

## **Description of the Office of Consumer Relations**

Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services (ACBHCS) responded assertively to the Mental Health Services Act's (MHSA) mandate to involve consumers in all aspects of the MHSA. In the summer of 2006, ACBHCS hired a Consumer Relations Manager. With MHSA funds, the Consumer Relations Manager hired four (4) additional consumers, altogether forming the Consumer Relations Team (CRT). The purpose of the CRT is to empower consumers to take a leadership role in transforming Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services through involvement in: Systems Change; Consumers as Mental Health Providers, including providers of Peer-run Services; Training and Education; and Consumer-Run and Peer Support.

To promote Systems Change, a major objective has been to organize and support an active grass roots group of Alameda County mental health consumers geographically representative of the County. Thus, the Pool of Consumer Champions (POCC) was created and, in just two years, has grown to over 240 consumer members. 70% of POCC members represent ethnic diversity and "underserved /inappropriately" served people. The POCC's mission is to improve the quality of life for Alameda County residents who have mental health issues and to provide the consumer perspective in transforming Alameda County Mental health Services to a recovery vision that is consumer-driven, culturally competent, and holistic in its services and supports. It provides a strong voice: of, by, and for consumers in the mental health system and in the community.. "Nothing About Us Without Us" is the POCC's overarching theme. To this end, POCC members sit on multiple ACBHCS activity and policy Committees. These include (but are not limited to) the Ongoing Planning Council, the Mental Health Board, other Committees that address substantive issues such as Cultural Diversity, Spirituality, Criminal Justice, Co-Occurring Disorders, Employment, Housing, and Transitional Age Youth. The POCC indeed provides a very dynamic consumer voice in Alameda County and especially has been very active in MHSA stakeholder processes.

Other objectives of the CRT are as follows:

Under **Systems Change**, participating in MHSA policy and program development; maximizing transformation through collaboration with other groups on issues; participating in other policy and program development and oversight.

Under **Consumers as Mental Health Providers**, providing consumer leadership in the implementation of Alameda County's WET plan; completing a strategic plan for hiring consumers; implementing the strategic plan for hiring consumers; and providing leadership for the implementation of the consumer/family employment toolkit.

Under **Training and Education**, supporting consumers to stay involved in MHSA implementation and other statewide and national consumer issues; training consumers regarding the MHSA and the opportunities it presents; and training consumers to be effective consumer representatives and spokespeople, and group participants.

Under **Consumer-Run and Peer Support**, supporting and providing technical assistance to PEERS and Alameda County Network of Mental Health Clients (ACNMHC) in their current programs (the two consumer-run programs in Alameda County); supporting the development of existing and emerging self-help programs; supporting the development of consumer-run Wellness and Recovery/Education Centers; and supporting the growth of self help/peer support throughout Alameda County's behavioral health system.