

## Intellectual & Developmental Disability Ministry

### *Amid grief, JCM brings healing to those with disabilities*

By Marie Zimmerman, communications specialist with The Lutheran Home Association in Belle Plaine, Minn.

It was not hard to get to know George Rocco. With a smile and a handshake, he made friends everywhere he went. And as an avid traveler, he went a lot of places.

A developmental disability made it hard for George to talk. But the 76-year-old still made an impression on others, who remember his sweet personality and dogged devotion to the Milwaukee Brewers; George had made many trips to Miller Park, his favorite place to watch his favorite team.

An amazing love for God marks the story of George's life. It was that love Pastor Keith Amborn of Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Milwaukee called on when George passed away this year.

Pastor Amborn met George through Jesus Cares Ministries (JCM), a program of The Lutheran Home Association (TLHA).

Abiding Word hosts "Worship at the Cross," which JCM designed to make each part of a worship service have special meaning, especially for people with cognitive impairments. George faithfully attended Worship at the Cross to hear God's Word.

JCM is also what brought Bill Truebenbach into George's life more than a decade ago. Bill has worked as the JCM staff minister and program consultant for 14 years, and is always amazed by the people he meets, like George.

"I have gotten to know so many big-hearted volunteers and devoted participants," Bill said.

Bill and George last saw one another at the annual JCM Milwaukee area Christmas program. When Bill received the call from a JCM volunteer in late July that George had died, he was heartbroken and knew immediately he had to attend the funeral.

"It was important for me to be there for the memorial service, as often our friends with special needs do not have as many family or friends as a typical funeral service may have," Bill said.

### WELS Special Ministries

WELS Special Ministries provides resources for eight main areas of congregational ministry.

#### Intellectual & Developmental Disability Ministry

*Amid grief, JCM brings healing to those with disabilities* 1-2

*Siblings fill a need for siblings of special needs kids* 2-3

*Branching out to those with special challenges in Oklahoma* 5

#### Lutheran Military Support Group

*Introducing the Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG)* 3

#### Parish Nursing

*Keeping our frail elderly in worship* 4

#### Mission for the Visually Impaired

*Web access for the visually impaired* 4-6

#### Health and Wellness Committee

*Bringing church to those who cannot come* 6

#### Committee on Mental Health Needs

*WELS Christian counseling goes "viral"* 6-7

*Conquering porn addiction through Christ* 7-8

He also wanted to support George's roommates at his group home —Rodney, Edward, David, Saul, and David. The men had lived together many years and were close friends.

"As I spoke with them, Rodney said, 'We are okay.' Yet one of the Davids said, 'Why is he dead? Why can't he talk? Why can't we talk to him?' And the staff said that Saul was taking it very hard and was missing George," Bill said.

As Pastor Amborn completed George's memorial service, George's roommates were allowed to say their final goodbyes. The men all spoke briefly. Except Saul.



In tears, Saul said his goodbye so all in the funeral parlor could hear his words. He told George how much he missed him, how much he loved him, how he was his best friend. All the time Saul needed for his goodbye to George was provided him, even as he repeated his thoughts. Trying to make sense of death for someone with special needs may never happen. Yet the gift of time is often what they need.

The service folder noted George's housemates were the honorary pall bearers. But the funeral director realized he would need more help and asked Bill if he could step in.

"What a privilege to be a part of George's final earthly journey," Bill said. "It was good to be there. As humans we are meant to be in relationships. When death ends that relationship, we experience grief and loss. For most, the grief and loss fade over time. For a person with a developmental disability, that may not happen. That's when we need to be with them. We can't take the grief and loss away from them. But we can be with them."

We cry when someone we love dies. Just like Saul wept for his friend George, Jesus wept. At the funeral, Pastor Amborn provided comfort with these words "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Pastor replaced "whoever believes in him" with "George." Then he replaced it with the names of each of George's roommates — Rodney, Edward, David, Saul, David. Just as George knew Jesus loved him, so do his roommates.

That's why TLHA is committed to sustaining growth in its JCM programs. It's so important to share a message that those with disabilities can understand, trusting in the Spirit to work in their hearts. One day we will see them in heaven with us.

