Fostering Leadership: Collective Self-Determination Among People with Psychiatric Disabilities

By Larry D. Belcher, M.A., C.A.G.S. and Kathy Muscari, M.A., M.A., C.A.G.S., West Virginia Mental Health Consumers' Association, CONTAC

Abstract

Fostering leadership among people with psychiatric disabilities and identifying strategies to reach more people in regard to collective self-determination concepts are vital to create societal change. Practical engagement and educational approaches can be used to develop interest and leadership among consumers/survivors to be able to effectively address current social barriers to self-determination. Although having different styles and backgrounds, leaders share common characteristics and challenges. They realize outreach, recruitment, and planning are important to the success of an organization or group. There are empowering skill-development curricula available today, such as the exemplary Leadership Academy, which provides practical lessons on leadership and developing shared action plans for positive community change. This paper describes concepts for fostering consumer/survivor leadership, strategies for engaging people in collective self-determination activities, and educational approaches for strengthening collective self-determination efforts.

Introduction

To create positive systems and community change, grassroots leaders are needed to promote collective self-determination among people with psychiatric disabilities   Identifying strategies to engage more people with collective self-determination activities is vital for continuing positive societal change. Practical educational approaches can be used to develop interest and leadership among consumers/survivors in addressing current social barriers to self-determination.

Concepts for Fostering Leadership

Leaders have universal characteristics and challenges.

Leaders are people who establish a path and help others to move in that direction. Leaders inspire others and help create a sense of mutual purpose.   In groups and organizations, leaders guide several followers. In this dynamic of leaders and followers, everyone learns more about themselves and their own abilities. Although having different styles and backgrounds, leaders share common characteristics and challenges.

Leaders take many forms. There is no one perfect type of leader. People who are of diverse gender, age, race, socio-economic background, religion, etc. have become leaders. They all started much the same as anyone might, by growing into leadership, overcoming fears, and taking risks to speak out, to fight back. According to Si Kahn (1991) "Leaders are not born. Leaders are made through experience, work, and training" (p. 22). Fostering leadership is crucial for our communities. To make change, many leaders are needed. Recognizing and supporting people with leadership qualities is actually an essential part of being a strong leader.

Contrary to popular belief, leaders are not born, but often have experienced great losses through which they gain new chances. Some find themselves thrust into leadership positions. This is likened to the shaman archetype who experiences death in order to become the healer. In comparison, the quest of people in recovery may take them into unexpected leadership roles. Moving beyond the humiliation of our past, and throwing away shame, many times allows us to seek help and advice where once we were reluctant.

Leaders are noted for surrounding themselves with people who are "smarter" than they. This behavior evolves from the leader's desire to serve a cause and not simply himself or herself. An actual example from the West Virginia Mental Health Consumers' Association involved the CEO attempting to explain the work they did. At first he was at a loss because the consumers' organization was so new and rapidly growing. Every day involved grassroots efforts, building in a flurry of activities. Yet, he knew for the organization to show its successes it would be necessary to provide service data and outcome measurements for peer services. At the time, this was virtually unheard of. He brought together a consultant and several innovative staff members. Together, they worked to identify a process and to generate a measurement template. This combination of additional expertise and the leader's vision helped to sustain and further the organization.

Kahn lists twenty personal qualities of a leader in his book, "Organizing: A Guide for Grassroots Leaders". In this writing (pp. 25-27), Kahn states that a good leader likes people, is a good listener, makes friends easily, builds trust easily, talks well, helps people believe in themselves, lets others take the credit, works hard, doesn't get

280

discouraged too often, has a sense of her or his own identify, asks questions, is open to new ideas, is flexible, is honest, is self-disciplined, mature, sets limits, is courageous, has vision, and has a sense of humor.

It makes sense that leaders are often around people. Thus, it is essential for a leader to be able to engage in discussions, to listen, and to work well with others in joint activities. People put their trust in leaders and are willing to take personal risks on their behalf. Being trustworthy, honest, and able to understandably explain things is important. Having self-confidence and the ability to share successes is a sign of a strong leadership. Leaders are self-disciplined; they work hard and long, even when progress is slow. It takes courage to move forward. To be effective, they handle their disappointments and look to the future, secure in who they are. Leaders get others to think and speak by asking questions. In turn, leaders grow by being flexible and open to ideas and suggestions of others. They stick to the vision of making the world a better place. This can be trying at times and maintaining a sense of humor helps.

