your friends list knows where you are. Further, the site now allows you to know who among your friends is on the site when you are so that an instant chat can occur.

### **Conclusion**

As mobility and technology evolve, relationships will certainly be altered, but the clear basics that affinities bond people, that face-to-face energy draws people, that expected behaviors will be present and that gatekeepers introduce the new comers will continue to influence how people build social capital.

Human beings are social animals and need the power and potency their relationships bring. This has been true since the beginning of time. It is true today and will most certainly be a critical ingredient in the future. We are better people, have better meso systems, and are a better macro society because of social capital. We get deeper into ourselves as we develop deeper relationships. It is perhaps this greater self-awareness that is the most important variable of social capital. Surely the more we know about ourselves, the better we become with others and the better we become as a society. ■■



# The Ethical Use of Power

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**Robert Lathers, LMSW**

CEO, Ionia County Community Mental Health

Adjunct Professor, Grand Valley State University, Graduate School of Social Work

**A**s conscious beings, every day is shaped by countless decisions of what to do next; most of them are mindless, another word for routine or habitual. However, when change or interruptions emerge, there is a brief opening to use that gift of consciousness and ask, "What is the right thing to do?" The ensuing dialogue is enriched when it is enjoined by another person. As others are engaged, the depth multiplies. This is the ideal scenario for the board room, the administrative or clinical team, as well as our family or circle of friends. These dialogues provide the meaning for which we all hunger, the foundation of deep happiness. As the dialogues continue, principles emerge that are honed into markers that can guide us and shape our future.

Recently I became engaged in such a dialogue that was reflecting on the fate of the state hospitals in Michigan. Upon hearing the story, our *Connections* editor asked me to share it in *Connections*, so here it is. (You need to be careful what you say to Clint Galloway!)

A Michigan-based filmmaker informed me recently that he has been working on a documentary about Michigan's State Hospital system and wanted to interview me on camera for the project. His interest in my perspective was two-fold: first, because I am a community mental health director in a community that had been home to one of the State's correction-based mental health facilities, the "Ionia Hospital for the Criminally Insane," which was in use from 1885-1972; secondly, because my father had been a resident there after his incarceration in 1966. My perspective was from a unique dual role as a family member and as the director of one of Michigan's community mental health programs charged with serving persons with severe mental illness as integrated members

of the community, some of whom would have been institutionalized in the Michigan State Hospital System a few decades ago.

At the end of a long two hour interview, the film producer asked me if I thought the closing of Michigan's State Hospitals was the right thing to do.

I asked, "Do you mean was it ethical?"


"Sure," he responded."

To which I stated, "It depends how you define ethics."

"So, how do you define it?" he asked.

I replied, "I would define ethics as how you use your power to enhance or diminish the self-determination of others!"

My response was followed by a period of silence. He looked at me with an expression of surprise. So I continued making the connection between my definition of ethics and his question of closing the hospitals. Yes, I believe it was the right thing to do. Most people placed in the hospitals had done nothing wrong. They were literally incarcerated for having a mental illness or a developmental disability. Eventually, those in Lansing who had the power to close the hospitals used it to increase the self-determination and freedom of others. It is now ethically up to the rest of us to finish the challenge and not diminish the gains by using the power we have to increase their self-determination. ❖



*"When the stories of our life no longer bind us, we discover within them something greater. We discover that within the very limitations of form, of our maleness and femaleness, of our parenthood and our childhood...is the freedom and harmony we have sought for so long. Our individual life is an expression of the whole mystery, and in it we can rest in the center...." - Jack Kornfield*

## *Cast-aways* (from page 3)

secure the glass became. Sometimes it looked really good, but if the wire was too loose, it fell apart. “Isn’t that the truth!” I thought, “just like people who are so fragile. The more support they have, the better chance they have.” I began to realize there were many analogies to people in this process, and I began to ponder how effective it could be in conveying important recovery concepts to people in early recovery whose thinking processes, focus, and attention were impaired due to addiction.

Another thing occurred to me. All the time I was focused on this art, my mind was calm, and I wasn’t worried and anxious. I began to think about different combinations of colors and wire instead of obsessing about my worries. It seemed like time went by quickly too! I began to grow excited! I was beginning to recognize the importance of “replacement activities” for recovering people. It could be any creative art form that they might choose to replace the destructive ritual of using drugs.

What a powerful way to deal with cues and triggers this would be for a newly recovered person, I thought. Having

wore one. One client returned to visit with his hanging from a gold chain his wife had rushed out to buy when she saw the effort he was putting into recovery. The irony of a broken piece of glass hanging from a gold chain seemed to say everything.

