

Newsletter

As we enjoy the crisp air of winter, this issue of the PERC Newsletter highlights some events & activities to help you make the most of this holiday season!

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UPCOMING PERC GROUPS



Combined Family & Participant Group

Monday, December 16th, 2024

5:10 - 6:30PM

Psychopharmacology

Presenter: Smrithi Prem, MD, PhD

Monday, January 13th, 2025

5:10 - 6:30 PM

Challenging Stigma

Presenter: Hailey Fasone, MA

Participant Support & Education Group

Tuesday, February 18th, 2025

5:10 - 5:45 PM

Substance Use

Presenter: Jonathan Bittner, APC, CPT

Family Support & Education Group

Tuesday, February 18th, 2025

5:45 - 6:30 PM

Substance Use

Presenter: Jonathan Bittner, APC, CPT

Resisting Internalized Stigma Group*

Tuesday, January 7th, 2025

5:30 - 6:45 PM

Meets weekly on Tuesdays through 2/25/2025

Presenters: Arielle Ered, PhD; Jonathan Bittner, APC, CPT;

Hailey Fasone, MA; Steve Dages, CPS

*Please note that this is a closed group. If you are interested in joining, please let your therapist know, or contact Dr. Ered at

Arielle.ered@penndmedicine.upenn.edu

**SEASON'S
GREETINGS**

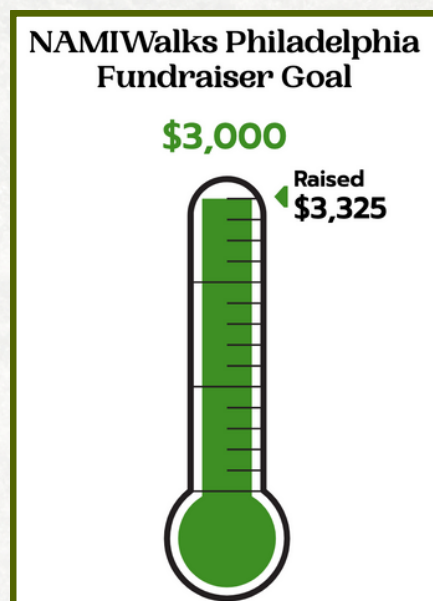
RECENT EVENTS



Saturday, October 12th, 2024

Friends Hospital

NAMIWalks Philadelphia 2024 was a huge success, thanks to the generous support of our community. Thanks to the generosity and support of our sponsors, volunteers, and participants, we exceeded our fundraising goals and fostered a spirit of solidarity to break the stigma around mental health.



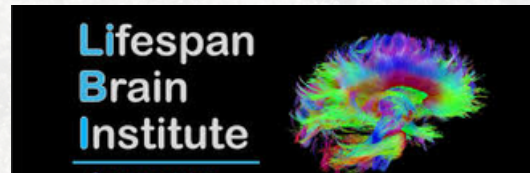
**JOIN US FOR
NAMIWALKS
MONTGOMERY
COUNTY IN
SPRING 2025!**



RECENT EVENTS

PATHWAYS TO PSYCHOSIS SYMPOSIUM

November 4th, 2024



A heartfelt thank you to our brave and inspiring lived experience panelists for sharing your personal journeys at the LiBI Pathways to Psychosis symposium. Your stories shed light on the realities of mental illness and offer hope to those facing similar challenges.



Staff Spotlight

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. MONICA CALKINS, PHD

BY BINGBIN XIA, M.S.ED

Tell us a little bit about the origins of PERC, your role within the program, and some of the other programs & organizations you're affiliated with?

Dr. Kohler had been doing clinical work focused on first-episode psychosis for many years and in 2015, he received funding to develop a Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) program for first-episode psychosis. He established the program as both Medical and Clinical Director and I later joined PERC as Associate Director. I've been with the Neurodevelopment and Psychosis section as a researcher and clinical psychologist since 2002, starting as a postdoctoral fellow and later joining the faculty.

In my work, I supervise trainees in clinical research assessment, and when I joined PERC, I expanded my role to include overseeing clinical and psychology trainees from various programs, guiding their training, and providing clinical supervision. The program has grown significantly since Dr. Kohler initially started it with one therapist and himself as the psychiatrist. Today, I help oversee its administration, organization, training experiences, and clinical services within the specialty care model.



I am also the co-director, along with Dr. Kohler, of Heads Up—a collaborating organization that provides training, supervision, and program evaluation for 17 CSC programs across Pennsylvania. Our team at Heads Up is dedicated to program activities, including annual trainings, ongoing supervision in the CSC model, and extensive program evaluation.

