



Florida Peer Network, Inc.

An independent organization of and for people who are recovering from a psychiatric disability

I apologize that I cannot be with you in person today. Sometimes life puts up a stop sign and you need to listen to it. What is not making it difficult for me is that I know the person that is reading this for me believes in what I have to say.

I have never been a person that speaks of statistics as I have always spoken from my heart and lived experience. Because of this I hope you will understand why I will be saying some of the things I am about to say.

I know several of the workgroup members in person and can say that I would trust them with my life. I feel safe to say they know who they are. I only hope that they will not be stifled with what they suggest should be done with this alarming matter that we all face.

The one statistic I will give you however is that I have been on many advocacy boards and there has always been a ratio of 51 – 75 percent consumer and family members on those boards. While I understand in today's society it isn't always easy to come forth and say you are a consumer, I then must believe that there is only one consumer who is on this workgroup since that is what has been reported. I keep hearing this voice saying to me "nothing about us without us", "nothing about us without us".

With this said I would like to make a suggestion that either consumers and family members be added to the workgroup or since we have eight (8) members that are representing ALF's that four (4) of them step down so that consumers and family members can take their place. If you need assistance in finding family members or consumers I will be more than happy to help with this.

I have had the opportunity to visit some of the facilities around the state and have wondered why we have allowed this to go on. I have been told the people living in them should be happy they have a roof over their head. I became homeless and had to live in a homeless shelter, and yes I thanked God everyday that I had a roof over my head. The difference being it was clean, I didn't have to worry about being abused or taken advantage of and

yes if something did happen with one of the other residences I was not afraid to say something.

I have spoken with several peer specialists around the state and they indicated to me that most of their peers are afraid to say something for fear they might be retaliated against. A suggestion I would like to make in this regard is to have peer specialists assist with monitoring these facilities. If the problem is that we do not have enough staff to be doing this then use peer specialists. I think the residents would feel more comfortable speaking with someone other than a government official. During this crisis I personally feel that a visit to the facilities should be monthly to make certain the residents are doing well.

There are enough advocacy organizations in our state that this would be able to happen. I am so shamed that we have allowed this to happen in our state. I not only feel a responsibility to my peers but to the senior population in our state. I am only hoping that you also understand what it is like not only for the person that has to live in these facilities but for the families that have no other choice but to place their family member in one of them. When they do this they are thinking their family members will be taken care of. The articles that have been written about some of the horrible acts that have been allowed to continually happen in these facilities should anger us all.

I ask myself how have we allowed this to happen, how have we become such an immoral society and allow our fellow citizens to have to live like this. These are the most vulnerable citizens who need our help the most. In some of the facilities that I visited I had to hear how they were making no money and we were difficult to work with. Well I question the group, if none of these facilities are making money then why do we have almost 3000 in our state? Also perhaps some of us are difficult to work with, but does that give anyone the right to abuse us.

I lived in one of our state hospitals for over three years and had horrible experiences with the night shift. When my father came to visit I was in tears about what they were doing to me. He went and spoke with the doctor and complained about what was going on. The doctor told me not to worry he would see that it was taken care of. I begged him not to say anything because I was afraid of retaliation from them. He said something and yes it got worse. I would have given anything if peer specialists were in my life

back then. Think of how a frail senior must feel when being mistreated. Is this how we should allow them to have to live their final years.

Please do not let this be a workgroup that comes up with wonderful ideas on how to handle this crisis and no one listen. Please put consumers and family members on this workgroup. Please tell the Governor to prove the media wrong and allow the workgroup to do the job and stop allowing our fellow citizens to have to live in fear.

I have brought up peer specialists throughout my statement and for a good reason. It has been proven how talking with your peers has aided in the recovery of their peers. We have over a thousand (1000) peer specialists in our state and they need to be put to good use. I will help in any way I can and I know they would also.

We need to prove to our vulnerable citizens that we do care, that we are a moral society and we will not rest till we are sure they are being taken care of as any of us would want to be treated.

Again I offer my help in any way it is needed.

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