

## **Grassroots Empowerment Project-United We Stand Wisconsin Wisconsin's Statewide Consumer Network**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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This project serves to support reentry and community integration of criminal justice-involved consumers through the development of a forensic peer specialist model in Wisconsin. Using Participatory Decision Making GEP will facilitate monthly meetings with individuals from multiple stakeholder groups to develop a model for forensic peer support. GEP will then train criminal justice-involved consumers and support them as they provide peer support.

United We Stand WI (UWSW), Wisconsin's statewide consumer network (SCN), is a program of Grassroots Empowerment Project Inc. (GEP) and formed in 2009. Since that time, the network has grown and become a powerful voice promoting recovery through peer support, service provision, healthy communities, and developing strong partnerships for change.

UWSW serves adults and youth in transition throughout WI. Anyone who identifies as a mental health consumer or with mental health and substance abuse issues is welcome. The membership is as diverse as the communities in WI. Currently there are over 1000 consumers listed on the database, over 300 participating on the listserv, and over 100 members attend annual events.

The main components of United We Stand WI's work over the next 3 years will be: Using the Participatory Decision Making framework, GEP will target three areas of the state to bring stakeholders, criminal justice-involved consumers, families, advocates, corrections staff, and law enforcement together to discuss the needs of criminal justice-involved consumers returning to communities and living in institutions. These regional groups will collaborate to establish guidelines and requirements for criminal justice-involved consumers to become forensic peer specialists. These groups will also conceptualize what forensic peer support looks like in WI. (Average group will include 5 criminal justice-involved consumers, 5 family members/advocates, and 5 corrections staff, law enforcement, and/or other stakeholders.)

GEP will train 75 self-identified criminal justice-involved consumers living with a mental illness to provide forensic peer support throughout the state of WI (30 in year 2 and 45 in year 3 of the grant). GEP will work with community partners, jails, community corrections, diversion courts, and others to explain the concept and market the value of forensic peer specialist support.

GEP anticipates that the trained forensic peer specialists will be employed and working in their capacities during the third year of the grant. GEP will also continue Empowerment Days for 100 consumers to meet with policymakers and discuss mental health systems improvements, and communicate with members through social media, listserv, and quarterly newsletter.