*It's so important to share a message that those with disabilities can understand, trusting in the Spirit to work in their hearts. One day we will see them in heaven with us.*

## *Sibshops fill a need for siblings of special needs kids*

*By Margo Schmidt. Margo and her husband Steve have two daughters, one with cerebral palsy.*

By God's grace, there are many good programs designed to help people with special needs, especially when they are young.

But what about their siblings? With that in mind, moms Ellen Moon and Margo Schmidt attended a two-day training workshop in Chicago in October 2014 in order to become Sibshop facilitators. The training included observing and participating in an actual event, where they watched 30 children smiling, laughing, playing games, and eagerly answering questions. These children were sharing their feelings, both positive and negative, about having a sibling with special needs. The only thing that Ellen and Margo thought was missing was Christ-centered encouragement.

Some time later, the moms met with Rev. Jim Behringer, the director of WELS Special Ministries. He listened to their ideas and encouraged them to go forward, offering helpful hints on devotions and publicity.

Sibshop began at St. John's, Oak Creek, Wis., in February 2015. The group meets on the second Saturday of each month from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. The primary goal of each session is for the participants — children ages 6-16 who have a sibling with special needs — to have fun. As they do, they are given the opportunity to freely share their feelings. They discover that they are not alone. Not a session goes by without someone expressing their love for their "special sib."

Instead of our regular session in August, we held a picnic with games for the entire family, thereby giving the participants a chance to meet each other's siblings. Besides filling up on good food, collages were made of family favorites and a family picture. Dads were great sports as they donned shower caps and a crowning layer of shaving cream before cheese puffs were tossed at them. Giant soccer involved some on their feet and some in a wheelchair.

We look forward to another full family event in November when we meet at Country Springs Hotel indoor water park in Pewaukee, Wis.

If you know of a child who would benefit from attending a Sibshop, please pass along this information.

To learn more about Sibshop, contact WELS Special Ministries at 414-256-3241.



## Lutheran Military Support Group

### *Introducing the Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG)*

*By Philip Mowry, president of the LMSG.*

A group of military veterans from WELS and ELS got together in the summer of 2014 along with Pastor Paul Ziemer, WELS National Civilian Chaplain to the Military, and drafted a plan to start the Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG). The organization is now up and running.

*LMSG is designed to serve both as an auxiliary to WELS Military Services and as an independent organization, having national reach and local impact.*

LMSG is run by a board of WELS and ELS veterans from all branches of service and several states. The board consists of some retired military, some active duty, and some who served but separated before retirement. It is rank neutral (board members can be officers, NCO's, or junior enlisted, and there is no rank among the group) and apolitical.

LMSG is designed to serve both as an auxiliary to WELS Military Services and as an independent organization, having national reach and local impact. Our programs and projects will focus on these three areas:

- **Active Duty Support** – We will be prepared to provide logistical, financial, educational, and human resources support to WELS Military Services. As current and former military people who have “been there,” we bring a host of skills, relationships, and perspectives not generally found among civilian church leadership.
- **Veteran Support** – Our initial efforts are centered around supporting and enhancing synodical activities in addressing PTSD. Military Services, through Pastor Paul Ziemer and others, is very involved in education, training, and addressing PTSD from a spiritual perspective. We at LMSG bring personal experience to the areas of PTSD and its treatment.
- **Military Family Support** – Those of us who have served are acutely aware of the critical role military families play in creating and maintaining an effective military force. We also know the unique hardships suffered by families of active duty/ deployed service members, as well as the challenges faced by the family members of veterans. These loved ones support those who serve, while also serving, sacrificing, and suffering in their own right. We are working to create an annual synod-wide recognition day for military families. We also want to foster connections, catechism, and Bible class opportunities for families stationed at remote locations who otherwise would go without.

Clearly, we can make a difference by driving programs, projects, recognition, and support for Lutheran military members and their families. However, we don't simply want to be a top-down organization. We want to encourage awareness, education, and projects at the congregational level. Outreach/evangelism opportunities may also present themselves to local congregations as the result of the activities of LMSG.

*We want to encourage awareness, education, and projects at the congregational level.*

Finally, in the space between Military Services at the synod level and the activities in the local congregations, LMSG sees itself as a conduit to enhance the flow of information, resources, and expertise – both up and down.

