

**Report from Advocacy Plank
National Summit of Mental Health Consumers and Survivors
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BACKGROUND/PROCESS:

- Developed ground rules
- Brainstormed barriers to advocacy (everyone participated, shared ideas)
- Plank participants took turns as facilitators of each working session, to foster leadership skills and engagement in process and outcome
- Organized barriers into eight categories, and from there into three main categories, with specific needs identified in response to the barriers and then prioritized
- Action steps were identified to overcome barriers and meet consumer needs

ACTION STEPS

A. Advocacy education

To become advocates, consumers need training using a curriculum focusing on:

1. Knowledge of federal/state entitlements (how wages can impact receipt of Social Security benefits; knowing Social Security and other systems/program, etc., to help others obtain benefits)
2. Public speaking training
3. Group processing skills
4. Creative problem solving skills
5. Negotiation skills
6. Knowledge of available resources
7. Teaching people how to be role models/mentors
8. Writing/grant writing skills
9. Active listening skills
10. Sensitivity training
11. Education on the legislative process
12. Motivational/interpersonal skills

13. Conflict resolution training
14. Technical training

Action Steps:

Knowledge of entitlements:

- Apply for grants
- Prepare letter of proposal for technical assistance (from NTAC)
- Contact local resources for expertise (Protection and Advocacy agencies, Social Security Administration, local libraries, etc.)
- Set up training pyramid, whereby one individual trains two individuals, who in turn each train two more individuals, and so on
- Have benefits/entitlements information available on a Web site, in newsletters, etc.
- Tap case managers and social workers who are entitlement specialists as training resources

Public speaking:

- Contact local Toastmasters to provide training
- Use local teachers/professors to provide training
- Get local Dale Carnegie group to donate training
- Use local Speakers Bureaus to provide training

Group processing/problem solving/other skills:

- Contact local community colleges, churches, national illness-specific groups (diabetes, etc.), League of Women Voters, AARP for training
- Begin self-help advocacy group and, through this group, develop new skills, and then spin this expertise off to others
- Contact technical assistance centers

B. FINANCIAL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

To become advocates, consumers need:

1. Peer support groups

Action Steps:

- Develop within each state a coalition or bimonthly meeting of all advocates to share ideas, discuss new issues, provide support
- Contact other area non-profit groups (AA, etc.) for ideas and assistance
- Look to your local or state consumer group (Office of Consumer Affairs) for assistance in forming peer groups

2. Benefits/entitlements

Action Steps:

- Get assistance in applying for benefits/entitlements from various knowledgeable sources (case managers, lawyers, job coaches, etc.)
 - Place advocates with appropriate training in places such as drop-in centers to help people with the application process, grievance process, etc.
 - Have entitlements specialists provide support/information to consumers
3. Medical/psychiatric supports (i.e., awareness of and sensitivity to mental health issues and the system)
- Ensure consumer representation on boards, committees, etc., that oversee the regulation and provision of mental health services
4. Stipends/reimbursements (“financial aid” to get to meetings)
5. Equal pay for equal work
6. Civic organization support (i.e., awareness of and sensitivity to mental health issues and the system)
7. Access to technologies
8. Spiritual
9. Political support
10. Access to technical education
11. Family support

C. GEOGRAPHIC

To become advocates, consumers need:

1. Transportation
- Work with local disability and aging groups to develop urban and rural transportation programs
 - Get consumers on transportation boards to push for adequate, affordable services
 - Ensure that every consumer sitting on a mandated consumer representation board or council receives transportation to meetings
2. Inclusion (especially in rural areas)
- Conduct community roundtables to solicit advocates
 - Form van pools and car pools to help get people to meetings

- Use technology (Web sites, teleconferencing, etc.) to increase consumer access to meetings
- Have a 1-800 advocate “warm line” to provide support, assistance

3. Access to services (medications, clinicians, etc.)

- Work with local boards, commissions, councils, etc., to define and expand geographic boundaries of service availability (for example, promote use of telemedicine)