Once such instance occurred in a psychiatric hospital where consumers were advocating passionately for a seat on a research committee. The attending physician, heading up the research effort, was vehemently against it. His rationale included statements suggesting consumers only knew how to talk about themselves and certainly didn't have research-related skills. In response a consumer leader put forth a series of questions. "Who is on the committee now?" "What are their academic credentials?" "How is confidentiality handled?" "Have you ever worked with consumers conducting research?" "Do you realize many of the consumer representatives at this table have more education than your existing team?" After fumbling and failing to

provide plausible answers, the physician finally came to a new conclusion. He eventually knelt by the speaker and asked, "how can we work together in this research?"

In addition to qualities of leadership, there are needed skills. Skills are learned behaviors that can be mastered over time. The best way to learn is through experience and to focus on developing a few skills at a time. Some skills suggested by Kahn (1991, pp. 28-29) include: working with people, defining issues, holding effective meetings, understanding organizational dynamics, creating strategies, raising money, conducting research, maintaining communication, dealing with media, setting up trainings, understanding culture, developing coalitions, understanding politics, speaking publicly, and supervising staff.

This list of skills can be intimidating to the beginning leader. Strengthen the skills one knows one has by applying them. Identify areas to improve. Go to trainings and read relevant books. Get involved by working on a few skills at a time and connect with other leaders having those skills. Ask questions.

In addition to qualities and skills, leaders face challenges. Three common challenges for leaders are managing power, handling the workload, and dealing with the personal pressures involved in representing an organization.

Power of a leader is to be used to build power within the people represented, not for the sole gratification of a leader. It is easy to be affected by the status of being a leader. Meetings with top brass, television spots, speaking engagements etc., can cause an inexperienced leader to think more of himself or herself rather than the organization represented. When power becomes self-serving, it is being used

282

irresponsibly and will have negative affects. Unfortunately, time after time, people coming from an oppressed environment take on characteristics and roles similar to their former oppressors. This happens in the consumer/survivor movement. Some people use a totalitarian approach from fear of losing ground or desire for power and control. This often results in leading no one. To lead, one has to have followers.

At the same time, any grassroots initiative requires vigilance and hard work. Often leaders put in long hours, becoming overworked. They give up free time and family time, which can lead to personal difficulties. As an organization grows, more and more time is demanded to oversee activities. Delegating responsibilities is crucial to avoid stressful results. Without delegation, a leader trying to do it all may become resentful of staff, which causes additional difficulties. In contrast, working little and occasionally checking in, while expecting staff to handling everything creates problems. Discovering a time-frame that works on a long-term and regular basis is beneficial. Otherwise, burnout can occur.

Organizing is emotionally charged. Even with the best of skills, dealing with personal pressures can be overwhelming. Leaders have had marital problems, alcohol and drug abuse, stress and burnout, to name a few difficulties. As organizations grow, leadership can be criticized, challenged, and ridiculed by others. Sometimes there are physical threats and just plain being overworked and exhausted.   Kahn (p. 44) gives five tips for managing these pressures. Try to avoid overwork. Set goals that are reasonable and manageable. Develop a personal support system. Preserve time for yourself. Take time to celebrate. Role-model self-care for others coming along. Leaders have an obligation to their followers.

As suggested by Kahn (1991), Kouzes and Posner (The Leadership Challenge, 2002), agree that ordinary people become leaders. They also note that with practice ordinary people can do extraordinary things. In their study of the dynamic process of leadership, they have discovered five practices that are common to personal best leadership experiences. These practices are accessible to anyone and have stood the test of time. Best practices for exemplary leadership, according to Kouzes and Posner (2002) are to: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.

Modeling the way is about practicing what one preaches. It fits with the old adage: walk the talk. This builds respect. True leaders clarify their values and stand up for their beliefs. There must be consistency. It is important to align actions with values, showing commitment. Followers are often attracted to the leader first, then the plans. Shared values make strong organizations.

