



Rise Up. Speak Up.



Which aphorism best sums up Greg Dicharry's triumph: "No man is an island"? "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you"? "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, but teach him to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime"? Maybe all three.

Despite heavy alcohol and marijuana use through college, the Louisiana native graduated in 1993 and headed to Hollywood to put his communication degree to work. Severe depression struck, and then Greg was arrested for walking naked down a busy street. He was diagnosed with bipolar and substance abuse disorders.

The next 10 years brought 10 forced hospitalizations, a month-long stay in the psychiatric unit of Orleans Parish Prison, two stints in drug rehab, and many depressive — even suicidal — periods. The young man was in and out of denial about his diagnosis, which by 2003 was officially a serious mental illness. Unable to hold a job, he went on disability.

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His turning point came in the form of a mental health jail diversion program, which introduced the concept of peer support. In 2004, Dicharry became committed to recovery through a 12-step program and consistent medication. The combination worked — and, he figured, if it helped him, it would help others.

Dicharry now holds a job: running the sort of peer-training program he so believed in. Soon he'd trained and mentored more than 100 people with behavioral health challenges to work as peer support specialists. He

also cofounded and cofacilitated a dual-recovery anonymous group at Arizona State Hospital, launched 12-step groups at two juvenile detention centers, and became deeply involved in Young People in AA service committees.

Dicharry found larger ways his lost-and-found background could be useful. As national youth empowerment director for Magellan Health Services Inc. — a "diversified specialty health care management organization" with expertise in behavioral health — he developed MY LIFE, or Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment, in 2008.

The free program has taken off nationwide, serving "youth ages 13-23 who have experience with mental health, substance abuse, foster care or juvenile justice issues, and who want to use their experience to help improve the systems that serve youth," according to its publicity. MY LIFE includes meetings, podcasts, local and national workshops, mentoring and skill development, and outreach to health professionals and community leaders on teen and young adult issues.

MY LIFE and its festivals, speakers, and media coverage have reached tens of thousands of people. The program and its founder have won awards, of course, but Dicharry has been most inspired by the power of mentorship — on himself and others. "In sharing our inspiring journeys," he says, "we help others grow and show the world how bright people like us can shine."

Mentorship is mutually beneficial. Using his knowledge and experience to help another person to overcome obstacles and achieve their dreams helps Greg with his own recovery. As Thomas Chandler says, Greg has discovered that "To love a person is to learn the song that is in their heart and sing it to them when they have forgotten."

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