Our hope is that each church in WELS and ELS will appoint a congregational liaison (active duty, veteran, or family member) through whom we might communicate regularly. A congregational donation of \$75 is suggested to formally join the organization.

For more information, contact me at one of the following addresses: pmowry7@gmail.com, president@lutheranmilitary.org, or www.lutheranmilitary.org.



# Parish Nursing

## *Keeping our frail elderly in worship*

By Sue Bolha, RN, parish nurse in Jackson, Wis., and coordinator of the WELS Parish Nurse Council. Email her at [welsnurses@wels.net](mailto:welsnurses@wels.net).

"I miss going to church." For our elderly members who have been attending worship for decades, health issues can make regular attendance difficult. And they miss it! They know that Hebrews 10:25 tells us, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing."



Our frail elderly may be losing their hearing or vision. Problems with pain, mobility, and weakness may discourage participation. Memory issues present a variety of challenges for the afflicted and for their caregivers. And yet, just like anyone else, they have spiritual needs and derive much comfort from being in worship, whether that is during regular Sunday services, at home, or in a healthcare facility; whether the message is delivered by a pastor, parish nurse, family member, or a church visitor.

But your congregation can take some simple steps to make worship more welcoming for those facing advancing age.

WELS Parish Nurses is pleased to provide a resource titled "Frail Elderly in the Pew and How We Might Keep Them in Worship," that offers some ideas on addressing those needs. To find it, go to [www.welsnurses.net](http://www.welsnurses.net) and click on "Parish Nurse Resource Library."

Parish nurses can also access a wealth of WELS devotional resources that can be used with the homebound or those in healthcare facilities.

What a privilege it is for nurses to serve the Lord and our congregations, especially our frail elderly, with our God-given nursing skills.



# Mission for the Visually Impaired

## *Web access for the visually impaired*

By Troy Hergert, IT Manager at Vision Forward. Visually impaired himself, he has taught others how to use this technology for 17 years. Troy is a member of Grace, Milwaukee, Wis.

Your computer's expensive speech technology talks to you as you navigate to a page. But since the controls of that website were designed exclusively for a mouse click, the graphical nature of the links and fields report inaccurately or not at all through your sophisticated talking computer. You cannot confidently complete your purchase or access the resources and information of that organization. This could easily happen to a blind or visually impaired person trying to utilize a website that has not been designed with universal access in mind. Fortunately, this can be corrected, and need not occur at all.

*People who are blind or visually impaired rely on the Internet like anyone else.*

People who are blind or visually impaired rely on the Internet like anyone else. Those with limited sight may rely on software that magnifies the screen and enables them to change color contrasts. Users with little or no sight will rely on screen reading speech technology, which speaks the content of web pages audibly.

Typically, people who use these programs are not using a mouse to navigate the content of a web page. A screen reader user will use the keyboard almost exclusively.

People who are blind or visually impaired, who have had the proper training to use screen reading and screen magnification software, can surf the Internet just as effectively as anyone else. Online banking, shopping, research, recipes, games—all are available to people with visual impairments.

With a little pre-planning and awareness of accessibility standards, organizations and developers can ensure that their websites are accessible and friendly to those using these kinds of programs. Common accessibility design practices include using "Alt" text tags for links and graphics, and ensuring that form controls that require inputting or selecting data are also written with proper text tags. Using HTML headings is also extremely helpful when designating content throughout the site. Official standards of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) can be found at <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>.

The blind and visually impaired community has also benefited greatly from Apple's built-in voice-over feature, which is included in all Apple products. Apps that are developed properly for Apple can also be utilized by people using voice-over to access a touch screen. Finger swiping, flicking, and tapping gestures are utilized, and with a little training and practice, touch screen devices become very accessible.

Any organization considering the development of an app for access to their website can find guidelines at <http://www.applevis.com/information-app-developers>.

The same developer guidelines for the Android platform can be found at <https://developer.android.com/guide/topics/ui/accessibility/index.html>.

The above links will also provide developers with information on a wide range of disabilities and their accessibility needs.

Vision Forward is an association in Milwaukee that provides rehabilitation, education, and training for people who need to use screen reading or screen magnification technology. If your organization needs guidance to ensure that its website is accessible, you may contact Troy Hergert at 414-615-0122.