Inspiring a shared vision is about creating a common sense of future. Leaders promote vision and what might be. Leaders are forward-looking. This involves knowing about the dreams and hopes of others and having peoples' best interests at heart. They are passionate and enthusiastic about vision and values. Envisioning the future and enlisting others strengthens an organization and supports collective self-determination.

Challenging the process consists of taking risks. Leaders rise to the occasion and find ways to make transformations. Problem-solving is a big part of challenging the process. This might consist of developing creative programs, participating in legislative change, redesigning organizational structure, or starting a new business. This principle

284

supports the idea of stepping out, taking a chance. Recognizing good ideas from the people on the street, in direct service, at the grassroots level is where innovation starts. Listening is essential. There may be failures as well as successes. Each provides an opportunity to learn and grow.

Enabling others to act involves team effort. An interesting test for potential leadership described by Kouses and Posner (2002) after interviewing thousands of personal-best cases, is "the frequency of the use of the word, we." Collaboration and trust-building are important in applying this principle. Everyone involved in a project has to be engaged for it to have excellence. Leaders work to make others feel "strong, capable, and committed"…"when people are trusted and have more discretion, more authority, and more information, they're more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results" (2002, p. 18).

In managing groups and organizations, a leader may not have time, interest, or inclination to deal with every tiny detail of program operation. This is where teamwork is essential. When employees, volunteers, and/or followers keep their eye on the vision, wondrous things can occur. The CEO of the West Virginia Mental Health Consumers' Association recollects many instances where he has entered his office with an idea, but no plan. By turning to his managers, proposal writers, and/or volunteers, he has gotten results. He mentions seeing excitement in people's eyes as a connection and "aha" is made. From that point on, discussion is focused on possibilities for implementation of the vision. However, if interest and commitment is not present, the vision can be lost to uncertainty and hours of unproductive dialogue.

285

Encouraging the heart exhibits genuine acts of caring. It's about continuing on despite challenges and disappointments. It's also about showing appreciation for people's accomplishments and celebrating successes. This can be as simple as creating handwritten note or detailed as sponsoring an honors banquet. Rewards are linked to performance. Leaders make sure that works improving the organization are highlighted. Celebrations can build common identity and increase community spirit. Leaders can develop and maintain their leadership skills.

Much like Kahn (1991), Kouzes and Posner (2002), Bobo, Kendall and Max (2001) agree that leadership is developed. Furthermore, they suggest that to listen and figure out "what the potential leader's self-interest actually is and then shape the position in ways that help the leader achieve those personal goals" (p. 123) is a good strategy for organizational success. A common way for leadership to evolve is through volunteerism and committee work. Committees have tasks to accomplish and strong leadership helps get the job done. Subcommittees give people opportunities to develop leadership skills. Give new people jobs to do and celebrate their successes. Leaders break big jobs into small pieces and get someone to help with each piece. This also supports collective self-determination.

One way to maintain and grow leaders is to practice evaluations and feedback. Take time to offer helpful hints and constructive feedback. After meetings some groups hold a brief evaluation session. Sometimes this is written, sometimes it is verbal. Wrap up time at meetings is also a great opportunity to praise accomplishments and to recognize hard work. Feedback can be provided by a group and/or it can be given by a fellow worker, mentor, or coach. When done in a caring way, feedback can be

286

invaluable to the person who is eager to apply new learning. Certainly, routine

personnel evaluations are opportunities to explore ideas and concerns and to develop

helpful action plans for increasing leadership skills.

Again, one of the most effective ways to evaluate performance is to utilize a

feedback loop. Using this method in a non-threatening manner to mentor people helps

build confidence. Borrowed from training and development programs, feedback loops

can be helpful to people in recovery who previously might never have thought of

themselves in leadership roles.

Bobo, Kendall, and Max (2001) promote the concept of "rotation of roles and

developing systems for training people for new roles" (p 124). They suggest very few

individuals want to stay in the same role forever. It can be an interesting to job shadow,

to switch roles with colleagues, and to take charge for a day. In these ways,

sometimes, new talents and interests surface. It is also helpful in larger organizations to

have people who can fill in for one another. Staff development trainings and providing

access to external trainings and educational events keep people involved and growing.

