

Recovery International Area 100 Presentation to Oakland County Community Mental Health
Authority: Peer Support Workgroup Meeting
October 28th, 2009

Hello and thank you for letting me speak to you. My name is Brian Perles and I am a volunteer for Recovery International (RI). You may know of us as Recovery Inc. or by our umbrella organization, Abraham Low Self Help Systems.

RI exists because back in 1937, the psychiatrist, Dr. Abraham Low, started doing group therapy with patients discharged from the University of Illinois Medical School's Psychiatric Institute. This 'after care' was successful and was then offered to the patients of his general practice. Dr. Low developed tools that would now be considered Cognitive Behaviorally Training. Patients were trained to change insecure thoughts into secure thoughts, to command their muscles to do the things they feared to do or to not release inappropriate impulses, to bear the discomfort of their symptoms, and to drop the negative judgments that created tenseness. He believed that patients could be trained to maintain their own mental health through self help.

The meeting structure also evolved and he was able to train his patients to lead the meetings. Patient lead meetings spread out from Chicago and today are available across the country and internationally. Meetings are simple, but structured. They begin with a reading from one of Dr. Low's books, to provide authoritative knowledge to the meeting. Next are structured examples of practice, where members of the meeting give 4 part examples where they describe a situation where they had symptoms, report their symptoms, tell which tools they used, and their improvement in how they handled themselves compare to before they began their training. The group then practices by spotting tools that could be used in that example. Meetings end with unstructured 'mutual aid' to provide social interaction for the members.

Currently there are 21 RI weekly meetings in south eastern Michigan. They are lead by volunteers who have been helped by the program and want RI meetings to continue to help people. There is no charge to attend the meeting, we only collect donations. We focus on symptoms, not diagnoses. Anyone suffering from anxiety, depression, panic, fear, sleeplessness, or anger is welcome at the meeting. Some people use RI meetings on their own, some use them in conjunction with other treatments. RI recommends that all attendees follow the instructions of their chosen doctor or professional.

My motivation to seek each of you out is a matter of capacity. I had one of our volunteers put together some figures for me. In July, we filled a total of 589 seats at all our weekly meetings in SE Michigan. In all, 235 unique people were helped by RI meetings that month. But the average size of each meeting was 6.5. I've led meetings of 13 with no problem and meetings of 20 or more are practical. The current RI organization in SE Michigan can help more people, but we are not reaching the modern sufferer. In the short term, we want more people with mental illness to benefit from the meetings that RI has to offer. In the long term we want more patients to become leaders of RI meetings so that Dr. Low's meetings are available to more people.

People whom you would call peers have been leading RI self-help meetings in Michigan since the 1950s. We applaud the Peer Support Specialist (PSS) program because it surpasses what even we could dream in regards to peer involvement in their own recovery. RI's goal is that PSS know that RI is one of the providers of self help meetings so that they share that information with other peers. An additional goal would be that if a PSS chooses to become a RI meeting leader, they would be paid for their time by their agency. As I learn more about CMH and PSS, I will certainly be able to dream bigger.

[Personal story removed for posting on internet]

Thank you, and if you have any questions, I'd be glad to answer them.

Brian Perles
Area Leader/Group Leader
Recovery International, Area 100
248-952-0897
bperles@glis.net

Supporting info:

Abraham Low Self Help Systems/RI, (Google maps of all RI meeting locations)

<http://www.LowSelfHelpSystems.org/>

Area 100 blog about connecting with Peer Support Specialists

<http://www.alshs-pss.blogspot.com/>

Area 100 Recovery International meeting locations by phone
(313) 561-2521

Monthly Data: July, 2009

RI Area 100 (South Eastern Michigan):

Meetings each week: 21

Total seats fill for all occurrences for all meetings: 589

Unique people who attended meetings: 235

Average attendance per meeting: 6.5

Number of RI meetings located in Oakland County: 9

ALSHS Mission Statement

The mission of Abraham Low Self-Help Systems is to use the cognitive-behavioral, peer to peer, self-help training system developed by Abraham Low MD to help individuals gain skills to lead more peaceful and productive lives.

Recovery International Mission Statement

The mission of Recovery International is to provide an effective, compassionate path to self-managed recovery from mental illness, behavioral disorders, and the stress of everyday life.

RI Area 100 Vision, Target: June 2014

- RI Area 100 will have 23 groups with an average attendance of 10 per group.
- RI-Discovery meetings will be available within Area 100.
- RI meetings and method will be well known and understood by professionals.