

# Advocacy and the mentally ill



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

When needed medical treatment is not made available, those who suffer often end up homeless, and frequently cycle in, and out of the judicial system because their behavior is mistaken as criminal instead of as a mental illness that can be treated given proper services are provided. Traditional Advocacy Services Advocating services for the mentally ill most often involve raising awareness by influencing legislation to make policy changes through educating the public about the facts of mental illness and rebuffing common stereotypes and negative views often associated with mental illness.

The effort is typically centered on changing rent and ineffective policies so proper treatment and equal opportunities can be provided to those who suffer. Putting pressure on policy-makers for increased support, "denouncing stigma and discrimination, and fighting for improved services"

(World Health Organization, 2003, p. 3) are common services for advocating for the mentally ill. Barriers to Service Delivery Numerous barriers exist that continue to affect delivery of needed services for the mentally ill.

Many of those barriers relate to lack of available mental health services, or the inability to pay because of rising out of pocket expenses. Quite often there is no link made between mental health and physical health. Mental health is not regarded with the same importance as physical health which often results in misdiagnosis or lack of any diagnosis. Stigma attached to mental illness affects service delivery by causing exclusion and lack of adequate mental health policy implementation.

Although some of these barriers are now easier to overcome than decades past, they still exist today requiring increased advocacy efforts

toward education and awareness in effort to change the perceptions of society on mental illness. Advocacy Services Available There are numerous advocacy services available ranging from services that advocate for the same basic rights those who do not suffer from mental illness receive. For example, Advocates Inc. Was founded in 1995 to assist the mentally ill homeless secure housing by offering legal advice and assistance as well as clinical referrals, and finding benefit entitlements (Advocates, Inc. N. D. ). Active Minds is an organization devoted to stamping out societal stigmas attached to mental illness, as well as nurturing and inspiring future "generations of mental health advocates" (Active Minds, 2013). Lastly, and possibly the largest and most well-known advocacy organizations is the National Alliance on Mental Illness, otherwise known as NAME, which offers a number of advocacy services including addiction treatment, services that fight against budget cuts that put tremendous strain on providing proper mental health services, as well as unemployment services just to name a few (NAME, 2014).

Emerging Social Issues Preventing Service Delivery Some of the major emerging social issues preventing service delivery to those suffering from mental illness relate to factors in the workplace which prevent promotion, and workplace issues that have a large impact on the mental health of the employee's within. Companies are beginning to be forced to take a harder look at the workplace environment and how it affects mental health. Steps are slowly integrated to focus on "promoting good mental health" (Harness & Gabriel, 2000, p. ) in the workplace and new policies are created requiring employers to accept responsibility for a workplace environment which may

have a negative effect on an employee's mental health. Integrating new policies that require employers to treat someone suffering from mental illness the same way they treat someone suffering with physical illness has not come easily. A history of overlooking mental illness, or mistaking it for what has often been called " stress" in the workplace makes the process of helping to change the past negative thoughts often associated with mental illness a slow process.

In essence, these new policies are requiring organizations to change the way think, which is not always easy given decades of false and misleading information about mental illness. Evolution of Advocacy Advocacy had evolved into its own specialized field Just like medicine and politics, for example. It has gone from centuries past when someone first made the decision that someone needed assistance that person should have been getting but was not, so an idea was put into action to help that person get that assistance. Whatever that need may have been, or that idea or the century may never be known.

Maybe a neighbor noticed that his or her widowed neighbor was only able to provide a meal for her children Just a couple times a week. So it was decided that if business owners were asked to offer up one five cents a week, that widow would be able to feed her children daily. This may be a long example; nevertheless, it could possibly be the first Human Services effort at advocacy. Today, it has expanded to a relentless effort for equal rights for members of society who may have physical or mental disadvantages and thereby labeled " different by society for centuries.

Because of this labeling, the opportunities and rights of these individuals have been "different," unequal, and unfair. These indifference's have become normal and almost unrealized to members of society who are unaffected. Of the few who are unaffected, but do realize these rights that are withheld from certain individuals, we helping themselves possess the same opportunities, and quality of life that anyone else it entitled too. As long as there is a person who does not have access to anything in life that someone else has, but should, advocacy will continue to evolve and change lives.