Co-facilitation of skill development workshops can also refresh leaders and renew their

enthusiasm. It is suggested that using strong, skilled leaders to train others builds

leadership development into every position and keeps people from being irreplaceable.

Align personal goals with organizational goals. It stands to reason when

people's personal goals fit with organizational goals, they will be more effective and

engaged. Bobo, Kendall and Max (2001) encourage organizations to "ask leaders to

set personal leadership development goals as part of your annual goal-setting session"

(p. 124). If personal goals are not aligned with organizational goals this can cause

conflict. However, much progress can be made for both the organization and the leader who is supported and trained to reach personal goals that are in line with organizational ones. Leaders are motivated by their feelings and goals. This motivation is a great help in accomplishing organizational objectives when both types of goals are aligned.

Strategies for Engaging People in Collective Self-Determination Activities

Leaders advocate with and on behalf of the people they serve.

Promoting advocacy is one strategy for involving others in collective self-determination. Leaders in the system of mental health care are typically strong advocates. The roots of advocacy, a desire to make a difference, can be traced back to Dorothea Dix, who tirelessly worked on behalf of people with mental illness, and Jane Addams, who began the settlement house movement. These leaders were able to focus on their dreams, hold to a set of ideals, and create positive change in the world in which they lived.

Ezell (2001) states in his text, Advocacy in the Human Services, that "it is important to think of advocacy as something one does, an intervention" something beyond "thoughts, feelings, or attitudes" (p.11). Advocacy is a process whereby problems are eliminated and conditions improve for people, communities, and society. Advocates believe people have a right to quality of life, to be free from harm, and to have opportunity to grow. Advocates realize social justice remains a goal and problems are often rooted in social institutions. People want to help.

Advocacy takes into consideration peoples' experiences and unmet needs. It is a process that can be both exciting and frustrating. Ezell (2001) defines advocacy as "purposive efforts to change specific existing or proposed policies or practices on behalf

288

of or with a specific client or group of clients" (p. 23). Change is the common factor. Leaders help create change. With their followers, they work to change policies and practices that prevent attaining goals. Every advocate has purpose in her/his efforts. Skills recommended for leaders in advocacy include persistence, tenacity, and patience.

The definition of advocacy does not limit who does it. Those in the mental health movement often refer to being involved in self-advocacy, which is about creating beneficial change for oneself. Certainly, a person with psychiatric disabilities or a group of people with psychiatric disabilities can effectively advocate on their own behalf. As evidenced many times, one person can make a difference. Self-advocacy focuses on individuals and is distinguished by the fact they are doing their own advocacy work. This is what self-determination promotes. Experience gained through advocating for oneself increases confidence and helps in developing leadership skills. Tactics for self-advocacy include such things as letter-writing, requesting a meeting, researching an issue, and asking for better services. People can be supported and encouraged to speak on their own behalf

Systems advocacy is about changing policies and practices that affect all persons within a group. According to Ezell (2001, p. 28), systems advocacy can be considered the same as class advocacy (which comes from the legal term: class action). When people take collective action on their own behalf this is also known as class (or systems) advocacy. Leaders having advocacy experience can help facilitate the empowerment of others. There is strength in numbers. Several advocates can engage in collective self-determination to create positive societal change. Tactics for

systems advocacy include negotiating with agencies, monitoring, giving testimony, and influencing administrations.

As important as advocacy is in serving the class, it is imperative a good leader heralds advocating for those things which are truly meaningful to the people being served. In 1998, the West Virginia Mental Health Consumers' Association gathered two hundred consumers active within this organization. During a two-day period, a list of values was collectively determined and described. These identified values continue to serve the organization as a guide for all decision-making. They are in the policy and procedure manual. A leader in touch with followers honors their collective values. Problems arise when the values of those seeking and needing advocacy are not the same as the leadership.

