Community Leaders

"I am a real partner in the most wonderful, giving relationship I could ever dream of. I work, vote, pay taxes, and I am involved in my community."

Curtiss Kolodney
Recovery Support Services Consultant
Washington, DC

Community

Spirituality

Service

Respect

Support

join the voices
for recovery

together

on pathways
to wellness

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Community leaders are in a position to promote healthy attitudes and behaviors throughout their communities. These prominent residents may include teachers, counselors, city and county officials, clergy, coaches, and volunteers. They can encourage and motivate individuals to seek prevention, treatment, or recovery support services for mental and/or substance use disorders.

To engage community leaders and other audiences about raising awareness of this important issue, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (http://www.samhsa.gov), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (http://www.hhs.gov), sponsors *National Recovery Month (Recovery Month).* Each September, this observance increases awareness and understanding of mental and substance use disorders. It promotes the message that behavioral health is essential to health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

The 2013 *Recovery Month* theme, *"Join the Voices for Recovery: Together on Pathways to Wellness,"* represents the many ways that people can prevent behavioral health issues, seek treatment, and sustain recovery as part of a commitment to living a mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy life. In its 24th year, *Recovery Month* educates individuals and communities that there are multiple pathways to achieving physical and mental wellness, and that community leaders can make a big difference in guiding people to those pathways.

In particular, community leaders have the power to change perceptions and spread a message of hope regarding the effectiveness of prevention and treatment. Through community education, encouragement, promotion of the possibilities of recovery, and by their own example, community leaders also can play an important role in a person's decision to seek help for a mental and/or substance use disorder.

From 2008 to 2011, 12.3 percent of people seeking treatment for illicit drug or alcohol abuse were deterred from treatment because they were concerned their community would have a negative opinion of them,[1] and 8 percent of people were deterred from mental health services for the same reason.[2] These statistics underscore why community leaders' efforts to encourage people to obtain the help they need can be so critical.

This document covers how community leaders can reduce the impact of mental and substance use disorders and be supporters of the recovery journey.

Assess and Evaluate…

To be successful, community leaders should understand the effects of behavioral health conditions on the local population. Decision-makers may conduct a mental disorder community needs assessment (http://www.ncstac.org/content/materials/CommunityNeedsAssessment.pdf), which helps to define the problem and guide the creation of recovery-oriented mental disorder services and systems.[3] Recovery-oriented mental disorder systems embrace self-determination, empowering relationships, meaningful roles in society, and eliminating prejudice or discrimination.[4]

A mental disorder community needs assessment is divided into the following sections:[5]

- Community demographics;

- Consumer leadership;

- Service gaps;

- Barriers to receiving recovery-oriented services; and

- Organization of services and funding.

In addition, the following are steps to evaluate how substance use disorders affect individuals in your area:[6]

- Measure the nature and extent of alcohol and drug abuse patterns and trends, using public access data or state-specific data, or by creating and distributing questionnaires.[7]

- Collect data on risk and protective factors throughout the community.[8] Risk factors may include substance availability or poverty; protective factors may include anti-drug policies or after-school activities.[9] Visit SAMHSA's Collaborative for the Application of Prevention Technologies website for more information on risk and protective factors.

- Understand how the community's culture is affected by alcohol and drug abuse.[10] For example, drug abuse also plays a role in many major social problems, such as violence, stress, child abuse, and drugged driving. For facts on drugged driving, visit http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/drugged-driving. Drug abuse can lead to homelessness, crime, and missed work or problems with keeping a job.[11]

- Consult with other community leaders working in drug abuse prevention, treatment, law enforcement, mental health, and related areas to learn about the local impact from their perspectives.[12]

- Assess community awareness of the problem by reaching out to school officials and neighborhood associations, or by creating public surveys administered on a locality's website.[13]

- Identify existing prevention efforts already under way to address the problem.[14]

An assessment should also include a review of the resources available for obtaining health insurance coverage.[15] The Affordable Care Act (ACA) creates significant new opportunities for affordable coverage of behavioral health services, as well as new processes and community resources for accessing coverage.

By evaluating these needs on a local level, community leaders can create an informed action plan to help individuals with behavioral health issues.[16]

Develop a Plan…

Once the current behavioral health environment in a community is understood, community leaders can determine the best way to reach audiences and make a difference. How leaders decide to communicate the prevention, treatment, and recovery message will depend on their role in the community and society. For example, a school principal may decide to offer group counseling activities for students after school or parental education meetings. A neighborhood association chair member may encourage residents to participate in monthly activities that promote physical health and well-being. Faith-based leaders can create welcoming environments for people in recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders.

