

CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT PROJECT

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Project Sites

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WORKSHOP 1 PACKET CONTENTS

Left Side of Folder

1. **Consumer Involvement Project Introduction**
2. **Consumer Involvement Project Mailing List form**
3. **Empowerment Toolkit Listing of Documents, Articles**
4. **Center for Mental Health Services Knowledge Exchange
Network Consumer Data Base of Interest Mailing List form**
5. **National Empowerment Center listing of Newsletters and
Publications produced by Consumers**

Right Side of Folder

1. **CIP Cover Sheet**
2. **Consumer Bill of Rights and Responsibilities**
3. **Skills Worksheet**
4. **Empowerment**
5. **Tom Wolff's Principles of Success in Coalition Building and
Promoting Problem Solving**
6. **Co-operation and Problem Solving Worksheet**
7. **Self Help "Why Self-Help Works"**
8. **Self-Help Worksheet**
9. **Consumer Self-help Projects**
10. **Consumer Projects Skills worksheet**
11. **Consumer Projects Community Partners worksheet**
12. **Starting Self-Help Groups: First Steps**
13. **CIP Workshop Survey**

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is a complex, multidimensional concept. Although there are similarities to concepts such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, empowerment has distinct differences. Empowerment is a process, not an event. The following is a list of qualities of empowerment.

1. Having decision making power.
2. Having access to information and resources.
3. Having a range of options to choose from, (not yes/no, either/or); a menu of options to choose from
4. Assertiveness
5. A feeling/belief that one person can make a difference (Hopefulness)
6. Learning to think and act differently, seeing things differently, overcoming institutional behavior and learned helplessness; redefining who we are and speaking in our own voice, redefining what we can do, and redefining our relationships
7. Learning about anger, learning more constructive/less destructive ways of expressing anger, learning to get past anger and resentment
8. Feeling of belonging, a part of a group; not feeling alone and isolated
9. Understanding and respecting individual rights and the rights of others
10. Learning to bring about change in one's life, and in one's community
11. Learning and refining skills which are important AS DEFINED BY THE INDIVIDUAL.
12. Willing to be a self identified consumer.
13. Changing others' perceptions of one's competency and ability to be proactive.
14. Self initiated and ongoing growth and capacity to change, to refine one's skills and coping strategies to move towards wellness and recovery
15. Building one's positive self image.
16. Overcoming stigma.

As a process, empowerment for an individual does not mean all these qualities are present; rather that an individual is moving towards developing and using these qualities in living.

SELF HELP

From “Why Self Help Works”

Self Help means that people take an active role in their own recovery, not just be passive recipients of services. Self-help support groups serve a number of functions that can contribute to a person’s wellness and recovery. Self-help involves mutual support. People move towards recovery when they reach out and share with others who have experienced common problems.

There are a number of reasons why self-help works.

First, self-help provides a social network.

Many people feel isolated after being diagnosed or after experiencing a traumatic event. People often feel they have been robbed of their humanity. In self-help, people are encouraged to share with others how having a diagnosis has impacted their lives. Membership in a mutual support group helps draw them out and brings them in contact with others who have shared similar problems.

Second, self-help groups give people an opportunity to change their roles from being the *helpee* to the *helper*.

In our society, people who help others are looked up to. Many people feel a sense of satisfaction and increased self-esteem when they are given the opportunity to help another person.

Third, these groups give people the opportunity to share with others ways that they have successfully coped with symptoms. Learning that they can still have a life even though they have symptoms gives people hope.

HOPE IS AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT TO RECOVERY!

Fourth, they provide positive role models.

Professionals have an important role in the recovery process, but they can’t always act as role models. Most probably haven’t had to cope with symptoms, or with the stigma of having a mental illness diagnosis, or with the myriad of other problems those in recovery face. Group members can’t really model their own behavior or lives after that of the professional.

They can, however, model their behavior following someone who has experienced the same kinds of problems they have.

Finally, self-help gives meaning to people’s lives.

They attend because they choose to attend, not as a condition of a treatment plan. They are able to design a plan for their lives based on their own choices and preferences, not on the judgment of a provider.

CONSUMER SELF-HELP PROJECTS

Consumer self-help projects can address many of the needs of consumers. If we believe as consumers, we are best qualified to meet our own needs then we have the responsibility to figure out ways to do this.

Here's a list of consumer-run services and activities. There may be projects, services, and supports not listed here; are there others you can think of?

- ⇒ Peer counseling
- ⇒ Speakers' bureaus
- ⇒ Creative writing classes
- ⇒ Advocacy (self advocacy and advocacy for others)
- ⇒ Information and referral services
- ⇒ Outreach programs (like UNM's Peer Bridger Program)
- ⇒ Housing development
- ⇒ Employment opportunities
- ⇒ Loan funds
- ⇒ Roommate matching services
- ⇒ Newsletters
- ⇒ Outings, trips, social events
- ⇒ Dances
- ⇒ Self-help groups (like DMDA, NAMI consumer support groups, AA, DTR)
- ⇒ Stipend programs
- ⇒ Leadership training and skills development (Leadership Academy)
- ⇒ Drop in Centers
- ⇒ Clubhouses
- ⇒ Information Clearinghouses
- ⇒ Peer case management
- ⇒ Crisis services/respice care
- ⇒ Warmlines
- ⇒ Consumer-run businesses
- ⇒ Consumer advisory boards

Once a project or service has been identified, and a group of consumers has agreed to

1. Use personal skills and talents to work on the project
2. Develop an attitude of "group empowerment" using qualities discussed earlier
3. Set achievable goals using action and group resources
4. Decided to commit time and effort, to be persistent in working on the project

Then, a **Plan of Action** can be developed. Each member of the project group should offer skills and talents, time, and an attitude of co-operation. Strategies will need to be discussed to use in the **Plan of Action**. Always remember that a little progress is better than no progress at all.