

Grassroots Advocacy Network Kansas Voices for Mental Health

Make a difference. Advocate.

(from the Latin word, “vocare”—to call, voice or speak)

Background

The most enduring and powerful motivator for policy makers on mental health issues is hearing real stories from people who live with mental illness, as well as stories from friends, family and mental health professionals. However, many people hesitate to share their stories or to contact their elected officials because they don't know what to say or how to say it. Powerful and personal stories serve as a springboard for confident advocacy and a grassroots network that can deliver the votes on key policy reforms. The purpose of this project is to help individuals learn to share their story and to become more engaged as advocates in their home districts.

Project Description

Sponsored by the Kansas Mental Health Coalition, Kansas Voices for Mental Health is an expanding grassroots network of mental health advocates across the state. We are committed to developing the capacity to influence every House and Senate member and County Commissioner on the Coalition's issues through the advocacy network.

In order to realize this goal, this project will focus on the following strategies:

- Recruit individuals who have a desire to be part of a statewide advocacy network and obtain commitments to serve in the advocacy network for the purpose of educating policy makers at all levels on mental health issues endorsed by the Coalition.
- Provide training for advocates at local events across the state in order to help people translate their stories into powerful advocacy messages.
- Encourage advocates to effectively share their stories with policy makers in a variety of settings.
- Communicate on a regular basis with advocates to provide information about developing issues and opportunities to connect with policy makers.

How to Get Involved

- *Apply to become a mental health advocate for your district:* Most individuals will have a personal connection to mental illness as consumers of mental health services, family members, or providers; however, anyone who is interested and willing to make the commitment is welcome, including Board members of service agencies and other advocates for individuals with disabilities.
- *Attend a training event:* Attend a Kansas Voices training event in a location near you as the training becomes available. Help us bring a training event to your area by working with a local organization to recruit a core group of six individuals who are interested in joining the Network.
- *Be an advocate:* The expectation is that being selected as a district advocate will require an ongoing time commitment to remain abreast of the issues and to seek out opportunities to meet with elected officials.

For More Information

Contact: Rick Cagan at rcagan@namikansas.org or 800-539-2660

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

....Speaking with one voice to meet the critical needs of people with mental illness