Community advocacy involves a particular group of individuals affected within a given community. This type of advocacy is about educating the community, defining and documenting problems, and organizing the community to take action. Community advocacy emphasizes changing ideas and attitudes. Tactics for community advocacy include education and media campaigns, interviews, direct contact, and workshops. People involved in community advocacy may not know each other, but have similar problems or needs. Leaders who are community advocates benefit from cultural awareness, a willingness to learn about behaviors and beliefs. According to Ezell (2001, p. 27), "the groups whose cultures are of great concern to advocates are generally those who have suffered the consequences of oppression and discrimination, predominately people with disabilities, women, older people, people who are poor, gays and lesbians, and ethnic and racial minorities." Engaging people in collective self-

290

determination as evidenced through various forms of advocacy is crucial to create societal change.

Leaders recruit through mutual trust, interdependence, and broad membership. In organizing, "we move from individual to the group" (Kahn, 1991, p. 97). People have to decide they want to be part of an organization and to advocate for change. Leaders build on personal relationships and recruit others who want to make a difference. There is much work to be done to help create a just society. Development of skilled leaders is an ongoing activity.

To lead, there has to be followers. A leader often begins by cultivating a group. Through personal contacts it is easier to tell what individuals are thinking and feeling. Initially it is helpful to bring small groups together. Kahn suggests making a list of people and to decide where and when to see each person on the list. Think of where people gather naturally in order to make contacts. Sites might include churches, school, work, supermarket, barbershop, restaurants, bus stops, bowling alley, etc. In recruiting others, be prepared to answer common questions, be aware of the issues, and how people feel about them.

To foster leadership, look within the organization. Look for people who have shown commitment and reliability. Watch to see who gets along with others, is motivational, and follows up on his or her commitments. Encourage people to work with leaders, to learn the ropes. As others go through the processes involved in leadership, they develop their own leadership skills. It is the sign of a good leader to develop other leaders. Use the principle of direct representation and create opportunities to gain experience.

<u>Leaders recognize people want to put time and effort into useful projects.</u>

Recruiting people and getting them involved is a big part of organizing. It's the way that groups are built and collective self-determination starts. People feel more ownership and commitment when they are part of planning and implementing. They want to know they are involved in activities that are truly beneficial. The simplest technique to get people to contribute their time, effort, and money into projects and activities is to ask them. While leaders appreciate staff efforts, they also recognize that volunteers are a key component of success. Volunteerism is strong in American life. It's a familiar tradition for people to care about their communities and to be concerned about issues. Leaders realize people need to know that their contribution matters. It is important to explain goals and action plans in a compelling way that inspires people toward the vision. As indicated by Bobo, Kendall, and Max (2001), people join organizations to work on issues that personally affect them, for career interests, power, because it's the right thing to do, and sometimes to promote their own interests. Orient others clearly to the mission and activities of the group so they understand how they might fit.

Volunteer groups can be quite effective in gathering in-kind contributions. Volunteer hours, donated materials, and valued resources create an impressive "budget". The volunteers themselves make all the difference as they capitalize on contributed time, energy, and resources. Accelerated growth leads to the need for paid employees. Sometimes an amazing and often troublesome shift occurs when a group based on volunteerism acquires funding. When paid skills are not combined with group values the atmosphere of an organization changes. Early on, the vision is the prize;

292

later, the paycheck often becomes the prize. This can be challenging to a leader eager

to focus on mission, honor organizational history, and return to the original passion of

volunteers following a vision.

One person does make a difference. Organizations are built one person at a

time. "Often, it's the action taken by just one person, sometimes someone who has

never done anything like it before, that is the spark to set off a major organizing

campaign" (Kahn, 2001, p. 19). In effective organizations, each person has a role to

play, a job to do. As noted previously, matching personal goals to organizational goals

builds success. To engage people in collective self-determination activities, they need

to believe they are important to the cause and part of creating change. Each person is

unique. Find out their special talents. Some have connections in the community,

contacts that might be useful. Others belong to various networks, such as churches,

social groups, community organizations that might host a meeting or participate in joint

efforts. In contrast, others may be more solitary and enjoy editing reports and

producing media releases, writing letters, or making phone calls.