Our CSC work led us to apply for an Early Psychosis Intervention Network (EPINET) NIMH grant, joining with Maryland to form the Connection Learning Healthcare System. This grant supports us in using collected data to evaluate and improve clinical practice, foster evidence-based care, and build communities of practice for first-episode psychosis. We recently received a center grant renewal, focusing on disengagement from CSC programs. Early disengagement is common, so we're working on identifying individuals at risk for disengagement and supporting programs across Pennsylvania and Maryland to enhance engagement.



Staff Spotlight

INTERVIEW WITH DR. MONICA CALKINS, PHD

What made you interested in clinical research on psychosis?

When I was in high school, I had a close friend whose sister developed schizophrenia. This experience was my first exposure to the challenges of schizophrenia, and it led me to reflect on vulnerability factors for psychosis. I went to Temple University for my undergraduate studies, staying on as a research assistant on a study exploring cognitive vulnerability to depression. Though the focus there was depression, we included interview questions about psychosis symptoms, which led me to want to better understand vulnerability to psychosis, so for graduate school, I applied to programs where a faculty member was studying schizophrenia risk factors. I landed at the University of Minnesota's Clinical Science and Psychopathology Research Program, which had just launched the RISC Project, investigating biobehavioral vulnerability markers like EEG and eye-tracking in families affected by schizophrenia. These research experiences shaped my PhD work and dissertation, examining heritable biobehavioral vulnerabilities in psychosis. Upon graduating, I joined the University of Pennsylvania, where I was involved in studies examining genetic risk for schizophrenia, later expanding my focus to clinical risks in community settings.

My work at Penn included research through a KO8 Mentored Clinical Scientist Award, a significant role in the Philadelphia Neurodevelopmental Cohort, and currently, participation in the ProNET arm of the Accelerating Medicines Partnership Schizophrenia Network (AMP SCZ). AMP SCZ is a large-scale global study with 43 sites studying biomarkers in young people at clinical high risk for psychosis. By examining different trajectories and outcomes, we aim to eventually develop individualized medications for specific risk profiles.

What are some protective factors for individuals at higher risk?

We know a lot about risk factors for psychosis, which include both environmental and biobehavioral factors. Early life adversity and substance use are common risks, whereas protective factors may include a strong family support system. Family support can be especially beneficial in facilitating recovery for individuals who have developed psychosis.

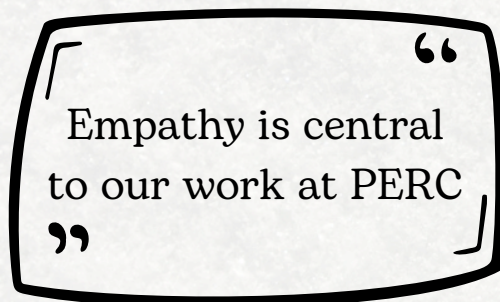
What do you want families and participants to know about PERC?

Experiencing psychosis or schizophrenia can profoundly affect individuals and their families. Recovery is possible, though it may look different than what families might have anticipated before psychosis. Nonetheless, there are many ways for people to find meaning and regain a sense of purpose in their lives. Programs like PERC help individuals reach a level of recovery they may not have achieved otherwise.

Staff Spotlight

INTERVIEW WITH DR. MONICA CALKINS, PHD

Empathy is central to our work at PERC. Our team keeps in mind that many of our clients and their families have been exposed to the stigmatization of psychosis and schizophrenia, which society still widely misunderstands. For example, individuals with psychosis are often portrayed as violent, although research shows they are more likely to be victims rather than perpetrators of violence. Challenging these stigmas is part of our responsibility, ensuring that our approach is compassionate and free from the biases perpetuated in the media.



What are some of your interests outside of PERC?

While I do work a lot, I also make it a priority to spend time with my family – my husband, two children, now 18 and 20, and two dogs. We’ve enjoyed different kinds of activities together over the years, but we always focus on making time for the family to connect. I’ve lived in West Philadelphia my whole life (other than the Minnesota years) - living here allows me to walk to work, access great hiking trails in the region, garden, and stay involved in our community association. My family and I also enjoy sailing most weekends during the summer - you can usually find us out sailing around the Sandy Hook Bay area on the northern New Jersey shore.

CT-R TIP OF THE SEASON

As the holiday season approaches, finding meaningful ways to contribute to your family and friends can create lasting memories and strengthen bonds. One impactful way is to focus on the gift of time and presence.

Consider starting a new tradition, like a family gratitude jar, where everyone writes down what they're thankful for and shares it during a festive gathering. Alternatively, craft thoughtful, personalized gifts or cards that reflect your appreciation and love for each individual. Volunteering together for a community service project can also foster a spirit of togetherness and giving.

By focusing on connection and shared experiences, you create a holiday season filled with warmth and joy.

WELCOME STUDENT-PRACTITIONERS!

Please join us in welcoming our new cohort of student-practitioners!

Jonathan Bittner, APC, CPT
Hailey Fasone, MA
Bingbin Xia, M.S.Ed

