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UPCOMING DEAF COFFEE NIGHT IS A SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL EVENT

MONTGOMERY – For nearly five years, monthly “Deaf Coffee Nights” have provided an opportunity for deaf and signing individuals to share time and information together as a community. Tonight the tradition will carry on in 2012 as deaf individuals and students, interpreters, signers, family members, deaf people with mental illnesses and others gather at the Starbucks on the Eastern Boulevard in Montgomery. The fellowship is from 6-8 p.m., and the press is invited.

In March 2007, the Alabama Department of Mental Health’s Office of Deaf Services staff lamented the lack of community activities that would help draw deaf people together. The first Deaf Coffee Night grew from those discussions. It drew about a dozen attendees. Since then, what started as a small project has grown into a series of opportunities for deaf people from all walks of life to come together and connect. The events have also fueled a resurgence of activity for the local association of the deaf. The coffee night is now drawing 30 to 70 attendees and is co-sponsored by the Montgomery Chapter of the Alabama Association of the Deaf. Deaf group home residents and the occasional curious non-signing hearing individuals also can be found at Starbucks on the first Friday of each month. The store has come to expect them and even keeps paper and pen on hand for orders.

ADMH’s Office of Deaf Services has long understood the need to have a highly visible presence among the deaf community. These coffee nights provide deaf individuals an opportunity for a language-accessible social outlet, the Office of Deaf Services another venue to educate and an opportunity for signers to hone their skills. Because ADMH’s Office of Deaf Services is a part of the department’s Division of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services, the events also help promote better understanding of mental illnesses and the role of mental health services.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly to Office of Deaf Services staff, Deaf Coffee Nights serve to raise awareness that there is a population of deaf people who are fully functioning members of their community. Office of Deaf Services state coordinator Charlene Crump, who helped start the initiative, says, “To me, it’s a monthly family reunion, where we regularly meet new family members and share coffee, information and memories. It’s been wonderful to see it continue and grow over the years.”

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RESOURCES

For more information about services for this population, contact ADMH’s Office of Deaf Services at 334-353-4703.