When engaging others, listen to them, obtain commitment and be sure to follow

up.   Be mindful of building long-lasting relationships for the organization. Get to know

people through conversation and establishing rapport. Learn about their interests and

concerns by asking questions and providing acknowledgement and support. Tie

people's interests to mission and vision. Organizations have needs that can be

addressed by engaging people's interests and talents. When working with others, it is

wise to get a commitment from them. This is part of action planning. What will they do,

what additional resources might they need, and when will it be accomplished? When

working with others and developing action plans, follow up. Keep track of people and

let them know you are glad to have them involved. Be sure to pay attention to new

people. Bobo, Kendall, and Max (2001, p. 117) offer tips on keeping volunteers, noting

that, "recruitment has to be backed up by an organizational plan, with clear goals and

expectations of what volunteers will do." They suggest, "getting people to work as soon

as they arrive" and to have a "variety of things to do". "Recruitment is the lifeblood of an

organization" and "growing, thriving organizations must train staff and leaders on how to

recruit others and build recruitment strategies into their ongoing program work." It is

important people feel their time is appreciated and that they are needed.

Approaches for Strengthening Collective Self-Determination Leadership

Lessons can learned from psychiatric rehabilitation.

Generally speaking, rehabilitation is about reducing negative affects of

psychiatric disabilities in a person's everyday life. Psychiatric rehabilitation emphasizes

and builds "on the healthier features of the person: his or her strengths and interests"

(Pratt,et. al. , 1999, p. 38). Recovery from mental illness is the vision of psychiatric

rehabilitation whereby individuals find meaning and purpose in their lives, moving

beyond their illnesses.   Anthony (1993) states that "recovery is what people with

disabilities do".

Embracing the goals and values of the psychiatric rehabilitation approach can be

useful in supporting personal empowerment and thus strengthening collective self-

determination. According to Pratt (1999) goals include: recovery, community

integration, and quality of life. Values include: self-determination, dignity and worth of

every individual, optimism, capacity of every individual to learn and grow, and cultural

sensitivity. A key psychiatric rehabilitation principle is that skills combined with supports can bring success. Pat Deegan (1988) suggests that the task for the individual is the creation of a new self-image that incorporates the fact that the person has a mental illness. The task of a group of might be to help create a positive image in the community, raising awareness about the many contributions that people with mental illness can and do make.   Deegan (2001) notes that, "recovery is not the privilege of a few exceptional clients"…"we can now tell people the good news that empirical data indicate most people do recover". With this in mind, it is important to build skills and supports for every person.

Building skills and supports is especially beneficial when working with volunteers in an organization. This may be someone's first work experience. Vision and values of recovery are often eagerly embraced. A leader understands the initial investment of skills teaching will enhance vision and purpose. Support, as long as needed, will serve the organization well. Skills teaching is one thing, but attitudes (values) cannot be taught.   This affects collective advocacy readiness and successful outcomes in the consumer/survivor movement.

Readiness is a factor often discussed in the psychiatric rehabilitation approach. Readiness assessment is about evaluating whether a person is ready to enter into a process that has chance for success. Cohen, Farkas, and Cohen (1992), mention five factors in determining readiness.   They include need for change, commitment for change, environmental awareness, self-awareness, and closeness to others. These factors can be related to collective self-determination. How ready is the group to enter a process that has a chance for success? Is there need, commitment, levels of

295

awareness, and mutual support? If so, there are several possibilities for next steps. One such possibility is taking part in a Leadership Academy.

Lessons can be learned from consumer initiatives: Leadership Academy.

"As consumers become proficient with advocacy skills, they are better able to impact the planning and provision of mental health and support services at the state and local levels" (Hess, Clapper, Hoekstra, Gibison, 2001). This is part of the rationale behind the exemplary Leadership Academy training. The Leadership Academy, begun in Idaho and further developed in West Virginia, is a three-day training for consumers of mental health services that emphasizes empowerment and collective self-determination.

