Sonoma County has nearly a half million residents and serves about 9,000 adults and children with behavioral health challenges. Our community is collaboratively very committed to wellness initiatives.

The Sonoma County Wellness and Advocacy Center in Santa Rosa opened its doors in April 2007, under the Community Supports and Services of the Mental Health Services Act. We are a peer-run and managed Wellness Center with 10 staff members-all employees with lived mental health experience. The Center is open to anyone who identifies as having mental or emotional challenges which have significantly impacted their lives. People refer themselves, or are referred by community health providers, mental health professionals, outreach workers, or family members. Our foremost focus is to create a safe and welcoming environment, where people can work on their own recovery journey in the ways that they choose. Over 2,000 individuals have joined the Wellness and Advocacy Center during the last six years.

The Center offers peer counseling and support groups, employment assistance and computer classes along with an Open Art Studio, organic gardens and a variety of community meetings as well as a place to gather and socialize.

Sonoma County also recently implemented a new Consumer Relations Program. This program consists of a Consumer Affairs Coordinator, whose mission is to reach out to and engage people who are currently un-served, under-served or inappropriately served as well as bring the client’s voice to the Dept. of Behavioral Health. The Consumer Education Coordinator is charged with creating more opportunities for peers to be employed in the mental health workforce. Beginning in September 2012 the Education Coordinator has met with contract mental health agencies along with County Behavioral Health and has begun analyzing their environments for recovery orientation and their readiness to integrate more people with lived mental health experience into their employment. The Consumer Affairs Coordinator has catalyzed an energized time, for changes within the Mental Health System and communities at large. While we have come a long way, there is still a lot of work to be done.
Give Input to Next 5 Year WET Plan at Forums

The Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD) wants feedback on the next MH Workforce Education and Training (WET) Five-Year Plan, to guide the development of public mental health workforce strategies – at state, regional and local levels – toward an integrated mental health service delivery system via 14 community forums in May and June. See center of this page for schedule and WWT Talking Points for these forums. Click here to view the entire flyer including the addresses and times.

There is $138 million at stake. Napa, San Diego and Ventura Community Forums have already taken place. Please lend your voice to these crucial forums leading to important conversations. See center of this page for the addresses and times.

Click here to view the entire flyer including the addresses and times.

WWT Talking Points for Forums:

- The Mental Health Services Act calls for the integration of consumers and family members at all levels of the mental health system, including as providers of services.
- This inclusion is a recognition that strictly clinical and medical model services are not sufficient to build resiliency in families and children or assist individuals to recover from mental health challenges.
- Individuals managing a mental health challenge and families supporting children and adult family members benefit from support by someone who has had a similar life experience.
- In California, there is no established statewide standard for hiring, training, supporting or defining the scope of practice for Peer Support Specialists.

WWT dollars should be spent:

- To continue and increase funding for WWT as the only state-wide collaborative working toward the inclusion of consumers, parents and families into the mental health workforce.
- To support a statewide effort to further develop a State Certification Program for Peer Support Specialists—consumer, youth, parent, and family Peer Support Specialists, including specializations in forensics and whole health.
- To develop a certifying body, certification requirements, further develop curricula, codes of ethics, values and principles, scope of practice, training requirements, necessary supports on the job and preparing the existing workforce.

WWT Summit for State Peer Certification

The WWT Statewide Peer Certification Summit will be held on May 17, 2013 in Sacramento to provide stakeholders an opportunity to review and give input on recommendations for statewide certification of peer providers in public mental health and integrated care settings and who have consumer, family member, transition-age youth and parent/caregiver expertise. While the registration is now closed due to meeting capacity limits, WWT is working on having the summit webcast. In our next issue we will report on the Summit and final stakeholder recommendations to the State.

Greater Bay Area Regional Training May 15

Seats are still available for the Greater Bay Area Regional Training on May 15, in San Mateo for “The Emerging Peer Role in Mental Health—Wraparound Systems Change and Family Partnerships” facilitated by Connie Burgess Consulting and Associates. Click here for the Registration form on the WWT Website.

Deborah Van Dunk, 916-643-1530 ext 105, is the Technical Assistance Coordinator for the Greater Bay Area.

Central Region Request

As I travel the 20 counties of the Central Region, I am most proud of the successes of the peer-run wellness centers—the activities, the resources, and the marvelous interaction between peers. Yet, I must confess – my bewilderment of the interwoven elements, which serve as the very foundation for success of each wellness center I visit. Please help me to identify two key elements that contribute to the successful nature of your peer-run wellness center. Send your brief paragraph to me, Ron Shaw at: ron.shaw@namicalifornia.org, describing two key elements that ensure making a difference in the lives of individuals on their road of recovery. Best wishes to all peers working, volunteering or dropping by wellness centers.