



Special points of interest:

- NEW Training Program
- Effective participation
- Tokenism

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The Voice

Visit the Voices of Experience web site at: www.mentalhealthrights.ca/voe.html

Mission: An equal partnership of service users and providers: a time for recovery through change and new ideas.

Vision: Empowering service users to have a voice in mental health and addictions services

May 2008

Steering Committee Training Graduates

The Voices of Experience Steering Committee motioned and carried a new concept back in August: we should be doing formal training for new participants. This idea was met with much enthusiasm among current participants, community partners and Steering Committee members.

The training was based largely on the old *E/Merging* binder, which many participants learned from. This manual was published in the 1990's, and needed some quick updates, and a bit of extra materials.

Training started in September of 2007. It went on for five weeks, and there are four newly graduated



participants who are fully trained in all aspects of sitting on a committee or a Board of Directors.

The topics covered are as follows:

- Chapter One: Overview (definitions, incorporation, charitable status)
- Chapter Two: The Consumer Survivor Movement, Consumer Participation
- Chapter Three: Board and Committee Structure
- Chapter 4: Meetings (parliamentary procedure, chairing, minute taking, agenda planning)
- Chapter 5: Traits of a successful Board or

Committee member

The training sessions include weekly tests, exercises, role plays, and homework. Those interested must be able to commit to five weeks of training, and to attending the Voices Of Experience Steering Committee as a practicum.

The Steering Committee would like to congratulate the following on their graduation:

CONGRATS!

**Karin A
Jennifer A
Lee P
Charles P**

Consumer Participation Not To Be Taken As Tokenism

Tokenism: “The practice or policy of making no more than a token effort or gesture, as in offering opportunities to minorities equal to those of the majority.” <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/tokenism>

In today's society, service providers are always looking for ways to allow people to view each other as positive ambassadors to anti-discriminatory practices. We include people regardless of race, religion, or ability. We don't look at socio-economic status when

deciding who can join our groups. We definitely do not look down on people who need to use our services. How ever right and true those statements are, do we use the opinions of these minorities to their full potential?

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Did You Know?

The term *In Camera* is Latin for 'in chambers', and is a legal term meaning 'in secret'.



Voices of Experience One voice from the committee

By John S.
Steering Committee
member

Over the last few years, the community and the health field are much more accepting of people with mental illness and addictions. This empowering, giving control to the consumer. One project which is allowing more consumer control is the Voices of Experience.

Started in 2004, Voices of Experience matches mental health and addictions consumers with boards, advisory groups and committees and visa versa. The project has received funding from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Good Shepherd HOMES Program, Hamilton Addiction Services Coalition, Hamilton Addictions and Mental Health Network and St. Joseph's Health Care Hamilton.

Voices of Experience, an initiative of the Good Shepherd HOMES Program and the Mental Health Rights Coalition, brings the consumer voice and experience to the table. The project's mission statement is to have "an equal partnership of service users and providers: a time for recovery through change and new ideas". The goal is to increase the level of

consumer participation and influence by sharing knowledge and experience with the mental health and addictions agencies that serve them. It enhances recovery to be treated as an equal who is accepted by the community.

Recovery means you can be a volunteer and an advocate—a voice for consumers. Being involved gives a sense of self-worth. For those serving on the boards there is the reward of doing something altruistic, an opportunity for meaningful activity, and the satisfaction of knowing you have made a difference.

The Voices steering committee guides the project. There is also formal training which orientates consumers to how boards and committees function as well as equipping them to carry out board member responsibilities.

The Voices of Experience project has placed consumers on 12 boards of directors, advisory groups and committees through Hamilton.

One way to allow consumer involvement is for the boards which participate to pay \$15 in honorarium/expense fee to the participants. This allows consumers to pay for any expenses like transportation, clothing and

personal care expenses which might otherwise keep them from participating.

Consumers, who might be interested in participating on a board or committee, should know those around the table want you to succeed. They want you to do well and not fall on your face. You don't have to worry about looking stupid. They all had to learn at one time. Remember—you are the experts. While you may have had limited formal education—you have the experiences of life. Also remember that your involvement is an important part of your professional development.

Reprinted with permission from **The Peer Support Council's Support Report**

For further information contact the coordinator at

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Why should I be member of a board?

By May F. Voices Steering Committee member

“After all I am doing well now. There are lots of others who can do that! I have managed to put my life together again. Let other people do that, I am busy with getting on with my life and having fun and doing things I never thought possible! I have all the things back I lost: family, car, job, friends. Yes life is good. I guess I could do it but why should I. They will always get someone else. There are all kinds of people out there who love to do these kinds of things. Or maybe later on I will do it. I don't have the time right now. “

Is this how you think? Will other people sitting on a board

really know how you felt, how you did it.? If you have been successful in recovery, do you know what a miracle that is? Do you know how many don't make it? Would like someone to be there if your son or daughter or your mother or father needs help? Do you think that the professionals know all about how to cure these people you love? Will someone tell them how it worked for them or what didn't work for them? Who is going to stand and explain what we need to have, and what we lack to get well and be a useful member of society?

