

National Consumer Advisory Board



# NCAB Newsletter

## **Chairs Report**

Welcome! It has taken us a long time to pull this together, but here we are. My Name is Ulysses Maner, and I am the chair of the National Consumer Advisory Board (NCAB) for Health Care for the Homeless (HCH). I live in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. I have served at the national level for about four years, and at last year's conference in New Orleans, I was elected chair of this wonderful committee. On the local level, I have served on our advisory board for six years, and currently serve as chair. Before I go any further, I would like to say that one of the reasons why we put this newsletter together is to have a way for HCH consumers to communicate with each other across the country. We want to use this as a tool to put together a network to help each other with any board problems that we may run across. So I hope you enjoy the newsletter.

## **Good Turn Out at HCH Conference**

I just wanted to mention a few words about this year's consumer turn out at the conference last June for the Health Care for the Homeless. WOW!!! I was impressed. We had our first Consumer 101, held on the Wednesday before the conference. There was standing room only thanks to HRSA, which provided funding for your local CABs to send consumers to the National Health Care for the Homeless conference. It was so wonderful seeing a lot of consumers (over 40!) at the conference. Our presence was

definitely felt. I hope we can double the participation of consumers in the 2005 HCH Conference.

I am really gearing this message to the site directors. Please help the consumers have a voice in their health care by matching the funding HRSA gives you for consumer travel. They send one. You send one. So directors, step up to the plate and let's out do last year.

I really want to say thank you to HRSA, John Lozier, and Jean Hochron for always making the consumers feel so welcomed. I would also like to thank the fair city of New Orleans for opening their hearts and doors to us in 2004. I really enjoyed the jazz funeral for homelessness. Thank you!!!!!!

## **Voting: It's Your Right**

At the last conference, HCH sites around the country were encouraged to set up booths at their sites to get the homeless registered to vote. I spoke with a consumer from Boston who said they had a great turn out. The Health Care for the Homeless team's booth in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, thanks to Mel, Nadine, and Julie, was a success. If your city did one, send me an email or fax, and I will publish it in the next issue of the newsletter.

*-Ulysses Manner, Fort Lauderdale FL,  
NCAB Chairman*

## **Boston Consumer Advisory Board**

The Boston Consumer Advisory Board is about eight years old. When I sat down to write this article, I was surprised to realize that it had been that long. It seems like just a few years ago that I was asked to join the CAB. We have become an integral part of Boston Health Care for the Homeless, so it is hard to remember when we didn't exist.

Our CAB meets monthly, on the third Thursday of the month. We always meet at McInnis House (our Respite Center). We usually have a guest speaker-sometimes it is a member of the staff, telling us about their department. Other times it may be a person that CAB needs to get information from. For example, we had been getting complaints from consumers about the hospital pharmacy. It was taking four to five hours to get a prescription filled, and some consumers complained that the pharmacy staff was not polite to them. The CAB requested a meeting with the director of the pharmacy. The meeting caused some changes to be made at the pharmacy and some training for pharmacy personnel. The wait has shortened some, and consumers now have a fuller understanding about the large number of prescriptions that must be filled each day.

The Executive Director of the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program meets with the CAB on a regular basis. He brings his advocacy agenda to the CAB before it is presented to the Board of Directors. The CAB will sometimes add items, and we always rank the agenda in terms of importance to consumers.

One of my favorite times of year is the Christmas Holidays. Our CAB visits with families who are living in motels (awaiting family shelter slots). Santa and Mrs. Claus (along with several elves) spends time with the children, distribute gifts, taking photos

(which are given to each family). The CAB really looks forward to that time of year.

It is also at this time of year that we look back at the past year with an eye to what we have accomplished. (This is done by going back over the minutes). It helps to recharge your batteries when you can look back with pride and realize that you have made a difference in the life of the consumers in your program.

*-Ellen Dailey, Boston MA, NCAB Secretary*

## **One Success Story**

Hi, my name is Debra Geldart, and I'm 38 years old. I am someone who, due to circumstances beyond my control, became homeless almost a year ago. I applied to many housing places to help me, only to be put on waiting lists everywhere. This was very frustrating, having to find people who would let me and my dog, (who is my kid), stay with them sometimes, just for a night. It was hard, especially being someone with a terminal illness (HIV).

Trying to maintain my adherence to my meds was hard. The stress level, at times, was very high. Trying not to be stressed was very hard. Then, finally in April of 2004, I got the word from HOAP (Homeless Outreach Advocacy Program) to start looking for a place. That was kind of hard because no one wanted a dog. I finally found a place and was able to move in on the first week of March.