My greatest satisfaction though, was when a newcomer came in, and another patient only two or three days into detox started explaining the meaning of Cast-aways. They were passing on recovery concepts without even realizing it. They were encouraging each other. They had become advocates pleading for help for those too broken and sick to do so themselves.

Engaging the clients in this process was very rewarding. Every step was symbolic of the process of recovery. Often they wanted to try it, sometimes they did not. Some wanted to, but were reluctant to try due to fear of failure or potential embarrassment. It fit the stages of change perfectly. With some encouragement from group participants, they often decided to just try; they were willing. I watched as they went from fear, to frustration, to quiet focus. I heard

*It seemed to be giving them hope. It seemed to be an anchor for them...*

something to engage in when those mental obsessions hit could buy them that minute or two of time needed for the craving to subside. It would also be empowering for them to sit back and see something beautiful they had created, instead of a path of destruction usually left by someone with an addiction. Cast-aways were full of such beautiful symbolism.

I began offering classes at a facility that had just opened a detox unit. Even with poor health, the patients could not wait to make their own Cast-away. Sometimes when I went in to work in the morning, a frail client would look up at me from the recliner she/he had spent the night in due to restless legs and unrelenting anxiety. They would open their hand, and there would be the Cast-away they had made themselves, with shaky hands and determination.

It seemed to be giving them hope. It seemed to be an anchor for them, helping them to hold on through some of the longest nights anyone could endure. We began putting the Cast-aways on leather or ribbon when they completed the program. Some of the staff commented that the clients seemed to hold their heads just a little higher when they

them ask one another for help. Often they offered each other help. And finally, they had a masterpiece. They held in their hands tangible evidence that—like recovery, if they worked through the struggle—they would end up with something amazing.

People get broken in many ways. Sometimes it is a mental health issue, or even a physical illness such as cancer. It could be a life situation, such as being the victim of bullying, domestic violence, sexual abuse, or a trauma of any kind. Many babies are tragically born into addiction or with syndromes for which the general public lacks understanding. Whatever the situation, stigma hurts. My hope is that Cast-aways remind people that human beings are fragile. People break, but no matter what, each individual has value, worth and beauty. My prayer is that more programs will become available to offer people the tools they need to find their self-worth again, and that we all become aware of the gifts, talents and abilities that lie dormant in people that very well could have been cast away. ❖❖

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## Mindfulness *(from page 5)*

I then show them a picture of the triune brain, and show how much of our brain is being powered by two-thirds instinctual, mammalian, and genetic impulses; and only one-third reason. I describe how, depending on our particular wiring, and genetic make-up (given the findings that many mental illnesses develop from genetic predispositions) that two-thirds can be very powerful. Pointing to the limbic system, I show how our five senses are plugged directly into that part of the brain, perhaps an evolutionary adaptation allowing the reasoning part—the prefrontal cortex—to be bypassed when a threat is detected, or negativity is evoked in memory. Theoretically, when that occurs, our limbic system can "highjack" the reasoning part of us and "trigger" us, causing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that may be reacting to things stored in memory, or over-responding to things our rational mind—if it had time to engage—would find less negative or threatening. I explain how mindfulness practice can help

us develop a habit of attuning to our reactions, allowing us a fraction of attention to our breath in response to the first sign of up-regulation, in hopes of interrupting the triggered reaction. That tiny bit of time might allow the prefrontal cortex to engage, allowing us to choose better responses. Over time, it may even be possible to retrain, and thus, rewire our brains into new, healthier ways of being.

After having taken a thorough biopsychosocial history in the initial session, at this point I often use examples from the client's own history to talk about how some of their particular ways of being, or past ways of coping may have become over-learned, and habitual. I explain that mindfulness practice may help build his or her intentional muscles and help them learn to resist impulsive or over-learned reactions, and direct her/his own course into more positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

I tell them how, when the breath passes quickly through the bridge of the nose, the pituitary gland senses that breath and directs the central nervous system to down-regulate, decreasing respiration and heart rate. Additionally, breathing all the way out, as instructed below, encourages fully in-breathing, oxygenating the bloodstream, especially the brain.

### Mindfulness Meditation

Sit up straight and imagine your spine as a stack of golden coins. Don't close your eyes, but rather fuzzy-focus on the floor about three feet in front of you. Relax your shoulders, let them fall away from your ears, and rest your hands on your thighs. Notice your feet on the floor: That is where you're grounded to earth by gravity, grounded and centered. Notice the weight of your hands on your thighs: That's where you're

grounded to yourself, your body.

Breathe in through your nose, then breathe all the way out: Try to touch your belly button to your spine on the out-breath, then breathe in again through your nose. About 60% of your attention is on the ambient sounds in the room, the ticking of clock, the noises outside in the street, and about 40% of your attention is on your out-breath. The mission is to focus on the out-breath.

