Recovery Learning Community Research Project: Assessment of participants' recovery outcomes

Project Description

The Center for Mental Health Services Research (CMHSR) of the University of Massachusetts Medical School will work with the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the state's six Recovery Learning Communities (RLCs) to assess the personal recovery outcomes of people who participate in RLC activities. The study is ongoing and will be completed in September, 2014, The study aims are to:

1) Develop a valid and reliable survey that assesses personal outcomes in relation to RLC participation;

2) Assess the effectiveness of a peer run community support program in improving participants' recovery outcomes.

This study is significant for several reasons including the unique peer-driven community-based nature of RLCs[1], the focus on personal recovery outcomes, and the consumer-driven nature of the project. (The PI is Jonathan Delman, PhD, a long-time consumer evaluator and researcher.)

The pilot survey will be administered through both web-based and paper/pencil formats. RLC participants will be alerted to the survey through the broad distribution of a recruitment flyer, posted both electronically (e.g., RLC website) and places at which participants may be present (e.g., RLC training sites). CMHSR (through Jonathan Delman, PI) will coordinate, oversee and provide technical assistance for the data collection process. RLCs, DMH and CMHSR will work together to develop reasonable accommodations for contacting and surveying consumers for whom English is not the preferred language, including those whose preferred language is American Sign. CMHSR will analyze the data, which will be collectively reviewed by CMHSR, DMH, and the RLCs. The survey will be refined based on our statistical analyses, and we will assess the relationship between RLC participation and participant outcomes.

This project is being funded by DMH. The research team is:
- Jonathan Delman, Principle Investigator
- Lorna Simon, Data Analyst
- Jay Byron, Research Assistant
- Karen Albert, Administrative Evaluator

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[1] *Recovery Learning Communities (RLCs)* are distinct from most other peer run programs in that they provide peer support meetings, classes and workshops ("peer services") in the community, not at a set location. To provide this coverage, RLCs train non-staff members to facilitate peer support meetings, and they receive stipends to lead these community-based groups. Peers also engage directly with the larger community through public awareness campaigns (e.g., stigma-fighting) and group volunteer efforts (e.g. , town-wide spring clean-up days). Through personal growth, skill development and community engagement, many peers establish and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships characterized by mutual exchange with community members in nonclinical settings.