



MHA's Compeer Program—Making Friends, Changing Lives

Meet Matt Pietras. . .

- MHA Compeer Volunteer since 2007
- MHA Board Member since 2008
- Family includes wife Julie and 9 month old daughter, Gianna
- Vice President at Wachovia



MHA Board Member and Compeer Volunteer Matt Pietras with daughter Gianna

Matt's first introduction to the MHA was as a Compeer volunteer in November 2007. Already an avid volunteer, Matt heard about Compeer from a friend. He thought it was another way he could help someone in his community. What he didn't expect was how much the relationship would "take care of him" too.

Matt knew from his first warm reception by Scott that "the relationship would be strong right from the beginning." Matt immediately learned that Scott has many strengths, and that his mental illness doesn't define him. Matt said, "I've learned so much about him and myself." Another aspect that Matt admires about Scott is that he's "constantly trying to be a better person and his success is because of his desire to be better (and feel well)." Matt added, that having Scott as a friend, "makes me better every day."

Now, meet Scott B. . .

Scott is very active in the community. He lives in a group home, goes to school to learn life skills, and volunteers with the YMCA and Special Olympics. He has difficulty with "down time;" it makes him anxious. A structured and full schedule, medication, and a strict diet help him stay healthy. But with Matt, their introduction was "friendship at first sight." Scott said, "We just clicked. . .there was an instant trust." Scott says, "he feels like a brother." In fact, Matt says he treats Scott as another member of the family and is calling him "Uncle Scott" to Gianna, who was born October 2008.

Scott adds, "I just like Matt because he's Matt. . . I feel like I get more respect when I'm with him. I'm having more fun in my life now. I'm grateful to Compeer (for connecting us.)" MHA's Compeer Program Director Sal Caraco observes, "Scott was looking for a strong male role model and he found that in Matt. He carries himself with more confidence and many symptoms related to his mental illness are greatly diminished as a result of the relationship."

Whether they're playing chess, eating spuds at McAllister's or attending one of MHA's monthly Compeer Social Events, Scott and Matt just have the comfort level of friends who have been there for each other—and clearly, will continue to be.

The Compeer model is recognized as a best practice for recovery by the American Psychological Association.

Compeer's programs are routinely recognized for achieving measurable results:

- Our volunteer mentoring relationships build self-confidence and independence.
- Our programs save precious health-care dollars by reducing hospitalization costs.
- All those involved in our programs – the people we serve, volunteers and community support workers – give the MHA Compeer program an outstanding effectiveness rating at 99% satisfaction.

Consider becoming a Compeer Friend!

If you'd like to learn more about becoming a Compeer volunteer, please call our Compeer Program Director Sal Caraco at 704-365-4380 or e-mail scaraco@mhacentralcarolinas.org.

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