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National Empowerment Center (NEC) Calls for Peer-Delivered Community Services Instead of More Forced Treatment

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 21, 2012 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- In the wake of the tragic Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, there are calls for improved mental health services. Dr. Daniel Fisher, executive director of the National Empowerment Center (NEC) and a member of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, who himself recovered from a diagnosis of schizophrenia, says, "The best means to help people recover from mental health issues is by funding more voluntary, community-based services delivered by people who have ourselves recovered: people who relate mutually, or peers. Peers uniquely connect with persons in distress in a non-stigmatizing, egalitarian manner because we have been through similar experiences. Peers operate respite centers, which are alternatives to more traumatic hospitalization, and work as wellness coaches in health centers to help integrate mental health and medical care. Peers also teach the public how to help each other through emotional distress by a peer-developed program called emotionalCPR (eCPR). Also, peers are learning community-based, voluntary Open Dialogue treatment from Finland."

Despite the lack of evidence of increased violence among persons with mental health issues, some recommend an increase in forced treatment through outpatient commitment: directing mental health personnel to forcibly medicate persons in their homes if they don't comply with psychiatric orders. Dr. Fisher concludes, "Outpatient commitment is wrong because it:

- "Destroys trust, which is the cornerstone of the therapeutic alliance and recovery;
- "Is traumatic and frightens people away from treatment; and
- "Is a gross violation of the Bill of Rights."

"It is also a mistake to call for a national database of persons labeled with mental health issues, which is a violation of civil rights and a barrier to treatment," Dr. Fisher says.

"Tragedies such as Newtown's grow from a U.S. culture of violence in which guns are accessed with ease," he says. "Other developed countries have an incidence of mental health issues similar to the U.S., yet they have a much lower rate of gun-related homicides. The difference is that there are much stricter gun control laws in other developed countries. England has only 6 guns/100 persons; the U.S. has 87 guns/100 persons. Similarly, the ratio of gun-related homicides in England compared to the U.S. last year was 1-to-50. The U.S. needs stricter gun control."

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