

Announcement

OVIEDO, FLORIDA. August 01, 2005. We are pleased to announce the formation of the Florida Peer Network, Inc., an independent statewide organization of and for persons with psychiatric illnesses in our state. This group will promote peer-directed services and consumer participation in mental health policy, planning, advocacy, rights education, with the goal of an overall improvement in quality of life. We estimate that there are 2.5 million people in the state who struggle with psychiatric illness. Immediate actions that are currently underway include, but are not limited to:

- ❖ Participation in the transformation of the mental health service system towards a recovery orientation, consumer direction, and holistic as well as evidence based practices.
- ❖ Assisting DCF in the development of a statewide Office of Consumer Affairs.
- ❖ The Implementation of peer specialist training and certification on a statewide basis.
- ❖ The education of consumers on their legal and civil rights.
- ❖ Providing grassroots political advocacy on behalf of persons with psychiatric challenges.

Twenty individuals, who were selected for their roles as local, state and national consumer leaders, met to work out the details of group structure at the Canterbury Retreat Center in Oviedo, Florida on July 28 and 29, 2005. We are grateful to the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities for providing funding for the Retreat. Technical and logistical support was also provided by; The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation, the Mental Health Program Office of the Department of Children and Families, and the Florida Mental Health Institute of the University of South Florida.

The Florida Peer Network, Inc. will reach out to the entire consumer community in the near future offering hope to the thousands of people struggling with psychiatric illnesses whose voices have not been heard. Together, we can facilitate the changes in the system necessary to improve the quality of life & care given to this substantial population of consumers.

For more information or if you are interested in becoming a member, you may contact Gayle Bluebird at the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities, South Florida office (954)967-1493 x 104.