Lessons in the Leadership Academy include such topics as: "Conducting an Effective Meeting", "Identifying Issues", "Working with Culturally Diverse Groups", and "Developing Clear Goals and Plans for Action".   Applying principles of adult learning, which include flexibility, goal-orientation, building on participant experience, and providing practical information, the Leadership Academy shows the participant examples of each lesson, tells step-by-step how to do the activity, and provides opportunity for participants to practice skills in a safe learning environment. There is a graduation ceremony and an expectation that after the Leadership Academy people will continue to network, develop action plans, and work together to create community change. Some examples of staying in touch include quarterly graduate teleconferences, annual leadership conferences, retreats, support groups, and town meetings.

This skill-building curriculum changes the way participants relate to their environment. Through the Leadership Academy, advocacy groups become "empowered

296

to take action steps designed to significantly affect their environment and the development of the mental health services system". Especially beneficial, as reported by participants, is the ability to network with others, gain support, and increased confidence. In addition, participants felt learning the advocacy skills, leading groups or meetings, and gaining useable knowledge to make a difference in their communities were important parts of the Leadership Academy. "In a 27 months period, graduates took 1,345 action steps to address issues of concern, with 400 outcomes, ranging from the establishment of a speakers bureau to starting a respite facility" (Hess, Clapper, Hoekstra, & Gibison, 2001) Skill development and outcomes are important aspects for leaders to consider.

Sabin and Daniels (2002), describe the Leadership Academy as "a prominent program for strengthening consumer advocacy skills, as a model of skills training and a source of practical lessons on improving managed care and the mental health system itself" (p. 405). Graduates of the Leadership Academy have worked together in writing letters, going to meetings, raising funds, and becoming involved on committees and boards. They have seen outcomes of their collective self-determination, such as opening a respite care facility, development of anti-stigma education programs, and forming coalitions. In West Virginia, graduates of the Leadership Academy help to strengthen the statewide consumer network, hold quarterly conference calls, conduct trainings, and host a Leadership Academy conference. This helps to link the graduates in common initiatives. Consumer voice and ongoing support are basic to the Leadership Academy. As suggested by Sabin and Daniels (2002), follow-up networking activities reinforce learning and support its application.

297

Lessons can be learned from consumer initiatives: Mental Health Recovery Education and WRAP.

Support, hope, advocacy, self-responsibility, and education are key concepts of recovery, according to Mary Ellen Copeland (1997), founder of Mental Health Recovery Education and WRAP. WRAP is about wellness recovery action planning. Creating positive change starts one person at a time. WRAP is a self-maintenance strategy that helps people to manage their symptoms and incorporate ways to stay well. Based on values of choice, respect, and dignity, mental health recovery education and WRAP has been shown to improve self-esteem and coping skills, while reducing crisis and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. With renewed faith in self, leaders are emerging who tell compelling stories of how they have had a turning point in their lives and give a message of hope and recovery.

Mental health recovery educators, working from ethics and values as described by Mary Ellen Copeland, are teaching others and building networks composed of various stakeholders in the system of mental health care. This approach takes one from attention to personal self-determination to discovering the benefits of collective self-determination. Mutual support and interdependence are encouraged by WRAP participants in order to move forward, addressing challenges and celebrating successes. There is now an emphasis on using mental health recovery education and WRAP in organizational development, providing instruction for systems of mental health care, including service providers, educators, consumers, and consumer supporters, etc. Leaders are encouraged to participate.

Lessons can be learned from consumer initiatives: Advocacy Unlimited, Inc.

Based in Connecticut, Advocacy Unlimited, Inc., (AU) is an organization that is dedicated to promoting self-determination for persons with psychiatric disabilities or people who are in recovery. Advocacy Unlimited holds the "belief that individuals with mental health disabilities should have the full rights, opportunities and expectations for a meaningful and personally satisfying life afforded to all members of society" (Advocacy, Unlimited, 2003, online). To accomplish this, AU has an advocacy education program that teaches skills for consumer leaders that can be applied in shaping policies and services. In the spirit of collective self-determination, AU's strategy is to develop a network of educated consumer advocates through the state of Connecticut.

