

Advisory Councils

Missed a meeting? Here's what we've been talking about...

Hot Topic: *Stigma & Discrimination*

The Discussion

- Assumptions made about people battling the disease of addiction were discussed and one member stated, "They assume we all lie. Of course I lied about my addiction, but I didn't lie about everything."
- Members stated that justice-involved individuals face discrimination across systems—even those that are supposed to help (e.g. housing, social services, treatment programs, etc.). NSC members relayed stories of how they felt some behavioral health and justice system professionals were "disconnected" and saw them as a number and not as a person.
- Members relayed that having a criminal record along with the challenges people face in recovery from addiction and/or mental illness make finding and keeping employment three times as hard. Employment options are limited. One NSC member was told by a college advisor "You're limited to the sociology and psychology field because that's all that's going hire you."
- Members discussed how they stigmatized themselves which, in some ways, limited their pursuit of opportunities. One member stated, "My challenges were getting over my own fears. My shame", another added, "Sometimes the last thing an addict wants to hear is that they matter."

Member Recommendations

- Start anti-stigma campaigns to educate the public at all ages and settings. Let everyone know that people can and do recover even if they have a criminal record or an addiction or a mental illness—tell them there is hope for us.
- Increase the peer workforce and ensure that people in recovery are a major part of the treatment team.
- Train behavioral health and justice system professionals to work together with "us" and see "us" as people first.

What's Being Done

- The Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse (GCADA) launched a statewide campaign highlighting that no one is immune to developing an addiction. For more information and downloadable materials visit <http://gcada.nj.gov/public/>.
- Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care Technical Assistance Center provides several trainings in which consumers offer their own experiences of strength, hope, and recovery. For more information visit http://ubhc.rutgers.edu/research_training/brti/tac.html.
- The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) offers "In Our Own Voice" —presentations geared toward combatting stigma by "describing the reality of living with mental illness." For more information visit <http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/NAMI-Programs/NAMI-In-Our-Own-Voice>.
- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has been working to restore and protect the rights of ex-offenders for decades nationwide. Please visit <https://www.aclu.org/search/ex-offender>.

"The crime does not define."- Cathy W., NSC Member