

THE ST. LOUIS EMPOWERMENT CENTER

A Consumer Operated Service Program funded by the Missouri
Department of Mental Health

PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- The following presentation will discuss the following:
 - The mission of the St. Louis Empowerment Center and the types of services that the program provides to peers.
 - The barriers and gaps in services that often face the participants of the St. Louis Empowerment Center.
 - The barriers and challenges faced by the St. Louis Empowerment Center and the other Consumer Operated Service Programs in the state of Missouri.

THE ST. LOUIS EMPOWERMENT CENTER

Mission

It is the mission of the St. Louis Empowerment Center to provide peer support, recovery services, and a sense of community to individuals, in the St. Louis area, who or have mental health and/or substance use issues.

Consumer Operated

The St. Louis Empowerment Center is 100% Consumer Operated and currently employs 12 consumer employees.

ST. LOUIS EMPOWERMENT CENTER DEMOGRAPHICS

The St. Louis Empowerment Center serves 25 to 40 participants a day. A recent demographic survey revealed the following information about most of the participants at the Center:

- 20-70 years old
- Identify as African-American
- Have serious mental illness and/or substance use disorders. However, many individuals have been disengaged from the system of care.
- Homeless (by the Federal definition of Homelessness)
- Unemployed or Under employed through lack of access to training opportunities
- Below Federal poverty level
- Have little or no family support
- Eligible for benefits through Social Security or the Veterans Administration

ST. LOUIS EMPOWERMENT CENTER SERVICES

- The St. Louis Empowerment Center offers the following Services to its participants:
 - Peer Support Groups
 - Peer Specialist Services- Including resource/referral, goal setting, and follow-up services
 - Employment Program- This includes help with resume writing, job searching, interview skills, etc.
 - Computer Lab- Including classes on using Computers
 - Mental Health Library and Lending Library
 - Access to Consumer telephone/ Fax/Ability to receive mail on-site
 - Television/Pool Table/Card games/Dice
 - Lunch Served Daily
 - Anger Management- This class is accepted by Probation and Parole

BARRIER AND GAPS IN SERVICES FOR ST. LOUIS EMPOWERMENT CENTER PARTICIPANTS

1. Turn over in Case Management Services

- The high rate of turn over in case managers within the mental health system can lead to several negative outcomes for participants:
 - Disengagement from services- Many participants at the St. Louis Empowerment Center will drop out of services after being passed around to three or four different case managers.
 - Loss of Housing- It was discussed at the last CPS State Advisory Council meeting that individuals placed in programs such as Shelter Plus Care tend to have trouble keeping their housing when there is high case manager turn over.
 - Employment- It was discussed at the last CPS State Advisory Council Meeting that individuals in the supported employment program will have their success break down and have more difficulty finding employment when there is case management turnover.

BARRIER AND GAPS IN SERVICES FOR ST. LOUIS EMPOWERMENT CENTER PARTICIPANTS

2. Lack of Medicaid/Access to Service

- Many individuals who attend the St. Louis Empowerment Center do not have Medicaid. This makes gaining access to services often a very long and difficult road. There are several components to this problem:
 - The System is at Capacity- Most, if not all, of the Community Mental Health Centers are working at Capacity. This puts anyone seeking services on a waiting list. If the individual seeking services does not have insurance, the wait will be longer.
 - Psychiatry Shortage- The state of Missouri faces a shortage of psychiatrists working within the mental health system. This impacts the individuals served with longer wait times between appointments and often times shorter appointment times.
 - Long Wait Lists= ER Visits- Often times when a participant of the center is faced with having to wait for 6 to 8 weeks before being able to receive services, they tend to end up going to the Emergency Room.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE ST. LOUIS EMPOWERMENT CENTER AND OTHER COSP_s

The Consumer Operated Services Programs are especially grateful to Mark Stringer for his continued support and dedication to the concept of Consumer Operated Programs. Here are a couple of the challenges facing those programs:

1. No Increase in Funding when Minimum Wage Increases

Each year the amount of money that the COSPs receive remains the same. It does not take into account the increase in minimum wage. Each time the minimum wage increases, the St. Louis Empowerment Center either has to cut hours for all employees or lay off one or two employees. Currently, the Empowerment Center is only able to offer its employees 12 hours a week at minimum wage.

2. Difficulty in Finding a Place at the Table

DMH Supports the COSPs and has always offered them a place at the table when holding discussion about the mental health system. However, it is difficult for many COSPs to be seen as an equal partner when engaging with other mental health organizations.