## *Branching out to those with special challenges in Oklahoma*

*By Christian Eisenbeis*

When you work the night shift as a police department dispatcher and spend your days and evenings—when not asleep—as the part-time pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Norman, Okla., time management is pretty important. You ask yourself, “What can I do to make the most of my time? What can I do for the people at church and in the community?”

It has happened twice in the last two years. My wife called me at work, in tears, and asked me to come home early. The first time: “There’s something different about our daughter.” The second time: “There’s something different about our son.” What was “different” turned out to be the same thing: autism.

Both our children are on “the spectrum.” God has blessed us with special kids. He has blessed us with a wonderful congregation that accepts and cares for our children. He has also blessed us with an opportunity to help families in our community.

My wife and I began The Thorn Bush, an autism support group, in February 2013. We meet on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month. Parents, grandparents, relatives, teachers, teachers’ aides, therapists, friends of the family, and the special children themselves have spent time with us.

Support from the community has been a big boost to our group. The public school system in Norman allows us to send our cards home with each elementary school student at the beginning of the school year. A journalist from the local paper interviewed us and published the interview in the Easter Sunday edition last year. For the last two years we have had a booth at a special needs expo at the state fairgrounds. This November we will have a booth at the statewide autism conference, conveniently enough, in Norman. This fall we will also have our first “Jesus Cares” service for the developmentally disabled in our community.

Raising children with autism teaches you to look at the world through very different eyes. Living as a follower of Christ teaches you to look at the world through the eyes of our Savior. When the disciples saw the man who was born blind, they reasoned that either his parents or the man himself had committed some horrible sin in the past. Jesus saw it differently. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me” (John 9:3-4).

As those who attend our meetings share their sorrows and joys, we share the gospel, the good news of the One who did the works of the Father who sent him, bringing life and salvation to this sinful world through his death and resurrection. Through The Thorn Bush, God has provided us with our own opportunity to work while it is day, that all may see his works displayed in these special children.

*For more information about The Thorn Bush, visit us on the Web at [www.thornbushok.com](http://www.thornbushok.com) or contact Pastor Christian Eisenbeis at 405-642-6769.*

# Health and Wellness Committee

## *Bringing church to those who cannot come*

*By Randy Johnson, pastor at Our Savior, Perry, Mich.*

Do these obstacles to church attendance sound familiar? "My car is running rough." "The roads are slippery." "Allergies are acting up." "I'm too tired." "Oops, forgot it was Sunday!" OK, they sound more like excuses than obstacles, but we've heard them... or even used them ourselves.

Let me tell you about another group of Christians that I know who face real obstacles to getting to church. They sound like these: "I really cannot get out of bed." "I can't get into my wheelchair without help." "My walker is out of reach." Or simply, "I forgot." These are not feeble excuses. They are genuine obstacles. These are Christians who would gladly and eagerly be in church on Sunday, if only they could.

These are the things I hear when I go to one of two elder care facilities in my area to conduct worship. In the Michigan District of WELS, there are nearly 25 pastors leading services for seniors in residential care facilities. We carry out this ministry under the auspices of Martin Luther Elder Care Ministries, which organizes, oversees, and compensates pastors who lead worship for our elderly.

These aged Christians may not be able to get to the chapel or common area without help. They may not remember what day it is. They may be feeling ill. They may have hurting feet and arthritic joints. But they want to worship. They desire to hear God's Word and be assured that their sins are forgiven. They long for encouragement to live another day. They hunger for a little snapshot of heaven to help them look forward to the joys that await them when the Lord finally calls them to his side.

*They desire to hear God's Word and be assured that their sins are forgiven. . . They hunger for a little snapshot of heaven to help them look forward to the joys that await them when the Lord finally calls them to his side.*

That is what we provide when we bring church to our elderly and aged. They may not know what day it is, or sometimes not even remember where they are, but when they gather to sing familiar hymns, recite the Apostles' Creed, and say the Lord's Prayer, they do so with tears of joy, smiling faces, and thankful hearts. They hear that even in their old age, they are still "Jesus' little lambs."

