

## **Recovering Together, April 2006**

Vol. 2006-1

*A joint publication of the Peer-to-Peer Resource Center  
and the Support, Technical Assistance, and Resource (STAR) Center*

Welcome to the latest issue of Recovering Together, a newsletter focused on self-help and recovery for people with mental illness! The newsletter is published electronically by the Peer-to-Peer Resource Center and the STAR Center.

### **The Peer-to-Peer Resource Center at DBSA**

The Peer-to-Peer Resource Center was established in 2003 to promote peer support as essential to wellness and recovery for people with mental illnesses. The Center has a particular focus on training and advancing the position of Peer Specialist as a viable employment option for consumers. Our major activity is to train consumers as Peer Specialists using our nationally-developed model training curriculum.

Established under a cooperative agreement with the Center for Mental Health Services, the Center operates under the auspices of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) and serves all people with mental illnesses. Contact the Peer-to-Peer Resource Center toll-free at (800) 826-3632 or access the web site at [www.peersupport.org](http://www.peersupport.org).

### **NAMI STAR Center**

STAR Center stands for Support, Technical Assistance and Resource Center. The Center promotes recovery by providing support, technical assistance, and resources to enhance self-help in diverse communities. STAR Center provides support, technical assistance and resources to help improve and increase the capacity of consumer operated programs. Self-help is recognized as a major element of recovery, as well as peer provided services and supports opportunities. The STAR Center collects, disseminates a wide range of culturally appropriate materials and resources. You can access the web site at [www.consumerstar.org](http://www.consumerstar.org) or via a National toll-free telephone line: (866) 537-7827. The STAR Center is funded by the Center for Mental Health Services of SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

### **Advocates for Latino Mental Health Advancement (ALMA) Moves into Action**

*National Consumer Group Promotes Recovery and Equality for  
Latinos Receiving Mental Health Services*

Latinos and Hispanic-Americans are the fastest-growing minority group in the United States, accounting for over 14% of the national population. Yet across the country

communities with large Latino populations are among the poorest and least served by health services in general and mental health services in particular. In addition, language barriers, prejudicial views and a lack of culturally competent services lead to disparities in the quality of care Latinos receive. As a result, Latinos generally get sicker before getting care and require more intensive and emergency services. In one shocking statistic, approximately half of all suicides completed in the U.S. were Latinos between the ages of 10 and 34 (*National Council of La Raza, 2005*).

An emerging group of leaders is seeking to change things, though, by promoting participation of Latino consumers in mental health planning and education. The national Advocates for Latino Mental Health Advancement (ALMA) was formed through a caucus held at the Alternatives conference in October 2005, in which Latino consumers from around the country gathered to discuss their experience and the problems Latinos face in getting the services they need.

Not all these problems come from the system, some pointed out, noting that religious views, experience of torture and trauma and other experiences that may make people fear institutions contribute to hesitancy to seek mental health help. Educating both providers and communities is an important goal of the organization. "But most important is spreading the word and hope of recovery for all people," says Gilberto Romero, Executive Director of ALMA, "living the spirit of hope and making sure Latinos are included in that vision."

ALMA members are developing action steps through monthly teleconferences sponsored by the STAR Center and plan for a national summit in 2006 to focus efforts at both local and national levels. "Consumer advocates and the recovery movement have achieved great things in helping move mental health forward" says Eduardo Vega, member and President, "but Latinos have been left behind because of a lack of representation. ALMA is taking steps to make sure we are heard and to ensure that services become more person-centered, equitable, appropriate, and appropriate to the needs and culture of Latinos across the country."

ALMA encourages consumers/ex-patients/Latinos to join this positive growing community. To find out more about ALMA, call (505) 412-2373 or e-mail [evega@mhala.org](mailto:evega@mhala.org).

### **Peer Specialists: Who are they, and what do they do?**

"Peer Specialist" is a term that we hear much more frequently these days in the mental health arena. More and more states and health care systems are utilizing the services of Peer Specialists as part of recovery-oriented services and treatment. So, what's a Peer Specialist, anyway?

A Peer Specialist is a person with a mental illness who has been trained to help his or her peers move ahead in their recovery by promoting hope, and by offering others assistance in identifying and achieving their personal goals. The Peer Specialist

cultivates the ability of those they assist to make informed, independent choices, and to gain information and support from the community to achieve those goals. Simply stated, Peer Specialists walk alongside their peers, supporting and encouraging their efforts.

