



**Northeast Iowa Behavioral Health, Inc.**  
*a dba of Northeast Iowa Mental Health Center*

**Promoting Recovery and Quality of Life**

12-1-11

Joanna Schroeder  
Department of Human Services  
Division of Mental Health & Disability Services (MHDS)  
1305 East Walnut, Hoover Building, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Des Moines, IA 50319-0114

Dear Ms. Schroeder:

Please find enclosed results of the "Consumer, Family & Advocacy MHDS Redesign Survey as completed by 11 consumers/advocates from Northeast Iowa Behavioral Center, 905 Montgomery Str., Decorah, IA 52101.

My name is Connie Bourassa, Peer Support Specialist/Trainer, WRAP Facilitator @ Northeast IA Behavioral Health since March, 2011. I was previously employed by Hillcrest Family Services in Dubuque as a Peer Support Specialist as well. I have been personally involved in the Iowa Peer Support Training Academy (IPSTA) as a trainer since 2006 and I am also a member of the IPSTA Advisory Committee and I also serve on the Board of Directors for the Iowa Advocates Mental Health Recovery (IAMHR).

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of consumers being able to gain personal empowerment in order to overcome their MH diagnosis. When we can educate consumers about their MH illness along with learning tools to manage their symptoms – a dramatic dynamic of personal power is demonstrated by the person. During the MH Redesign process – It is definitely time to empower the people who have felt "less than" because of disabilities and who have become recognized as inactive in the working environment or in other words "stigma-tized" in society. I have seen the results of consumers who were totally dependent upon the system turn into productive responsible individuals in their communities.

Since we are from a rural community – the resources are not as readily available as they are in the urban areas and the resources definitely need attention in the rural communities as well. We are handicapped in providing consumers appropriate services such as:

- Iowa Care (Iowa's Supplemental Health Care Plan) provides services in the urban areas only, therefore we need closer accessible services in the area instead of affording to drive to Iowa City or Dubuque for immediate services which can involve a round trip = 5 hours or 270 miles from NE Iowa.
- Transportation issues = transits do not run all day or at night so attending activities is usually limited to the transit schedules which includes attending necessary appointments and if the person has to await Title 19 approval the cost per mile for someone who isn't on Title 19 is approx. \$1.00/mile according to the TMS rates.

□ Central Office – 905 Montgomery St., PO Box 349, Decorah, IA 52101, 563/382-3649, Fax 563/382-8183  
□ Branch Office – 36 S. Frederick Ave., PO Box 113, Oelwein, IA 50662, 319/283-5774, Fax 319/283-5775  
Hearing or Speech Impaired 711 or 800 735-2942

[www.neimhc.org](http://www.neimhc.org)

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- Respite Homes are a necessity in the rural communities as well, similar to homeless shelters provided in the urban areas. We have people who are homeless, either because of substance abuse or family conflicts and yet we don't have any local habitats to send them to until they can get on their feet.
- Because inpatient psyche or treatment centers are such a long distance - the counties usually have to absorb higher transportation costs to transport patients costing more money than in urban areas for transportation.

At Northeast Iowa Behavioral Health Center in Decorah, we are in process of providing "Crisis Stabilization Services" provided by a Grant on a daily basis to people in crisis needing MH services; we are testing a pilot project for Crisis Stabilization under a grant in the HAWC areas which include Howard, Allamakee, Winneshiek, and Clayton County Hospitals. Peer Support Specialists trained at the Iowa Peer Support Academy, under the Georgia model, answer the on-call emergency phone to respond to providing services in the hospital ER's when people in crisis need mental health assistance. We become part of the treatment/ER staff in calculating what options are open for obtaining appropriate services for the patient who has presented to the ER because of suicidal ideation, alcohol/drug abuse, etc. The hospitals also provide 23 hr. crisis bed within their facilities where the Peer Support Specialist can stay in the room to communicate with the patient. Peer Support Specialists respond from experience with their own mental health symptoms along with the important training techniques received at the Iowa Peer Support Training Academy. The physicians, nursing staff and patients, are quite impressed that Peer Support Specialists can also provide immediate continuing follow-through services to the patient so when they are sent home from ER they are not "lost and on their own". Follow-up services include immediate support by Peer Support Specialists to provide phone contacts and face to face appointments along with resources, education and options for the patient to choose from.

Over the past 5 years I have been involved in the Iowa Peer Support Training Academy and also have worked as a Peer Support Specialist for two different facilities. I have seen recovery attitudes work in my own life as well as within many others whom I have supported. As Senator Harkin once said to me, after listening intently to my story: "there is no one better to hear how to do it than from someone who has been through it." Please note that we have learned this in many recent disasters in Iowa as well, such as flooding, and tornadoes - when someone who has personally experienced the devastation of such horrific disasters it aids their healing in helping when someone else is going through the same thing they have gone through it. Recommendations for funding is needed for the following:

- We need to promote and provide the Iowa Peer Support Training Academy for training Peer Support Specialists under the Georgia Model twice a year or yearly as the classes are limited.
- We need to provide education for recovery and training for Peer Support Specialists to obtain Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) facilitator certification.

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I would greatly appreciate if you could share the information I have provided with the appropriate MH Redesign Committees and CEO's. You may contact me for further information at Northeast Iowa Behavioral Health Center, Ph: 563-382-3649, Decorah, IA. It's time for change in Iowa regarding MH and recovery education.

Sincerely, *Connie Bourassa, NEIBH PSS*

Connie Bourassa, NEIBH Peer Support Specialist/WRAP Facilitator  
Northeast Iowa Behavioral Health  
905 Montgomery Str.  
Decorah, IA 52101

cc: Todd Lange, OCA