

## Evaluation of Outcomes Related to Participation in Consumer Run Organizations

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Consumer Run Organizations (CRO) are an important peer support/consumer-delivered service that has the ability to positively impact community integration and recovery outcomes. Understanding how to establish positive and respectful long term partnerships to promote research and the stability of these organizations is important. Since 1999, the Self-Help Network (SHN): Center for Community Support and Research has had a working partnership with the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS); Division of Mental Health Policy, and 20 Consumer Run Organizations (CRO) across Kansas. The development of this partnership involved both research and capacity building related to CROs which has allowed for outcome evaluation to better understand how CROs can be most helpful to their members.

This Statewide Implementation and Validation of Mental Health Consumer Operated Programs Research has two major goals consistent with the State Based Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices. The first was the assessment of CROs as naturally occurring, nontraditional helping resource in the community, where persons with psychiatric disabilities determine their roles and CRO services. The second was collecting outcome data to help move CROs from being considered an emerging best practice to an evidence-based practice.

Kansas has 20 state funded CROs and there is much diversity among these CROs (i.e., frontier, rural and urban settings, populations served, diversity and number of members, leadership style, collaboration with community partners, etc). One goal of this research was to establish a "best practices" set of characteristics that result in the best outcomes for members and the solvency of the organization. More specifically, three objectives were addressed: 1) Development of a best practices model of organizational functioning, 2) Determine fidelity to the model, and 3) Assessment of a quality improvement process that incorporated feedback from CRO members to improve the best practices model.

In order to collect data to help move CROs from being considered an emerging best practice to an evidence-based practice, an outcome evaluation of CRO members was begun to better understand how CRO involvement impacts members. In addition, this research further investigated the relationship between specific organizational characteristics and member outcomes. The objectives were 1) To document the effectiveness of CROs and estimate the effect size of member outcomes and 2) Further refine the CRO "best practices" model by examining the relationship between organizational characteristics and member outcomes.

Initial findings have shown there are a number of aspects across the CROs in this research thought to contribute to community integration and recovery including: 1) a culture of mutual-help among members, 2) strong sense of community within the membership of CROs, 3) positive organizational health that encourages participation, 4) ample opportunity to become involved in the organization including helping others such as providing peer support or staffing a warm line, 5) genuine ownership and management of the CRO by primary consumers, and 6) shared

leadership in the development and operation of the CRO. At an individual level, early positive outcomes of participation in a CRO include 1) greater confidence and control of one's life, 2) greater levels of competence, 3) greater independence, 4) more effective in both daily problems and crisis situations, 5) improved ability in social situations, 6) better use of "leisure time", and 7) better relationships with others including family. While these and other early results of this long-term evaluation are promising at an individual member level, the relationships between the "best practice" activities of CRO and these positive outcomes provide empirical support for CROs being able to contribute to recovery in unique ways that complement but can not be offered by the professional public mental health system.