I was not a druggie or someone who looked to be homeless. I had a run of bad luck with houses that I moved into being put up for sale; and the new owners wanted the old tenants out. I can tell you that I never want to be in this situation ever again, so I do what I have to do to keep a roof over my head. I am responsible. Thank God for programs like HOAP!

*-Debra Geldart, Worcester MA*

## Another Success Story

In 1999, I moved to Kalamazoo, MI from Denver, CO to be closer to family members. I remember thinking to myself, “here I go again”, another city, another shelter and yet another stab at sobriety. I’d lived on the streets and in shelters for the past 10 years and I wasn’t certain if this attempt would be any different. I lacked a place to stay or food to eat. More importantly, was that I lacked self-esteem and self-respect. I’d lost both of those attributes from not being able to take a shower on a daily basis and too ashamed and disgusted to look in the mirror at the reality of what my life had become. I was spiritually, mentally and physically ill. I’d been in an abusive relationship before I arrived in Kalamazoo and the scars were visible. I suffered from chronic withdrawal symptoms from alcohol, which resulted in seizures. I had hepatitis C, a fractured shoulder and permanent uncontrollable "shakes" that made me look and feel as if I were about to leave this world at any moment. To make matters worse, I had no health insurance and had almost welcomed death as a solution to my seemingly hopeless situation.

Someone at a local mission suggested I call HCH to make an appointment to get help for my “problem.” I’ll never forget that phone call. I was nervous and crying. I didn’t think I was making much sense, but obviously, I was. *I couldn’t dare let anyone see me in the condition I was in. My gosh, my hair was matted and my breath smelled like 5 day old whiskey.* Since I was fairly new to town, I didn’t know where the HCH office was located and made a feeble excuse about not being able to make the appt. However, the outreach worker took time out of his day to pick me up so a doctor could see me. Not only that, this same outreach worker (the late Joe McClean) took me to get x-rays and drove me to a local detox center 4 or 5 times. (My blood alcohol level was

alarmingly high— .606, so the detox center suggested I be hospitalized first.) This outreach worker believed in me more than I believed in myself at the time. I thought I was only going to be seen by a doctor, received medications and that would be the end of it. Ha! I was dead wrong. The staff at the HCH actually called me “Miss” Moore. Wow! Being treated with dignity and respect were foreign to me, especially having lived on the streets and being viewed as a second-class citizen.... *only much lower.* Not much dignity and respect floating around...that’s for sure.

I was grateful beyond measure for what HCH did for my life. They not only nurtured the physical pains, but started to “fix” the emotional ills as well. I wanted to “give back” in some small way, so I began to help out and speak with the local HCH social worker quite often. I then found myself on the governance board of our local Family Health Center and on the local HCH Consumer Advisory Board. I went to my first National HCH Convention in my old “stomping ground” of Denver in 2000 and have made every convention since. In fact, I was living in a shelter at my first HCH convention and spoke out at various workshops. There were clinicians, staff and doctors there who actually listened to us “homeless” folk. Wow! They actually cared! Two years ago, I was elected co-chair of the NCAB (Nat. Consumer Advisory Board). I consider this position both an honor and privilege.

I am no longer homeless and am the Director of a homeless shelter in Kalamazoo, MI and able to give others what was so freely given to me----a little dignity and respect.

Thanks, HCH! You saved my life!  
-Veronique Moore, Kalamazoo, MI, NCAB  
Executive Committee member

## A Poem by Ladelle Cole

I was headed for sure destruction, I didn't even know,  
where I would end up or where I wanted to go.  
I am free, free to be who and what I want to be.  
How do I know that I am free?  
Let me explain and you will see.

I used to rely on a substance to help me fly.  
It used to call to me and say I will get you high.  
All that time that substance was a lie.  
I was headed for sure destruction, I didn't even know,  
where I would end up or where I wanted to go.

Until God came into my life and said, "You no longer  
need to sin,  
but you have to want to change, and change comes within.  
But I understand your troubles and the life you lived.  
Give your pain to me, and peace I will give.  
As long as you trust; and whatever you need,  
I will provide, because I am your Father you see."

So, no matter what happens from this moment on,  
God has made me free and He is with whom I belong.

Author: Ladelle Cole  
Consumer Consultant for the SAMSHA Homeless Families Project

### **Send Us Your Stories**

We need you!!! Hopefully, in our upcoming issues you, the readers, will send in your personal stories, poems, and articles regarding how you started your HCH Consumer Advisory Board and how it is running today. We are very interested in the various ways that HCH projects get consumer input regarding their operations. Please also send any helpful comments on what you would like to see in the newsletter that might help others. Please write us at [ncab@nhchc.org](mailto:ncab@nhchc.org).