

**National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor  
Organizations**

**Notes from the August 14, 2008 National Coalition Member Tele-meeting**

**The next tele-meeting of the National Coalition will be Thursday, October 2, 2008 at 3pm E.S.T.**

Participating: DC-Effie Smith, PA-Rachel Freund, VA-Ann Benner, Self-Help Clearinghouse-Joseph Rogers, NEC-Dan Fisher, Staff: Lauren Spiro and Judene Shelley.

**1. Rachel Freund**, (PA Mental Health Consumers' Association) an advocate and organizer on voting gave a very informative talk on **Voter Registration and Outreach**.

**A. Use the National Voter Registration Act**

The National Voter Registration Act, (NVRA – also known as the Motor Voter Law) *requires all state-funded organizations that provide services to people with disabilities, including mental health services*, like out-patient, residential, psychiatric rehabilitation, case management and drop-in centers, to assist those they serve with voter registration and to report their registration data every month to their state. Learn more about NVRA and how it can be a powerful tool in your voter engagement tool box. Here are some great resources:

- Text of the [National Voter Registration Act](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/): <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/>
- [Project Vote](http://www.projectvote.org) is non-partisan and non-profit; their NVRA Implementation Project assures that NVRA is working: [www.projectvote.org](http://www.projectvote.org)
- The [American Association of People with Disabilities](http://www.aapd.com) (AAPD) provides ideas, data and leadership on mobilizing the disability vote, including the use of the NVRA to make that happen: [www.aapd.com](http://www.aapd.com)
- Kay Shriner's [research](http://www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/voting/nvrastudy.htm) shows how NVRA is working (or not): <http://www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/voting/nvrastudy.htm>

**B. Activate the grassroots to register, educate and energize our peers-** People are far more likely to be drawn in if their peers encourage them to get engaged

- Wellstone Action's [resources](http://www.wellstone.org) for mobilizing voters: [www.wellstone.org](http://www.wellstone.org)
- Faces and Voices of Recovery [voter engagement guide](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org): [www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org)
- Tennessee Disability Voter coalition - [www.tndisability.org](http://www.tndisability.org)
- [Voterization 2008](http://www.nlihc.org), hosted by the National Low Income Housing Coalition: [www.nlihc.org](http://www.nlihc.org)

What groups in your area can you partner with?

- League of Women Voters - League of Young Voters
- Welfare rights organizations

- Homeless groups - ACORN - Community organizations

**C. Make sure your registration work gets counted** - Unless policy makers have data to show how many voter registrations we produce, we will not be recognized as a political force. We can use the framework of the NVRA to assure our numbers are documented.

You can see the grim statistics for your state by checking this report to Congress and looking at page 34. [http://www.eac.gov/clearinghouse/docs/the-impact-of-the-national-voter-registration-act-on-federal-elections-2005-2006/attachment\\_download/file](http://www.eac.gov/clearinghouse/docs/the-impact-of-the-national-voter-registration-act-on-federal-elections-2005-2006/attachment_download/file)

D. Discussion: When looking for funding, call it citizen engagement or civic engagement. Rachel got a small grant from the Pennsylvania Disabilities Council to do this work. This has been a reaching across disability groups to get to disenfranchised voters. Be clear that it is nonpartisan work. Don't endorse any candidate. There are foundations that support voter registration, such as, [www.AlianceforJustice.org](http://www.AlianceforJustice.org) and [www.nonprofitvote.org](http://www.nonprofitvote.org)

If nonprofits are getting funding to serve people with disabilities, they are actually obligated to encourage people to register and also to report to the Department of State.

Joseph said that each state has Disability Planning Council funding. Voter registration is called "self-advocacy."

Dan suggested that the NC might support voter registration at consumer-run centers nationwide. Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) and American Association for People with Disabilities (AAPD) might partner with us in encouraging voter registration. Rachel offered to take the lead on networking about voting; NC members will be asked to contact her. The NC could support periodic tele-conferences. Who is doing this and would like to network. If enough interest perhaps we can get funding.

Rachel said that voter turnout is related to income level also. We have a huge potential to encourage a lot of people to vote. Currently 41 of the 50 states have some kind of competency requirement. For example, the possible restrictions are things such as if you have a guardian you can't vote.

**2. The Presidential Candidate Forum** July 26 in Ohio was a great opportunity to network with cross disability groups and meet and educate staff of both presidential candidates. See web for more information on the Forum.

### **3. Developing & Supporting States**

A NCMHCSO Survey of Technical Assistance (TA) Expertise was sent out to NC members today for them to complete and return. We want to determine the skills and TA expertise of our membership so that we will be better able to link expertise and resource where it is needed.

Joseph offered to take the lead on putting together a webinar, that the NC (with the TA Centers) could co-sponsor on nonprofit fiscal responsibility. It would help board members and others (eg, staff) to better understand the accountability process and their role. When one member organization is in distress it effects all of us. The IRS is making it harder to be a non-profit.

#### **4. Fundraising**

Lauren and Dan have met with foundation representatives and look forward to hearing more from them. David Sanders wrote a draft Letter of Inquiry (LOI) which is being reviewed by the fundraising committee.

We are planning a live tele-seminar panel to get our stories out to the general public and to sell our CD pack- Voices of Hope and Recovery. A letter was sent to Mrs. Carter looking for her support. At a minimum we would like to use her photo and a statement of support for this project; the dream level of support would be for her to participate on the panel and talk about her story and the mental health work being done at the Carter Center.

There might be money available for developing consumer speakers bureaus in each state. People thought this would be a good idea. One possibility for developing public speaking ability is the organization Toastmasters. There is not a cost to belong.

#### **5. Email Management - What to send out to NC**

If it is something that the organization already has a policy on it, then a position could be taken without consulting the group again. Some agreed that an email every two weeks or so summarizing what has been happening would be better than a lot of individual emails.

Lauren to write a policy on when to check with the Steering Committee and the membership for feedback and/or for information dissemination.

#### **6. Recommendations RE: MH Block Grant**

Our #1 public policy priority is sustained federal funding to consumer-run statewide organizations or coalitions. To this end a meeting was held July 9, 2008 between NC members and SAMHSA/CMHS re: the MH Block Grant process. Lauren has written recommendations for more consumer input and involvement into the process and more funding to consumer-run organizations and initiatives. Joseph suggested sending the draft out to the membership with a deadline and then using the input received to create the position statement.

#### **7. Annual Meeting, October 30, 2008 6pm - 9 p.m. Buffalo, New York**

The meeting will include a report of accomplishments for the past year. A discussion followed of ideas for the Annual meeting agenda:

a. How states can go after more block grant money or money from the Department. Dave Sanders could do a presentation on this; WV has been very successful.

b. Rachel suggested it would be good to talk about how we can network more with other people between the annual meetings, connected and be a more cohesive community.

c. Perhaps meet regionally (using the 10 federal regions), develop relationships. Some regions do not have many people but if they connect they can form a critical mass to develop further.

d. We could put up the policy priorities voted on last year for the group to look at or input further. We may want to look at an abbreviated version of draft policies that were developed based on last year's priorities.