Action plans usually start by identifying the goals for any wellness activities that are planned. A goal may include building a safe community environment to promote wellness locally. According to the National Prevention Strategy, safe community environments include those with clean air and water, affordable and secure housing, efficient transportation, good schools, violence-free places to be active, access to affordable healthy foods, and streetscapes designed to prevent injury.[17] Maintaining these core community principles will help reduce risk factors for behavioral health conditions.

As another resource, SAMHSA's Communities That Care program helps community decision-makers select and implement tested, effective prevention policies and programs to address the most pressing risks facing their youth.

Take Action in the Community…

Community involvement opportunities, such as after-school activities, counseling, exercise, or participation with religious groups, can provide a sense of belonging for someone suffering from a mental and/or substance use disorder. These activities are perceived and proven to be effective.

For example, most adults with mental illness symptoms (78 percent) and without mental illness symptoms (89 percent) agreed that treatment can help persons with mental illness lead normal lives.[18] In addition, in 2011, approximately 1 in 8 youths aged 12 to 17 reported that they had participated in drug, tobacco, or alcohol prevention programs outside of school in the past year,[19] and the prevalence of past-month use of illicit drugs or marijuana was lower among those who reported having exposure to drug or alcohol prevention messages.[20] Communicating openly in the community about behavioral health issues can increase awareness and encourage prevention and treatment services.

During **Recovery Month,** community leaders can engage friends, families, neighbors, colleagues, and peers to rally around the cause. Following are a few ways for community leaders to get involved:

- Start a coalition or partnership to discuss issues, such as mental and substance use disorders that affect the community. Enlist members to develop a public education initiative that promotes positive behavioral health in your area. Refer to the "Build Community Coalitions" document in this toolkit for more information on creating or joining a coalition.

- Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental and substance use disorders to identify individuals who may need help. Refer to the "Overview" section of this toolkit for more information.

- Learn about the available treatment facilities and support services to know where to refer someone in need. For confidential referrals, you can encourage individuals to call SAMHSA's National Helpline (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment/index.aspx) **– 1-800-662-HELP (4357) –** or visit the treatment locator (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment).

- Learn about health insurance outreach and education efforts planned in the community as a part of the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. Open enrollment starts October 1, 2013, and **Recovery Month** events can build upon and coordinate with these national health information events. For information on implementation in a certain state and resources for outreach and education, visit http://www.healthcare.gov/law/resources/index.html.

- Organize a rally or event related to **Recovery Month** to unite community members and spread the word that recovery from mental and substance use disorders is possible. Refer to the "Promote **Recovery Month** with Events"document in this toolkit for more information.

- Connect with people in your area who are in recovery, and encourage them to share their recovery stories with other members of the community. Please refer to the "Join the Voices for Recovery" section of this toolkit for real-life stories of recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders.

Take Action with Youth…

When it comes to educating the community about positive behavioral health practices, schools are critical settings because young people are particularly at risk. Several federal, national, and local initiatives can assist community leaders in promoting behavioral health in schools. For example, SAMHSA's Safe Schools/Healthy Students (http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/default.aspx) initiative creates healthy learning environments that help students succeed in school and build healthy relationships. The program promotes safety, mental disorder services, and emotional support for students. It also provides alcohol and drug prevention activities to schools across the United States. Community leaders who are interested in learning more about the initiative and available federal funding can take the Grant Readiness Assessment Quiz (http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/apply/assess.aspx).[21]

To promote total wellness, community leaders can also encourage physical activity and support healthy lifestyles for young people.[22] Programs for youth, such as Students Against Destructive Decisions, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the Let's Move campaign, promote positive peer support, provide role models and mentors, and help improve the overall health of the next generation.

Faith-based leaders and congregations are also vital to promoting total wellness for youth in their communities because they are trusted resources.[23] Working in conjunction with other community leaders, they can encourage physical wellness by teaching kids to live healthy lives, including emphasizing the need to have a healthy diet.[24] Among the many reasons that healthy eating is important, a study of nearly 17,000 boys and girls found a correlation between routine overeating and the onset of marijuana and other drug use.[25]

Elected officials can take advantage of SAMHSA's Children's Mental Health Initiative, which funds government entities to create a network of effective community-based services and supports to improve the lives of children and youth – and their families – with serious mental illnesses.[26]

Lastly, collaborative community efforts can provide support for behavioral health issues, helping youth succeed and achieve a well-rounded future. Community activities, such as National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day, can provide a concrete way for people to help by safely disposing of unwanted or unused medications.

Continue on a Path to Wellness...

