

Fact Sheet

What is In Our Own Voice?

Description: In Our Own Voice (IOOV) is a unique informational outreach program developed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) that offers insight into the recovery now possible for people with severe mental illness. Started by a grant from Eli Lilly and Co, in 1996, the goals of IOOV are to meet the need for consumer-run initiatives, to set a standard for quality education about mental illness from those who have been there, to offer genuine work opportunities, to encourage self confidence and self esteem in presenters, and to focus on recovery and the message of hope.

Presentations: It is natural for people living with serious mental illness to speak about their personal journeys to recovery. Thus, IOOV presentations consist of compelling and personal testimonials, a short video, and time for audience questions and discussion. Target audiences include consumers, mental health service providers, families, students, law enforcement personnel, professionals, faith members, and all people wanting to learn about mental illness.

Growth: Since the inception of IOOV more than 3,000 presenters have been trained to conduct presentations, and the program is active in 41 of the 50 states. More than 270,000 audience member have been reached.

Research: Studies now show that contact between people who have mental illnesses and the general public is the most effective way to reduce the discrimination and stigma associated with mental illnesses (Corrigan & Penn, 1999). An article published in the peer-reviewed *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* concludes that “there is strong evidence that NAMI’s ‘In Our Own Voice’ consumer education presentation is effective as a strategy for increasing audience knowledge about mental illness and improving attitudes towards those who experience psychiatric disorders.” (Wood and Wahl, 2006)

What are people are saying about IOOV?

Presenter: “Participating in the IOOV program is the single most effective thing I am doing to maintain my mental health.”

Psychology Professor: “They were able to communicate to the students what dozens of hours of lectures on psychopathology could never do. This is something that can’t be learned by memorizing a list of signs and symptoms.”

Law Enforcement Official: “The consumers who spoke really educated me. I have been employed in hospitals for a decade prior to becoming a police officer. I never had a chance to hear the consumer’s thoughts, lifestyle, their stories - even though I have spent ¼ of my life working with people who suffer from mental illness.”