Serving the spiritual needs of our elderly is not only rewarding but necessary. As the population of our aged Christian brothers and sisters grows, so do our opportunities to minister to them.

Your community may have elder care facilities that welcome volunteers who can meet the spiritual needs of their residents. You can help overcome their genuine obstacles to worship and lead them to sing about their Lord, "He satisfies my desires with good things, so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:5).



## Committee on Mental Health Needs

### *WELS Christian counseling goes "viral"*

*By Jeremy Long, LPC, LMHC, and a certified e-therapist. He is a member at New Hope, West Melbourne, Fla.*

She had been struggling with adapting to "normal" life after being released from years of incarceration, and it was affecting her marriage, her job, and her feelings of self-worth.

His nightmares were getting worse after his return from deployment; he was becoming angrier and exploding at his wife and children over little, everyday annoyances. The guilt and feelings of being out of control were wearing down his spirit.

*The guilt and feelings of being out of control were wearing down his spirit.*

They were proud parents beaming with joy toward the toddler they had adopted. But as the years passed, their daughter's volatile behaviors grew in severity and she emotionally regressed, withdrew from her sixth grade friends, and began cutting herself to deal with the inner pain of being abandoned by her biological mother.

Where could any of these hurting people turn to find professional help and hope? How will they obtain support to deal with the very real and complex emotional difficulties they live with day in and day out? How can they be sure that a counselor or psychologist will not put their faith at risk because of the counselor's worldview or training?

WLCFS-Christian Family Solutions now offers WELS members easy access to a Christian counselor who shares their faith. You don't even need to go to a clinic to receive this help! Counselors can meet

with you online, using the Internet and a web camera from home or church. WLCFS-Christian Family Solutions uses VSee, a video conferencing system similar to Skype or FaceTime, but is secure.



Through the Member Assistance Program (MAP), congregations partner with us and have funding available for online counseling sessions at no cost to their members. An average of five to seven sessions is typical. Members can meet with a counselor from their living room couch, work, school, or church office.

The problems burdening our fellow believers are many: anxiety, depression, trauma, grief, addictions, Internet pornography, and marital strife, to name a few. The counselors at WLCFS-Christian Family Solutions use their training to pass on to hurting people the skills, knowledge, and understanding of how to cope with problems more effectively. More important, we rely on God's Word as the guiding influence on how to best help our clients. We work hand-in-hand with pastors to help them guide their members who are counseling with us.

We also offer the option in certain states to obtain WLCFS-Christian Family Solutions services through your health insurance, using our Telehealth program. This provides access to members who would prefer to use their insurance for counseling fees, rather than using the funds from their congregation's Member Assistance Program.

Speak to your pastor to inquire about counseling with us. You may also visit our website and meet our counselors at [www.ChristianFamilySolutions.org](http://www.ChristianFamilySolutions.org), or call us at 800-438-1772.

## Conquering porn addiction through Christ

By Kent Reeder, pastor at Illumine, Rock Hill, S.C.

Getting them to feel bad doesn't make them stop looking at porn.

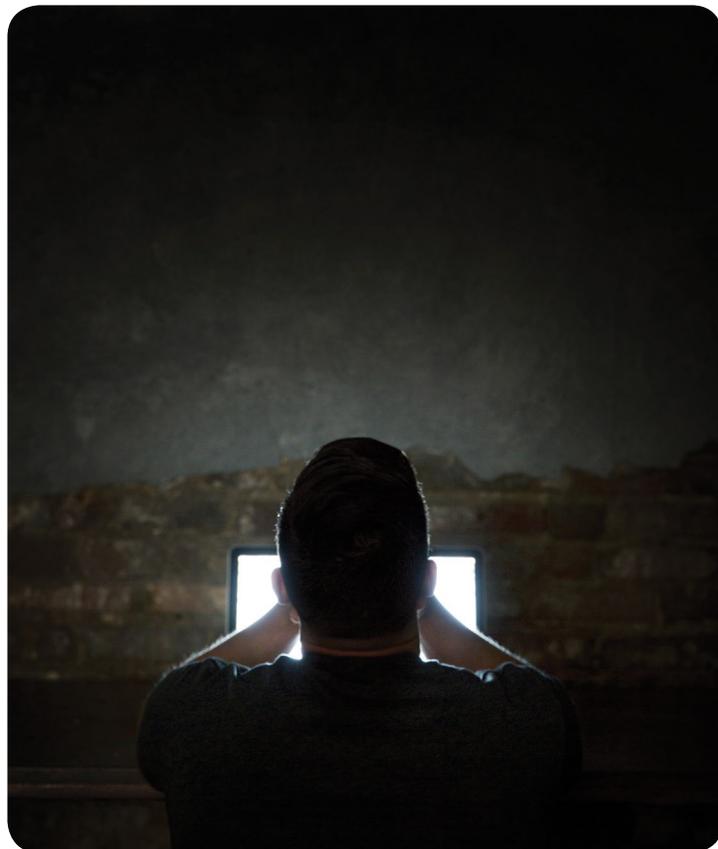
The kid hiding the magazine, the man watching the window to see when his family gets home, the fiancé or fiancée weighing the pros and cons of opening up about their addiction—they feel bad already. They know what they are doing is wrong; their behavior betrays their guilt. It's a rare case, in fact, when someone completely denies that viewing porn is wrong. So why do it?

