



## Prosumer peers inspire hope, will to live among those recovering from mental illness

By Janet Paleo and Anna Gray

It has been said that peers and peer pressure can transform the world. Prosumer peers have shown this to be true with people with a mental health diagnosis.

Peers who are in recovery from their mental illness have been shown to be effective role models and supporters for those who have not yet found new ways of living their lives and coping with their mental illness.

The Prosumer peer model is innovative in that it focuses on a person's aspirations and goals as a way to overcome the barriers to achieving those goals. Thus, the person becomes proactive in their recovery and is encouraged to give back to the community to assist others to find their path to recovery.

The Prosumer program was founded by Janet Paleo, who herself was diagnosed with a severe and persistent mental illness and who found herself hopeless. She felt helpless to change her life, as do many people with mental illness.

Like many patients, Janet's first hospitalization for her mental illness was two years long, with upwards of 50 hospitalizations in the next 10 years. However, she was fortunate to find people and opportunities that started her on the road to recovery.

As she began getting better and involved in life, she found that there was a mental health consumer movement that was international in scope. Her passion took her all over the world, and she found that people in recovery had a recurring theme: volunteering as an avenue to help them in their recovery process.

Since this also was part of her story, Janet, along with Anna

Gray, created a local movement that incorporated volunteering along with empowerment and encouragement to help people find their path of recovery. This movement is called Prosumers. The program, using a model of resiliency, has demonstrated success as many of its members are back at work, holding jobs or going back to school.

**The Prosumers have some exciting offerings for members. These include:**

- the Prosumer Action Center, 1921 Burnet St., San Antonio, where members can be assisted in finding resources in the community;
- daily classes offered in computer skills, resume development, and job searches;
- a job readiness program in a safe, understanding environment to revitalize the skills necessary to go back to work, and
- a Recovery 101 class that teaches members how to work with their doctors, what their rights are and how to realize that a diagnosis of mental illness does not have to rule your life.

The Prosumer group helps identify the positive choices in life that lead to the outcomes of recovery. Ultimately, Prosumers inspire hope and the will to live, thus reducing the need for crisis services, regular services and medication. More than that, people have found that they can achieve their dreams and live a life that they love. Recovery is possible.

*For more information, visit [www.ProsumersInternational.org](http://www.ProsumersInternational.org).*