



Statewide Consumer Networks Grantee Spotlight September 2011

Recovery Focused and Peer Led - Wings Across Alabama

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Wings Across Alabama is a peer-run, recovery driven, state funded organization that leads the way in Alabama for peer recovery. Our main objective is to move Alabama from a medical model to one that is recovery focused and peer led. Not only are we engaged in the serious business of decision making on the state level, but we are also delivering wellness and recovery training statewide. Our activities range from working independently with individuals to working with the state in their efforts to merge the state mental illness and substance abuse divisions into one, to become more adept at dealing with co-occurring disorders.

The focus of our Statewide Consumer Network grant is to establish a network of partners and affiliates across the state in mental health centers, peer led groups, and state hospitals. Our main activity is facilitating WRAP groups for consumers, peer specialists, and mental health staff. We chose to conduct WRAP trainings for these groups because skills to face life's challenges will be essential for them in the future. Often what is most disabling about a mental health diagnosis is that what is accepted as truth is not what one is truly capable of. We want to provide individuals with a shift in thinking, where they learn to accept that a label of diagnosis does not mean they are incapable of doing what their hearts desire.

WRAP addresses the needs of consumers by empowering and educating them in a self-directed curriculum that focuses on hope. It puts the needs of the consumer first by modeling recovery and by demonstrating that recovery is real through the use of trained peers. It prepares those that are ready to engage with the system, so that the system works for them instead of focusing solely on medication compliance and long stays in rehab programs. Consumers know what is best for them and are encouraged by peer leaders to delve deeper into what they really want out of life. It takes courage to change but someone who has been there before can sometimes be the catalyst for that change to occur.

We focus our efforts on large scale, high population areas, but we have also worked in more rural areas where this type of training is not easily accessible. In 2010 we trained 288 consumers and in the current year we have trained close to 300. Most of our efforts have paid big dividends, for instance, in year one

of our grant we had a 90% success rate of keeping people out of the hospital. These statistics were collected close to a year past the time of trainings. We also have obtained scores in the upper 80's with quality of life statistics.

As an organization, we recognize that Alabama has changed and will continue to change in many ways, mostly because of lack of funding. However, we will continue to work within our organization and statewide to ensure that the community will serve as the caregivers and supporters of the new collaborative system that is being developed. The fact that peer specialist services are growing and that we are training our own trainers is a positive step forward. A leaner department of mental health and substance abuse with collaboration and cross training will bring a new way of looking at service delivery. These are interesting times for sure.

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