

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF RESPECT

Transcom's Position Statement on Employee Self-Disclosure in Mental Health Service Workplaces

As members of the Massachusetts Transformation Committee (Transcom), we support the vision of a state-wide network of activities and services driven by the wisdom and needs of people in recovery from mental health conditions. We believe in the value, utility and inspiration that comes from hearing another human being share his or her personal story. As research and experience supports, people are more inclined to build and sustain their efforts at recovery and rehabilitation when they are encouraged by those who have been challenged by similar circumstances.

We are committed to the ongoing development of respectful interactions within our own environment, the mental health service system. We look forward to a time when the disclosure of a mental health or substance abuse condition within the workforce is not associated with shame or bias.

OUR PURPOSE

This statement is intended to encourage organizations to fully support and value all staff who wish to share their own triumphs and challenges from a variety of realms. An open environment where diverse life experiences are shared is necessary to the success of staff who disclose that they live meaningful lives with mental health difficulties.

By encouraging responsible and open exchange, we hope to inspire inclusion and a culture of respect for people with mental health conditions, not only within the mental health workforce, but within society as a whole.

A number of organizations have thought about these issues and support and recruit employees who disclose their mental health conditions. We are encouraged by their leadership. We hope that this statement stimulates energetic dialogue about policies and practices related to personal disclosure in every workplace.

THE WORKFORCE OF PEOPLE IN RECOVERY

Many individuals in the workforce have mental health conditions and many do not always feel comfortable or welcome to share their expertise. We recognize that agencies and employees are at various stages of awareness about the benefits and responsibilities of a work culture which values the experience of people in recovery from mental health conditions. Advocating for the support

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of personal disclosure means confronting long-standing principles that advise against personal sharing which are still practiced by many organizations and professional schools. While recognizing that this perspective might be new for many, we endorse a system that views voluntary, personal disclosure within the context of helping relationships in a positive light.

Disclosure of a mental health condition by employees can be a complicated issue at every point in the service system, including for those who provide and use services, supervisors and funders as well as teachers and students in professional training programs. It is a worthwhile effort! The sharing of human difficulties and limitations by staff helps to create a system where these experiences are not seen as the monopoly of clients. As with any communication in the workplace, we expect that decisions about disclosure to clients will be considered thoughtfully and be based foremost on the needs of the people who are using services. In all cases, we expect that self-disclosure will continue to be a choice which is personal and voluntary.

In addition to workers in a variety of positions in the field who use self-disclosure to assist others, the system now includes staff who are expected to disclose and have clearly identified “peer” responsibilities. In Massachusetts, efforts are underway to recruit, train and develop a statewide workforce of Peer Specialists, people with mental health conditions who are hired to draw on their personal experiences to promote recovery.

APPRECIATION FOR PIONEERS

People who have chosen to self-disclose with care and consideration at their jobs and those entering the workforce as Peer Specialist are true pioneers. Such employees are actively participating in creating a more inclusive, open, and empowering work environment. Peer Specialists, in particular, experience the joy of helping others while facing the tremendous pressure of breaking new ground in an extremely demanding field.

Transcom appreciates the strength and resilience of both Peer Specialists who are “the first” to work in the system and other workers who are “the first” to disclose in their organizations. It will be critical that organizations develop and share innovative training, supervision and other practices to meet the employment needs of Peer Specialists. We recognize that employers will need to be creative as they nurture and support all workers who encounter the inevitable challenges that come from being in the forefront of change.

Endorsed unanimously by members of Transcom February 23, 2007

Transcom Membership

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Role</u>
Karl	Ackerman	Transformation Center Board Member, MDDA-Boston
Moe	Armstrong	Peer Educators Project
Chris	Busby	Consumer Quality Initiatives (CQI)
Linda	Cabral	Center for Health Policy and Research (CHPR)
Clara	Carr	Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP)
Deborah	Delman	M-POWER / Acting Director, Transformation Center
Jon	Delman	CQI
John	Deluca	MassHealth Behavioral Health Programs
John	Frazier	MOAR and CQI
June	Gross	MBHP
Steve	Hahn	Mental Health/Substance Abuse Corporations of Massachusetts (MHSACM)
Sara	Hartman	MHSACM
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Betty	Maher	Mass Rehab Commission (MRC)
Eric	Masters	CHPR
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Michael	O'Neill	DMH
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