They cannot experience the true feelings you feel and know for sure what made you decide to get help.

Do you think our voice added

to the professional voice, would be a help when discussion with the ministries, federal and provincial, about people not getting the help they need. Who's going to tell them about why people like us are dying?

We know there is no cure! Someone needs to be the face and the voice of the addict or the mental health consumer who still suffers while governments “play around”.

You need to be that person.

We are so fortunate to have excellent workers in the field in Hamilton but they cannot tell how it feels to be the patient so think about that. You are the one to say “we need the money” and “people are dying because we are not getting

enough assistance.”

They need our help. One way of doing it by sitting on boards that impact our lives.

Tell them what you need.

I have been on several boards in the past number of years and found, for me it was a very rewarding experience You will also so get in touch with Voices and join us.

We look forward to meeting you.



Being an effective and efficient board member means staying focused when facing issues



Traits of Effective Board or Committee Members

There is a difference between the member who sits and absorbs, and the member who speaks to the issues. There is a difference between those who are content to follow, and those who are willing to attempt something new. There are those who evaluate themselves objectively and are able to grow from this; there are others who do not know how to be completely objective.

Shortened from the Board of Directors, Steering Committee training, here are some traits of an efficient committee member:

- **Be a Leader:** initiate activity, discussion and offer a different

perspective.

- **Ask Questions:** if you feel you have insufficient information, you cannot make a decision; don't be afraid to ask.
- **Be Open Minded:** Look at different perspectives: not everyone shares the same opinion, or sees the issue from the same perspective. Clarify your perspective, and be sensitive to other's perspectives.
- **Be Organized:** know what it is you want to say and how to say it. Bring with you need to the meeting, don't rely on others lending you their materials.
- **Evaluate:** be able to

evaluate your own performance and that of other members objectively. To be objective is to be impartial, fair, and impersonal.

- **Maintain Confidentiality:** you will gain the trust and respect of other if you adhere to the principles of the Oath of Confidentiality.

These are just some of the tips for being efficient and effective during your time on a committee or board. If you feel you need more information, please contact the coordinator (see page 4).

THE OFFICIAL
NEWSLETTER OF THE
VOICES OF EXPERIENCE
PROJECT

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A joint effort of:



Good Shepherd
Faith in people.

Good Shepherd H.O.M.E.S
Program,
and the
Mental Health Rights Coalition



Consumer Participation Not To Be Taken As Tokenism

(Continued from Page One)

Do we have people sitting at the table who are given the opportunity to fully express their opinions on any given topic? If not, we are displaying tokenism; yes, the consumer is at the table, but no, they do not participate.

Sometimes, tokenism happens without people realizing its full damaging potential. What are people hearing when they are invited to participate, but aren't allowed to have a voice? It shows consumers that their voice is only useful when it comes down to statistical reports and showing the general population that the provider is inclusive. When a

consumer is, more than not, shot down, the stigmatizing beliefs of decades ago are being newly reinforced: 'the mental health consumer can't know how to provide services to their peers, can't possibly have the knowledge to give any useful information to non-consumer service providers'.

It hurts me to even write that sentence. I know from my own experience that consumers have useful voices; we have the information, the ability and the experience to speak out; we only need the venue and the confidence in our opinions from others, to be able to share the expertise.

We've seen what works for us and our peers, and can only make the system better by promoting those 'best practices'.

I, as the coordinator of the Voices of Experience Program, have attempted to work with Boards and advisory groups to educate service providers on the full inclusion of consumers, and the absence of tokenism. As consumers, we can only hope that other service providers will learn from those already involved, that tokenism only harms the group; the service provider, the consumer, and ultimately, the community they serve.

Kate

Refresher—What does that mean again?

This section of *The Voice* is used to remind readers of the different terms used by Boards and Committees. If you have a term that needs to be refreshed, please contact the coordinator.

- **To table a motion:** serves to delay the consideration of a motion, usually until the next meeting. Confusion around this term comes from many newspaper articles, where reporters assume that to table a motion is to state a motion for discussion; that is not the correct way to use this term.
- **In Camera:** is Latin for 'in chambers', and is a legal term meaning 'in secret'.
- **Constitution:** the written document stating the fundamental laws and principles of the organization. The document is completed with the by-laws. Not all organizations have a constitution.
- **By-Laws:** The document that gives the detailed rulings of an organization. It is what goes along with the constitution to create the Board of Directors' responsibilities to the agency.
- **Consensus:** the state where communications have been sufficiently open, and the group members feel they have had a fair chance to influence decisions, however, the majority feels differently than the minority. Basically, it means a majority vote.
- **Unanimous Consent:** happens when everyone agrees to a motion; this is the least attainable type of consent.