As your thoughts arise, just notice them. Don't try to stop them or change them. Simply label them "thinking," and gently return your focus to the out-breath. If you have an urge to move, or scratch an itch, simply label it, "thinking," and gently return your focus to our out-breath.

I'll watch the clock: Five minutes.

Now, gently begin to come back into the room. Scan your body from the top of your head, down through your neck and shoulders, down through your arms, hands, torso, your legs, and your feet—and tell me where

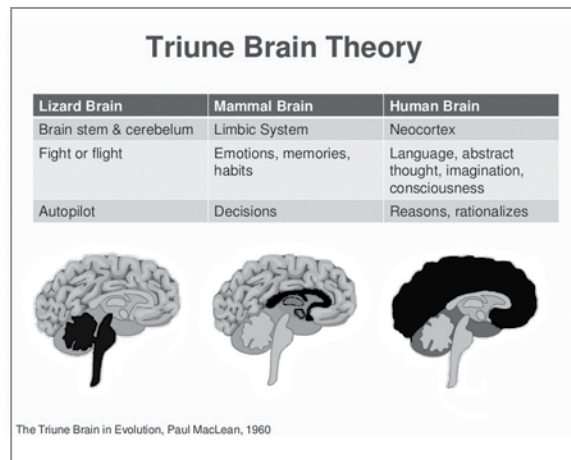
you feel the most energy in your body, right now. Focus on that part. Take one more breath into that part. Breathe in healing and peace. Breathe out stress and tension.

I give them the directions, above, on a handout and ask them to practice 5-15 minutes a day, when possible. I begin most sessions with this meditation for 3-5 minutes, and many clients have expressed they like how this "centers," "calms," or "focuses" them on making the most of the session.

At three-month intervals, and when clients are transitioning out of treatment, I ask them to identify which aspects of our work have been most and least helpful to their progress. Most clients report that starting sessions with mindfulness meditation has helped them cultivate this practice at home, and find it "calming," "helps relationships," and "helps me slow down and enjoy life more." Unfortunately, clients experiencing high levels of anxiety, and/or high levels of physical energy—for instance, adolescents and teens—find it difficult or uncomfortable to be still or quiet, to resist the impulse to use that energy for expression.

Over a year ago, I began treating a 15 year-old female client, a young woman struggling with social anxiety. I initially taught her the mindfulness practice (above) and began our first several sessions that way. After we'd developed a relationship, however, and she began to trust both me—and herself—more, she said, "I really don't like sitting still and being quiet like that. Can we just talk?" So we suspended that practice, and continued therapy along cognitive behavioral lines, identifying and labeling uncomfortable thoughts and feelings; practicing replacing negative thoughts with positive ones.

*(concluded on back cover)*





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## Mindfulness *(from page 11)*

She is 16 years old now, and has made remarkable progress, has a strong peer support/friend group, and is making excellent grades in high school. Two weeks ago, she came into our weekly session and said, "You know that meditation you taught me when I first came here? Will you do it with me again? Teach me the way to do it, again?"

I asked her what had happened to bring this topic up, and she said, "Well, I really do use that breathing, sometimes, and it really does help calm me down. I notice how I just talk fast when I'm anxious, and blab out the wrong thing, but if I get one breath in, it really helps calm me down so I can say what I mean, and no more. I can just notice my breathing instead of talking."

The take-away for us, in session, was that the very energy that arises for self-expression was driving her social anxiety. She reported the "blabbering" was causing her to speak before she had formulated her thoughts, and memories of embarrassing moments when that had happened were reinforcing her fear of social interactions. Though she initially resisted the practice in sessions, over the course of the year she had recalled and practiced focusing on just one breath several times, and experienced herself as more centered in those moments. She said she had wanted to bring it up for some time, but was "embarrassed about changing her mind." Ironic, isn't it? In the course

of reteaching the practice, I reminded her of the instruction to "witness our thoughts and feelings with compassion—toward self."

As I mentioned, earlier mindfulness meditation has become a basic staple of my own personal life. In conclusion, I just believe, hope, and anticipate a time when we will begin teaching our children early, mindfulness meditation. The earlier, the better, because the hope is we can begin learning to direct our attention easier when young brains are naturally pliable and growing—much like it is easier to learn languages when we're young. Goldie Hawn has a foundation and is trying to get it into as many schools as possible, and I just love Dan Siegel's work, too (see below). ■■



*(Added/copied from above text) "Breathe in healing and peace... Breathe out stress and tension."*

Additional information is available at:

<http://donnarockwell.com>

<http://thehawnfoundation.org/mindup/>

[http://www.drdansiegel.com/about/interpersonal\\_neurobiology/](http://www.drdansiegel.com/about/interpersonal_neurobiology/)