

# Mental Health Consumer Network, Inc.

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<b>Project Title</b>	Warmline Expansion
<b>Grant Description</b>	To increase the capacity of the consumer Warmline for Hamilton County, Ohio
<b>Focus Area</b>	Severe Mental Illness
<b>Region Served</b>	Hamilton County, OH
<b>Award Amount</b>	\$52,500
<b>Year Awarded</b>	1999
<b>Grant Duration</b>	33 months
<b>Results</b>	<p>The expansion of Warmline (a peer support telephone line) involved adding another paid consumer on each shift so that there would be two staff available for Warmline calls 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. In the end, due to recruitment and retention difficulties, the Network was only able to increase the Warmline coverage an additional 16 hours per day.</p> <p>The Mental Health Consumer Network:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• expanded the capacity of the Warmline by hiring additional consumer staff. Two people now staff the Warmline 16 hours per day, and one person staffs the other 8 hours. The Network employs 28 part-time consumer staff for the Warmline.</li><li>• gathered key information on each Warmline call. The Warmline staff complete a three-page phone log on each call, enter the information into a database, and prepare quarterly reports.</li><li>• secured committed permanent funding from the Hamilton County Community</li></ul>

Mental Health Board.

The evaluation had five components:

1. The project staff added a question to the phone log of each call that asked the consumer what he or she would have done if there had not been a Warmline. A sample of 34 calls showed that the most frequent response was to call a friend or family member (47%) or a professional (29%).
2. The project team conducted a survey of case managers that asked if the Warmline is helpful to them and their clients. Forty-five case managers completed the survey. The survey showed that 78% of the case managers know about the Warmline and of these, 93% make referrals to it. The changes the case managers noticed in clients who used the Warmline were that the clients felt less isolated (45%) and clients called the case managers less often (24%).
3. The project team administered an empowerment scale to new consumer staff as well as consumer staff who had been working for at least seven months to see if having employment made a difference in confidence, optimism, and sense of control. No pattern was present between the length of time as a Warmline worker and the empowerment scale score. The sample was too small to detect significant differences.
4. The project staff had no way to measure the effect of the expansion on busy signals since Cincinnati Bell no longer offers the call analysis service. However, the number of calls going through to the Warmline went from 13,010 calls per year before the expansion to 21,600 calls per year after the expansion. The staff still receive complaints that the Warmline is frequently busy and take measures to

deal with this problem. All calls are limited to 20 minutes, and callers are limited to one call to the Warmline per four-hour shift. Also, if the Warmline is busy, the caller receives a message to call back.

5. Project staff have collected some case vignettes:
  - A well-educated family man who was depressed called the Warmline for support. He later wrote to tell the staff that he wanted them to know how much their encouragement meant to him. He had decided to kill himself, but made a call to the Warmline and after the call decided that life was worth living.
  - A case manager reported that one client was calling her so much she had trouble handling clients who had more serious crises. The case manager referred her to the Warmline. The client now calls the Warmline frequently. The client's calls to the case manager have decreased, freeing the case manager for crisis situations.
  - A woman with bipolar illness had very low self-esteem. She took a job as a staff member for the Warmline. She performed her duties very well and regularly received positive feedback from Warmline callers. Her confidence increased and a year later, she started taking college classes in social work. She continues to work on the Warmline and go to school.

Some of the learnings of the project staff:

- "Even small agencies that seem to have

the odds stacked against them can grow and be successful in helping others."

- It is important to make sure that consumer staff take care of themselves. The consumers are limited to working five shifts per week in order to prevent burnout. The Warmline staff meet monthly and offer each other "a network of support to process difficult situations and blow off steam."
- The Warmline staff continue to struggle with the complaints about not being able to access the Warmline and are continually looking for ways to address this.
- Many Warmline staff have gained confidence and skills to go on to other employment or educational pursuits.

The team presented "How to Run a Successful Warmline" at the Ohio Advocates Conference in Canton, Ohio, in August 2003. In 2002, the Hamilton County Community Mental Health Board recognized Joan Cluxton, the Warmline supervisor, as the consumer advocate of the year for her work.

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