

# Starting a Consumer Run Drop-In Center

**Step 1: Realize that starting a drop-in center is hard work—running a drop-in center is even harder work**

## **Step 2—Involvement and Planning**

Consumers should be involved in planning from the beginning, not brought in later

### **Set up a taskforce/committee/team**

- Taskforce should be lead by consumers, but also should include local leaders both in and outside of mental health, including but not limited to:
  - Consumers from all walks of life
  - Local self- help/peer support groups
  - Mental Health Center Staff
  - NAMI
  - Mental Health Association
  - The local business community
  - (accountant and lawyer very helpful)
  - Local civic leaders (Kiwanis, Rotary Club, Civitan, Lions, etc.)
  - City and county official, city council, mayor, county commission
- Chose a leader/coordinator/quarterback
- Come up with a **written plan** with goals, the steps in reaching each goal and a timeline for accomplishing them
- Set up committees to accomplish each of these goals
- Meet on a regularly scheduled basis

## **Step 3: Issues to be considered and addressed by the taskforce**

First address Financial and organizational issues

- Board Of Directors
- Funding
- Financial Management And Accountability
- Incorporation
- By-Laws
- 501 C 3
- Funding for operation

**There is nothing more important to the success of a drop-in center than sound financial management and a properly functioning Board of Directors.**

## **Next address Operational issues**

Next determine what Consumers want in a drop-in center

Who will attend the drop-in center?

Will there be members or will consumers just drop-in

Activities-social, educational, peer support

Hours/days of operation

Will meals be provided?

- Staffing: Who will be in charge of the day to day operation  
Will there be paid staff? Volunteer staff
- Operating Procedures
- Rules
- Dealing With Crises/emergencies
- Confidentiality
- How will you handle complaints

## **Step 4: Once you have completed the above, you are ready to start looking for a location and start planning for opening the drop-in center**

Issues to be considered when deciding on a location

- Transportation
- Local codes
- Zoning issues
- Local attitudes-not in my backyard

## **Step 5: Once you have a location and have resolved the issues above, you are ready to prepare for opening**

At this point you must have funding for start up and operational expenses in place.

- Insurance
- Payroll and benefits
- Rent
- Utilities
- Furniture
- Activity supplies and equipment
- Office supplies & equipment

## **Step 6: set a date for opening-**

You may want to open 1-2 days per week in the beginning and increase hours as you become more experienced and work out any problems that arise.

### **Things to keep in Mind**

- Financial accountability and a properly functioning board of directors are the #1 priority. Without these the drop-in center will not succeed.
- There is strength in numbers
- Two or three people cannot start and run a drop-in center
- Minimum of 8-10 regular attendees to be viable
- Securing funds is a 7 days 12 months a year job
- You will never have enough money
- A Drop-In-Center is a business and it should be operated as such

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