



Dear Mental Health Taskforce Members,

Wellness in the Woods (WITW) was founded in March, 2013, in response to the need for a consumer-run, consumer-led statewide organization. All board members and staff identify as living with a mental health experience. In June of 2016, WITW was awarded a federal grant through the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to form and establish a Statewide Consumer Network for MN. This grant creates opportunity to connect mental health consumers across MN and provides a united voice to offer feedback to groups like the Mental Health Taskforce. With that concept in mind we are requesting your support for consumer run Peer Respite Programs.

We believe it is imperative that the success of any mental health service must have input from consumers from inception, during service implementation, and through evaluation of outcomes. In response to the identified governing principles of: Prevention and early intervention, resilience and recovery driven, person centeredness, autonomy, anti-stigma, community based, accessible and evidence based practices, we offer the successful option of creating in Minnesota two peer respite programs to be funded through legislative block grants.

Included in this informational packet you will find the Peer Respite Hospital Diversion Manual created by Optum, Wisconsin's Peer Respite Request for Proposal, and the 2015 annual report from (AFIYA) Peer Respite. The Minnesota Peer Respite Program gathered information from consumers, family members and providers in Todd & Wadena counties. We learned there is a desperate need for intermediate support for people with serious mental illnesses who seek help through local hospital emergency rooms, experience interventions via local law enforcement, or learned there are no services that meet their needs until they experience a higher level of crisis resulting in the need for acute or subacute treatment in hospitals or intensive community and/or residential treatment services. This results in an increase in trauma for the person and often their loved ones, as well as losses of housing, jobs, community integration, and engagement in supportive relationships, and the costs to the State of Minnesota associated with higher levels of interventive services.

Peer respite services offers an alternative, non-medical approach that activates peer support. Individuals can stay from 1-5 days in a supportive environment that has proven to decrease emergency department (ED) visits and hospitalizations by 40-70%, according to Recovery Innovations in Arizona. Through our SAMHSA grant, WITW can leverage national and regional consultation. Wisconsin's *Grassroots Empowerment Program (GEP)* oversees one of three peer respite programs, and will provide three years of consultation and guidance as we develop the first of its kind in Minnesota.

I will be available at the September 12th meeting in Duluth to answer further questions. Thank you for the work you are doing to improve mental health services in Minnesota.

Respectfully,

Jode Freyholtz-London

Jode Freyholtz-London, Executive Director

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