Most often, services by Peer Specialists are offered as an adjunct to professional treatment. The Peer Specialist typically completes a rigorous training program and demonstrates their knowledge and skills by passing a certification examination. Many Peer Specialists are paid employees although some choose to work as volunteers.

As someone who experiences a mental illness themselves, the Peer Specialist models competency in recovery and maintaining ongoing wellness. This melding of actions centered on recovery and peers delivering services is a unique and potent combination. Mutuality and shared experiences provide a link that has been missing from traditional care and helps to build trust and rapport.

How do Peer Specialists offer this specialized support, and how is it different from what professionals offer? They may facilitate groups that meet in either inpatient or outpatient settings. They may serve as a sounding board for a peer who wants to set a goal. When requested, a Peer Specialist may accompany his/her peer as that person acts on their goals and locates resources and supports in the community.

At the Peer-to-Peer Resource Center, we know that the support of peers is essential to wellness and recovery for people with mental illnesses. We are working to **bring peer support the recognition it deserves**, and to **make Peer Specialists an integral part of every consumer's recovery team**.

### **STAR Center Embarks on National Consumer Operated Services Identifier (COSI) Project**

Consumer Operated Service Identifier (COSI) is a STAR Center project that seeks to identify culturally competent consumer operated programs throughout the country. The STAR Center Director, Ramiro Guevara, will use cultural competence standards to measure the level of cultural competence within each program via telephone interview. During phase I of the project, the STAR Center has identified over 100 programs as possible participants in the project.

Interviews will begin in April 2006. By July 2006, the STAR Center will post a list of culturally competent programs on the new STAR Center Web site, scheduled to be released in April 2006, at [www.consumerstar.org](http://www.consumerstar.org). The COSI Project will assist the STAR Center in identifying promising peer program models as well as new and emerging leaders who have achieved expertise in cultural competency.

If you or your organization would be willing to participate, please contact Ramiro Guevara via e-mail at [ramiro@consumerstar.org](mailto:ramiro@consumerstar.org) or call (703) 516-7996.

## **Advancing Peer Support in 2005**

Last year was a busy and productive one for the DBSA Peer-to-Peer Resource Center. During 2005, the Center:

- Completed and submitted a draft model Peer Specialist training curriculum to the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS)
- Trained and offered certification to 120 consumers as Peer Specialists in partnership with three diverse public and private service delivery systems
- Made presentations to 700 consumers, mental health professionals and administrators throughout the U.S. on peer support, Peer Specialists and principles of recovery-based services
- Collaborated with the Center for Health Studies/Group Health Cooperative of Seattle, WA, on a successful NIMH grant proposal that will train and place Peer Specialists and research their effectiveness

Can the Peer-to-Peer Resource Center assist you or your organization in training or presenting on peer support and recovery-oriented services? For more information, contact Lisa Goodale, Peer Services Director, at [lgoodale@DBSAAlliance.org](mailto:lgoodale@DBSAAlliance.org), or (800) 826-3632, x155.

## **STAR Center to Launch New Web Site**

The STAR Center is in the final phase of implementation for the new STAR Center Web site, currently scheduled to be released April 2006. The new site will allow the user to search for STAR Center Events, Publications, and Organizations specific to a "community," broken into three sub-categories, "Cultural Competency," "Self-Help/Peer Support," and "Other."

A new "Archives" section has also been added! In this section you will be able to find current and previous issues of this quarterly newsletter, *Recovering Together*, along with a listing of all STAR Center national teleconference calls. Audio files (MP3) and transcripts (PDF) of the calls can be easily downloaded from this section.

The STAR Center is excited about the release of the new STAR Center Web site and invites you to visit the site in mid-April 2006! [www.consumerstar.org](http://www.consumerstar.org)

## **"Depression in America"**

On February 8, 2006, the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) unveiled a major national report, "The State of Depression in America." With the help of nationally known consumers including veteran CBS anchorman Mike Wallace, U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, and former CNN Chief Tom Johnson; leading consumer advocates including Larry Fricks, Jennifer Martin, and Jana Spalding; and nationally recognized professionals and researchers including Surgeon General Richard Carmona, DBSA

presents a comprehensive overview of the impact and cost of depression in America today.

“Depression in America” aims to create a thorough, comprehensive, and actionable body of information to inform legislators, policymakers and other critical stakeholders about the state of depression the United States and the urgent need for action. With nearly 19 million Americans estimated as suffering from this illness, the need is great.

An Executive Summary, the full report and the accompanying 10-minute video can be downloaded from DBSA’s website at this location:

<http://www.DBSAlliance.org/stateofdepression1.html>.