We know it's wrong, but we often fail to realize that it's also dangerous.

A young woman, when first exposed to porn, may feel guilt but not fear. It doesn't seem dangerous, and it doesn't seem like it's doing any damage. Quite frankly, it feels the opposite. It feels good.

The boy on the school bus isn't thinking about becoming addicted to the stuff in the magazine his friend has in his backpack. It's not his goal when he Googles "sex." It doesn't even occur to him the first time he erases his search history. It simply feels good, even if it's wrong.

But our bodies release these pleasing endorphins and our minds develop these powerful habits—things that make it so easy to come back again and again—and these seemingly harmless behaviors turn out to be much more threatening than they first appeared.



Because her husband just isn't as good, and she can't convince herself otherwise.

Because his wife won't talk to him, and he may never win back her trust.

Even then, feeling bad really isn't enough to make them change.

Conquerors through Christ, the WELS special ministry that helps people fight and win against pornographic addiction, understands this. Unlike the average anti-porn programs, we don't focus on shame and guilt. Unlike some of the better programs, we don't even focus primarily on a "picture of a better future" to motivate the change.

Into the confusion of her shame and the darkness of his guilt, Conquerors through Christ focuses on introducing exactly what our name implies: Christ, victorious over sin. The gospel message of Jesus' free and complete forgiveness for those trapped in addiction is a solution that works right now. No waiting on a better future, or reform, or programs, or on yourself. Hope is yours, despite everything, through Christ.

Getting them to feel bad doesn't make them stop looking at porn. Getting them to feel Christ, to know his victory is theirs no matter what they have done or what they are into—that gives them more than just a reason to stop looking at porn. It gives them a reason to fix their eyes on something and someone better.

To learn how Christ can help you or someone you love be a conqueror over pornography, visit [www.conquerorsthroughchrist.net](http://www.conquerorsthroughchrist.net).

*The gospel message of Jesus' free and complete forgiveness for those trapped in addiction is a solution that works right now. No waiting on a better future, or reform, or programs, or on yourself. Hope is yours, despite everything, through Christ.*



## News & Notes

### *Special Ministries Retirement*

There have only been three administrators for the Commission on Special Ministries since its founding in 1973, and Jacki Schleicher served with all of them. She was usually the first point of contact for many people who were seeking Special Ministries information and resources, and almost as often, she was the voice of the WELS, answering the phone and directing calls to someone who could help.

Her compassion for people with problems and her heart for Special Ministries characterized her service. Now, after nearly 28 years of serving Special Ministries, Jacki retired at the end of October. Special Ministries Director Jim Behringer said at her farewell, "When is a job not just a job? When you're serving the Lord out of love . . . I know in retirement you'll continue to do special things for Him."



### *Child abuse ministry resources on new website*

Freedom for the Captives (FFTC) has launched a website for survivors of child abuse and for churches and church workers who help them. Check out the website [www.freedomforcaptives.com](http://www.freedomforcaptives.com) (the URL does not use "the"). If you would like to promote the website, you'll find an article to download on the Mental Health Needs Committee Resource Center.