Advocacy Unlimited, Inc.'s advocacy education program consists of an intensive fourteen week semester, with a seven hour class each week. After graduating, advocates attend bimonthly classes to help support their efforts. Participants commit themselves to volunteer six hours a week for six months at an agency or clubhouse of their choice. While there, they arrange presentations and workshops relevant to advocacy. Skills learned in this program are applied toward system change. Advocates form an empowered network interested in working together to shape policies and services relevant to their lives. Outcomes provide strong evidence of the power of collective self-determination.

<u>Lessons can be learned from consumer initiatives: Alternatives Conference,</u>

Leaders value opportunities to improve their skills and learn new information. Attending educational gatherings, meetings, workshops, conferences, and classes are all venues for increasing knowledge. Not only do leaders attend seminars, they teach

them. One of the important tasks of a leader is to nurture new leadership, which can be done by providing educational and skill-building opportunities.

Once such learning opportunity is the Alternatives Conference, which has been in existence nearly twenty years. According to the Center for Mental Health Services, which helps to fund the conference, it's purpose is to provide a national forum for consumer/survivors to meet, exchange information and ideas, and provide and receive technical assistance on a variety of topics of interest. It transfers knowledge on best practices in mental health and support services. The information and knowledge gained at the Alternatives conference can help consumer/survivors to advocate for effective individual treatments and services, as well as for broader care and service system improvements.

Attendance at Alternatives has averaged nearly 900 participants who represent states across the nation and occasional visitors from other countries.   Institutes, workshops, caucus events and plenary sessions are all part of this event. Participating in events, such as Alternatives, is a significant way to learn from people with life experience who are making a difference in the system of mental health care. Participants range from founders of the consumer movement to people who are attending for the first time. In this instance, knowledge is power. People have opportunity to network, share ideas, and learn new skills. Collective self-determination among people with psychiatric disabilities is evident in the planning and implementation of a national conference such as Alternatives.

Conclusion:

Leadership can be fostered by recognizing there are common characteristics and challenges for leaders, leaders have an obligation to their followers, and that leadership skills can be developed and maintained. People become engaged in shared self-determination activities through various levels of advocacy, by attention to common values, and because they want to be involved in useful projects. Collective self-determination can be strengthened through educational approaches including psychiatric rehabilitation technology and consumer/survivor programs, such as the exemplary Leadership Academy and Mental Health Recovery Education and WRAP. As leaders learn and grow, so can their followers.

References

Advocacy Unlimted, Inc. Building a grassroots network of mental health advocates across Connecticut from the inside out. (n.d.). Retrieved August 1, 2003, from http://www.minklink.org/about_phil.html

Anthony, W. A. (1993). Recovery from mental illness: The guiding vision of the mental health system in the 1990's. Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal, 16(4), 11-23.

Anthony, W. A., Cohen, M. R. & Farkas, M.D. (1990). Psychiatric rehabilitation. Boston: Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston University.

Bobo, K., Kendall, J., Max, S. (2001). Organizing for social change: Midwest academy manual for activists.   Santa Ana, California: Seven Locks Press.

Cohen, M. R., Farkas, M. D., & Cohen, B. (1992). Training technology: Assessing readiness for rehabilitation. Boston: Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Copeland, M.E., (1997). Wellness recovery action plan. West Dummerston VT: Peach press.

Deegan, P. E. (1988). The lived experience of rehabilitation. Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal, 11(4), 11-19.

Deegan, P. E. (2001). Recovery as a self-directed process of healing and transformation. Retrieved August 15, 2003, from http://www.intentionalcare.org/articles/articles_trans.pdf.

Ezell, M. (2001).   Advocacy in the human services. Belmont, California: Wadsworth / Thompson Learning.

Hess, R. E., Clapper, C. R., Hoekstra, K. et al: Empowerment effects of teaching leadership skills to adults with a severe mental illness and their families. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal. 24:257-265, 2001.

Kahn, S. (1991). Organizing: A guide for grassroots leaders. (revised edition). Silver Spring, Maryland: NASW Press.

Kouzes, J.M. & Posner, B. Z. (2002). Leadership Challenge (3rd Ed.). San Francisco, California: Josey-Bass.

Sabin, J. E. & Daniels, N. (2001). Strengthening the consumer voice in managed care: IV. The Leadership Academy program. Psychiatric Services. April 53(4):405-406, 411.