

## The Power of WRAP as a Transformative Recovery Tool within Community Mental Health Settings

Over the past two years, following my certification as a WRAP Facilitator at one of Mary Ellen Copeland's Brattleboro Vermont week-long workshops, I have focussed my energies on introducing WRAP within a variety of community mental health settings in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. As part of my contribution to this book I want to share with you the power of WRAP as a transformative recovery tool. Starting with a pilot recovery project in a small case management agency, the positive experience from this project has ultimately led to requests for WRAP programs in another much larger case management agency, a supported housing agency, a consumer/survivor initiative, a family support agency, and a supported employment/education program connected with case management services. In effect, Toronto now has the nucleus of a network of recovery-based services within a major Canadian city despite the fact that the overall provincial/national mental health system follows a predominantly traditional medical model. WRAP then is providing a much needed tool to transform mental health services to a recovery orientation from the grassroots upwards.

The first WRAP group conducted in Toronto was in a small case management agency called **Alternatives** in June 2004. True to its name, this agency was actually the first community mental health service in the city to decide to offer an "alternative" to traditional case management services, namely a survivor-run self-help group program grounded in mental health recovery values. Three WRAP groups, each eight weeks in duration, were run over the

fall and spring of 2005. Participants who expressed an interest in learning to facilitate WRAP were offered opportunities to “shadow” in a subsequent WRAP group. Depending on their comfort level, they were encouraged to lead discussions and record brainstorming sessions on flipchart paper among other things.

As part of the closure process for each WRAP group, participants were asked if they would like to continue meeting on a regular basis. The majority said yes so a weekly Peer Support program was introduced. In an effort to integrate WRAP values within this new Peer Support group, it started with an initial six work sessions based on the Mead & Copeland workbook “Wellness Recovery Action Plan & Peer Support: Personal, Group and Program Development”.

Reflecting back on this year long process of introducing recovery programs at Alternatives, it is interesting to note that when WRAP participants were asked which program they would have chosen to attend first, they all indicated that WRAP was their #1 choice – if Alternatives had offered Peer Support initially, they said they would not have come out. It was only following their very positive group experience with WRAP that their attitudes and interests changed toward peer support. A number of folks mentioned that their previous experiences with peer support groups had mostly been negative because these groups seemed to be dominated by illness and problem-laden conversations. In addition, another recent positive development at Alternatives has been a series of workshops organized by one of the WRAP graduates – topics are wellness and recovery-oriented.

The next agency to seriously consider implementing mental health recovery principles was a large supported housing agency called **Houselink** ( with over 400 members and 55 plus staff). Over the course of 2005 they asked me to lead three WRAP groups in several of their apartment complexes. Simultaneously I conducted three 12 week recovery education series for all their front-line housing workers and management. A Recovery Workgroup of over 50 members and staff has evolved from both the WRAP and staff training process. This Workgroup's task is to provide leadership in integrating recovery values throughout all Houselink policies and programs.

Some interesting developments to date have included the decision to hire a Recovery Wellness Worker (rather than another housing support staff) from amongst their own members, who will help initiate recovery programs, like WRAP and Peer Support, within all their housing units. Workshops on nutrition, exercise, and healthy weight loss are being planned as well as “knowing your medications' side effects”. They have set up a Recovery Resource Centre for members and staff and plan to provide content for a new Wellness/Recovery section created in their regular newsletter to members.

A second case management agency, **Community Resource Connections of Toronto (CRCT)** decided to follow Alternatives' direction and asked me to introduce WRAP groups in three of their locations across the city. One group was designated “Women Only”, as part of a homeless women's project, and another was offered to a predominantly Asian population in Eastern Toronto. A Peer

Support group has recently been initiated as well as a regular speaker series on wellness topics selected and facilitated by their own clients.

In May 2005 the **Krasman Centre**, a unique consumer/survivor initiative (csi) located just north of Toronto in Richmond Hill, made the commitment to have their staff of five and all their Board members be introduced to the WRAP program. Early in 2006 I returned there to conduct a WRAP Facilitator Training Workshop. Now the Krasman Centre is not only scheduling WRAP sessions at their own premises but they are also receiving requests to run WRAP groups at local community mental health centres and supported housing facilities in the area.

The Krasman Centre is presently creating a Recovery Resource library of articles, books and videos and has plans to offer recovery-based Peer Support and WRAP training to other consumer/survivor initiatives in the near future. What also makes the Krasman Centre quite unique and a wonderful role model for other csis is the fact that they also offer a family mental health recovery education series and ongoing support for families as well. They are truly recovery-based in every sense of the word.

Not long after I began to facilitate WRAP groups in the agencies mentioned above, I was hired by the **Family Outreach & Response Program (FOR)**, a small family support agency in Toronto, as their first Family Recovery Resource Worker. My primary task is to develop curriculum and training for mental health recovery education in a family setting. This education is mainly for families dealing with mental health challenges as well as family support workers and

other mental health providers. The current 8 week recovery education series has one session devoted entirely to Self-Care and its here that we introduce families to WRAP. They are especially encouraged to take information about crisis planning to their family members and to support their choices wherever possible. This Fall, as a pilot project, we are planning to offer a WRAP series for families coming for their own individual support as well as a workshop on WRAP planning for families as a unit.

The final agency where WRAP has been instrumental in bringing recovery values to service delivery is a supported employment/education program, called **WIN (Work Initiatives Network)**, located within a small case management agency. Throughout 2006 I will facilitate four WRAP groups, each 8 weeks in duration, which consumer/survivors from five partner agencies can use as a preparation for their entry into the WIN job counseling and placement program. The primary goal of these sessions is to offer consumer/survivors, who are contemplating a return to school or work, an opportunity to engage socially in group discussions, immerse themselves in a safe learning environment and, most importantly, learn relaxation techniques and coping strategies to deal with anxiety and employment related issues.

To date feedback has been very positive – WRAP graduates say they are better prepared and feel more comfortable going into job counseling sessions. The WIN providers report a noticeable difference in their confidence and readiness to engage in back to work/school planning.

In summary, from my own perspective, I believe the WRAP groups have provided a “kick start” to the recovery process within these various community mental health settings. On an individual level, WRAP appears to be helping folks get “unstuck” and swinging the focus on to their own personal wellness. Each group has been unique in its very own way and has created numerous opportunities for “case managers” to observe their “clients” grow in ways they hadn’t previously believed possible. Indeed WRAP is proving to be a very effective catalyst for recovery-based change in a variety of community mental health settings.