

Youth Unite to Overcome Behavioral Health Challenges and Fight the Stigma of Mental Illness

Magellan's MY LIFE program to present best practices at 2011 Alternatives Conference

AVON, Conn.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- Each year, nearly three million American adolescents age 12 to 17 receive behavioral health treatment or counseling in a specialty mental health setting. Signs of depression, problems at home, and suicidal thoughts or attempts are some of the most common reasons for treatment. Left untreated, these youth are more likely to engage in substance abuse, become victims of bullying, drop out of school, be arrested or become homeless.

Tomorrow, during the 2011 Alternatives Conference in Orlando, Fla., Magellan Health Services (NASDAQ: MGLN) and several young adults will present insights, outcomes and best practices from a program designed to address these behavioral health issues for youth and young adults called Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment (MY LIFE). MY LIFE comprises youth between the ages of 13 and 23 who have experience with mental illness, substance abuse, foster care and juvenile justice issues. These youth provide support for their peers; develop critical skills in leadership, mentoring and mental health resiliency; act as advisors to local officials to help improve services and systems that serve youth; and provide a much-needed voice in the community to combat the stigma associated with behavioral health issues.

Supporting Recovery and Discovery for Youth and Young Adults

MY LIFE began in 2008 with approximately 20 youth in Maricopa County, Ariz., when Magellan Health Services of Arizona identified the opportunity for youth who have experiences with behavioral health issues to join Magellan in improving services, programs and outcomes for youth and young adults.

"MY LIFE provides a venue where youth can overcome their personal challenges with support from their peers, develop and hone their leadership skills, and use their voices to inspire and create positive change for themselves and others in the community," said Greg Dicharry, CPRP, youth empowerment director at Magellan. "In addition to helping these youth individually, MY LIFE also has been very beneficial to programs and systems that serve youth by bringing about changes to improve care for youth across the nation."

MY LIFE groups hold regular meetings, lead workshops, learn from guest speakers, present at schools and juvenile detention centers, and produce advocacy and community awareness events, all of which are also open to family members, friends and youth services providers.

Spreading MY LIFE Across the Country

With the great success in Arizona, MY LIFE has expanded with new groups in Bucks, Delaware, Lehigh/Northampton, and Montgomery counties in Pennsylvania and in Jacksonville, Fla.; groups are also in development for 2012 in Tallahassee, Fla. and Louisiana. Several of the Arizona MY LIFE youth have traveled to meet with other chapters to explain the purpose and benefits of the MY LIFE program.

"We have been very pleased to see the MY LIFE program grow into such a positive influence for these youth and their communities across the country," said Anne McCabe, senior vice president of public sector at Magellan Health Services. "MY LIFE has become a model program, building the supportive community infrastructure that is critical to helping those with behavioral health challenges achieve a successful recovery and maintain resiliency. We're so proud that these youth have helped grow the MY LIFE initiative by becoming leaders and advocates for others."

A new program also launched in 2011 called MY LIFE Discovery, designed for youth ages eight to 13. This program, being piloted in Phoenix, is led by MY LIFE young adults in partnership with adult staff. MY LIFE Discovery addresses age-relevant topics and social skills such as building healthy relationships, bullying, anger management, mental health and peer pressure, while providing opportunities for the older MY LIFE youth to develop their own leadership and mentoring skills.

A Voice in the Community

A key tenet of the MY LIFE program is overcoming the stigma associated with behavioral health and foster care issues for youth. MY LIFE youth organize public events and meet with government leaders to share their personal stories, speak out on issues affecting youth, and help themselves by helping others.

MY LIFE presentations are the primary vehicle for sharing the program's message with large numbers of people. MY LIFE has made more than 30 local and national presentations that have reached more than 4,000 youth and adults.

"MY Fest" has become a signature event for MY LIFE. The one-day festival is organized by MY LIFE youth and features musical acts, dance performances, art exhibits and other demonstrations of self-expression. A variety of local organizations that provide youth services also participate in the event to raise awareness about the community support programs and services available to youth and families.

"MY Fest events have been incredibly successful for the MY LIFE youth and their communities," said Dicharry. "The six MY Fest events held thus far have inspired and educated more than 15,000 people. MY Fest is a venue for self-expression, acceptance and support that these youth truly embrace in the hopes of making a positive difference."

MY LIFE youth have also taken their message to government leaders during "MY LIFE Youth Day at the Capitol" events, during which youth meet with state legislators to discuss issues affecting the state's behavioral health and foster care systems for children and young adults. Participants also have appeared in public service announcements and delivered presentations at state and national conferences.

"We want to do whatever we can to help other youth experience the benefits of youth groups like MY LIFE," said Hayley Winterberg, a MY LIFE youth from Arizona. Winterberg, 18, who was a founding member of the MY LIFE Arizona chapter at age 14, was honored with Mental Health America's "mpower" award last year for her advocacy work with MY LIFE. "I want to keep spreading our message of inspiration, hope and youth action around the country and the world."

MY LIFE at the 2011 Alternatives Conference

Dicharry and five MY LIFE youth will deliver a presentation on MY LIFE, titled "MY LIFE! Youth Changing Systems and Communities" at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 27, at the 2011 Alternatives Conference. The conference is hosted in Orlando, Fla., October 26-30, by the National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and is described as the oldest national mental health conference organized by and for mental health consumers and survivors. The presentation will outline the MY LIFE model and provide instruction on establishing and maintaining youth involvement and youth peer-delivered services within behavioral health systems. This will be the third consecutive year that MY LIFE has presented at the Alternatives Conference. Magellan and MY LIFE youth also will partner with five other organizations to lead a plenary session on youth involvement on Saturday, October, 29, at 8:30 a.m.

"I love being able to share MY LIFE with youth and professionals from other parts of the country," said Matt Horning, 19, of Arizona's MY LIFE group. "Just this year I have visited Florida, Louisiana, California and Illinois to present information about MY LIFE, and it has been really great to see other groups get started as a result of our efforts."

For more information about MY LIFE locations, events and new MY LIFE programs, visit www.Facebook.com/MYLIFEyouth. Additional details about the 2011 Alternatives Conference are available at www.Alternatives2011.org.

About Magellan Health Services: Headquartered in Avon, Conn., Magellan Health Services Inc. is a leading specialty health care management organization with expertise in managing behavioral health, radiology and specialty pharmaceuticals, as well as public sector pharmacy benefits programs. Magellan delivers innovative solutions to improve quality outcomes and optimize the cost of care for those we serve. Magellan's customers include health plans, employers and government agencies, serving approximately 31.3 million members in our behavioral health business, 18.9 million members in our radiology benefits management segment, and five million members in our medical pharmacy management product. In addition, the specialty pharmaceutical segment serves 41 health plans and several pharmaceutical manufacturers and state Medicaid programs. The Company's Medicaid Administration segment serves 25 states and the District of Columbia. For more information, visit www.MagellanHealth.com.

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