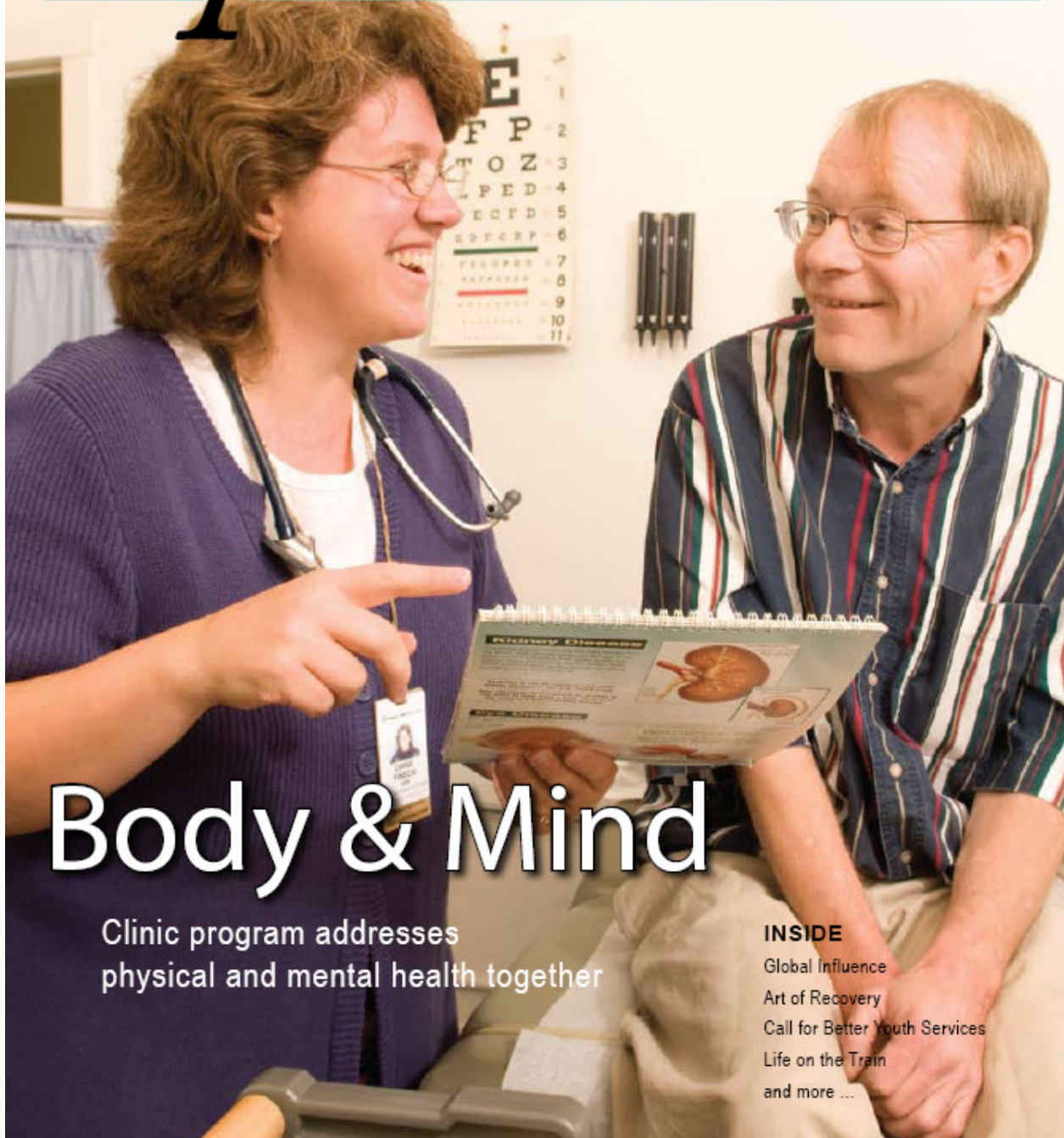


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A Magazine from the Nation's Leading Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centers

Fall 2008



Body & Mind

Clinic program addresses
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INSIDE

Global Influence
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Envisioning a Better System

An interview of Illinois Representative Sara Feigenholtz



Sara Feigenholtz is serving her seventh term in the Illinois House. She represents the 12th District, which includes the Chicago lakefront neighborhoods of Lakeview, Lincoln Park and the Near North Side.

Q: You've been a champion for expanding mental health accessibility for years. Could you talk about your achievements in this area?

A: There has been a conversation that has begun in the state of Illinois, mostly about how we serve the mentally ill, and how the mentally ill are viewed, and the conversation about just the acknowledgement and acceptance of people living with mental illness.

There also has been a conversation about the ability of the mentally ill to function in society, and be productive members of society, through successful recovery program models, versus just the old institutionalization model. I think that has been a very steep learning curve in Illinois. And I think that although the battle isn't over, we can look back and say there certainly has been progress in Illinois, and the ship is hopefully heading in the right direction in Illinois—albeit slowly.

I'd like to think I'm part of the effort to have made these kinds of changes, but certainly not the sole reason it has happened.

Q: How would you describe the outlook?

A: When you are struggling with limited resources, and so much of the mental health budget is going into institutions in the state

of Illinois, and we are trying to grow the residential and community track, it is very, very difficult. We find ourselves fighting amongst ourselves for COLAs (cost of living adjustments). We really need to get beyond that and start working together and convincing the players that the direction where the market is heading is where the state of Illinois should be heading as well.

Q: What should we be doing?

A: It's a combination of definitely increasing resources, better management, more recovery-minded models, as well as a housing component.

It's a matter of rebalancing the system and making it more client-driven rather than more provider-driven—meaning really taking a look at a little more comprehensive case management, and money following the person. The concept that money follows the person is something that we ultimately should try to achieve, without beating each other up for resources.

Q: How would you describe the funding situation this year?

A: We have a lot of providers who will be shutting their doors soon, never to be reopened



again. It's a very hard pill to swallow for me because I believe that we need to fortify, not diminish. So it's a very challenging position I have, as you can imagine. I just cannot believe what is going on here.

I'm in the process of drafting some legislation to do some restoration of cuts.

Q: What can our readers do about these problems?

A: It's time for advocates to coalesce. It seems like the human service arena is constantly behind the eight ball and voiceless. I know the substance abuse cuts were clearly the most egregious, but I think singing from one hymn book with a very clear message about funding would be a good thing.

I think that there's just a lot of different messages out there. And it gets lost somehow. The whole education funding issue seems to have a lot more traction than human service. We're always the bottom man on the totem pole, the first to get cut when it comes to funding.

At a Glance... Sara Feigenholtz

Prior experience

- Chief of Staff to Senator John Cullerton.
- Executive Director of the Central Lakeview Merchants Association.
- Founder of her own consulting firm which raised funds for political candidates and charitable organizations.

Committees

- Chair – Human Services Appropriations and Adoption Reform Committees.
- Vice-Chair – Tourism & Conventions Committee.
- Member – Mass Transit, Insurance, and Juvenile Justice Reform Committees.

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