Community leaders can encourage people to build a sound body and mind, which can help prevent the onset of behavioral health conditions and improve a person's chances of recovering. To focus these efforts, it can be helpful to address the eight dimensions of wellness, which SAMHSA outlines in its Wellness Initiative. These include:[27]

- **Emotional:** Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships;

- **Environmental:** Achieving good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being;

- **Financial:** Feeling satisfaction with current and future financial situations;

- **Intellectual:** Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills;

- **Occupational:** Obtaining personal satisfaction and enrichment from one's work;

- **Physical:** Recognizing the need for physical activity, healthy foods, and sleep;

- **Social:** Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system; and

- **Spiritual:** Expanding a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

Community leaders can emphasize these wellness principles through their unique social network and individual responsibilities. For instance, guidance counselors may provide career advice, a coach may help his or her athletes attain their overall health and fitness goals, and a clergy member can reach a person spiritually.

No matter the approach or scope of these efforts, every contribution from community leaders is valuable. Housing, employment, education, and socialization are all pieces of the puzzle that fit together to achieve overall behavioral health objectives[28] and lead people to successful, satisfying, and healthy lives integrated in the community.[29] There are many pathways for community leaders to make a difference during *Recovery Month* and throughout the year.

Make a Difference During *Recovery Month* and Throughout the Year...

There are many ways to involve the community and spread the message of *Recovery Month.* Consider taking the following steps:

- **Encourage people to speak up.** Motivate community members to share how mental and/or substance use disorders have affected their lives. These stories may inspire others to pursue recovery.

- **Spread the word about resources.** Remind community members that they can make healthy lifestyle changes by taking advantage of local prevention, treatment, and recovery support services.

- **Join in the local celebrations.** Attend local recovery events to celebrate others' accomplishments.

Targeted Outreach

Additional Resources…

A variety of resources provide additional information on **Recovery Month** and/or mental and substance use disorders, as well as prevention, treatment, insurance enrollment information, and recovery support services. The toll-free numbers and websites below are available for people to share their experiences, learn from others, and seek help from professionals. Through these resources, individuals can interact with others and find support on an as-needed, confidential basis.

- **SAMHSA's Website (http://www.samhsa.gov):** Leads efforts to reduce the impact of mental and/or substance use disorders on communities nationwide.

- **SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) – or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD) (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment):** Provides 24-hour, free, and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, treatment, and recovery in English and Spanish.

- **SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Website (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment):** Contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.

- **SAMHSA's Safe Schools/Healthy Students (http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/default.aspx):** Prevents violence and substance abuse among our nation's youth, schools, and communities.

- **SAMHSA's Recovery Community Services Program (http://www.samhsa.gov/grants/2011/ti_11_004.aspx):** Supports peer leaders from the recovery community in providing recovery support services to people in recovery and their family members, and fosters the growth of communities of recovery that will help individuals and families achieve and sustain long-term recovery.

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org):** Provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

- **Technical Assistance Centers:** Maximizes self-determination and recovery and assists people on their path to recovery, ultimately decreasing their dependence on expensive social services and avoiding hospitalization. The five technical assistance centers include:

  - **National Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Center at Mental Health America (http://www.ncstac.org);**
  - **National Empowerment Center (http://www.power2u.org);**
  - **National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse (http://www.mhselfhelp.org);**
  - **The Family Café (http://familycafe.net);** and
  - **The STAR Center (http://www.consumerstar.org/index.html).**

- **Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale Technical Assistance Center Strategy (BRSS TACS) (http://tie.samhsa.gov/Documents/pdf/factsheet_plain.pdf):** Provides policy and practice analysis, as well as training and technical assistance, to states, providers, and systems to increase the adoption and implementation of recovery supports for those with behavioral health issues.

Targeted Outreach

- **BHBusiness (http://www.saasnet.org/bhb):** Offers targeted training and support for behavioral healthcare executives, CEOs, and directors, including health care insurance enrollment training information.

- **Center for Financing Reform and Innovation (http://www.samhsa.gov/healthreform):** Supports the need for information, analysis, products, and technical assistance to address significant changes in the organization and financing of behavioral health care, as well as the need to guide and support governments and people on how to most effectively and efficiently use available resources to meet the prevention, treatment, and recovery support needs of the public.

- **Communities That Care (http://www.sdrg.org/ctcresource/index.htm):** Helps decision-makers in the community select and implement tested, effective prevention policies and programs to address the most pressing risks facing their youth.

- **Easy to Read Drug Facts (http://www.easyread.drugabuse.gov/index.php):** Talks about drug abuse, addiction, and treatment. The website has pictures and videos to help readers understand the text.

- **Healthcare.gov (http://www.healthcare.gov/index.html):** Contains information on finding health insurance options, help using insurance, information on the Affordable Care Act, help comparing providers, and information on prevention and wellness resources.

- **SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) (http://www.prainc.com/soar/about/default.asp):** Increases access to Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income for eligible adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a mental and/or substance use disorder.

Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the *Recovery Month* website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Targeted Outreach

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