

In Memory of Sally Zinman
1937-2022

How do you describe the 40-plus year career of one of the most influential and persistent consumer/survivor advocates in mere words? With a great deal of respect, love and admiration.

Sally, one of the founders of the California and national consumer/survivor movements, insisted that the public mental health delivery system emphasize choice, self-determination, recovery, inclusion and peer support. She led the effort to establish the first consumer-run drop-in center in California in Berkeley. She was the founding executive director of the first statewide consumer advocacy organization in the nation (CA Network of Mental Health Clients) and was instrumental in achieving a long-held goal to recognize the legitimacy and value of peer support and peer support workers with the establishment (finally) of the Peer Support Specialist certification in California.

A recipient of many awards, her national reputation earned her the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Voice Award for lifetime achievement and the Clifford Beers Award granted by Mental Health America.

Sally, along with Jay Mahler (and others), have been long-standing allies of CASRA as we share a vision of what a recovery-oriented delivery system should look like. A system built on hope and voluntary alternatives to forced treatment and involuntary 'care.' CASRA, the CNMHC along with Disability Rights CA (formerly Protection and Advocacy) and the CA Mental Health Patient Rights Advocates formed CARES (Coalition Advocating Rights, Empowerment and Services) in the early 1990s to fight expansion of forced treatment including outpatient commitment. While other statewide organizations supported these efforts to some degree, CASRA was the only provider organization to join the coalition.

The Community Residential Treatment System Act (1978), sponsored by CASRA and carried by then Assembly member Tom Bates, was the first legislation in the nation to articulate the core principles and practices of a recovery-oriented system. In addition to describing community-based alternatives to institutional 24-hour care settings (e.g., hospitals, psychiatric health facilities, and skilled nursing facilities), it also emphasized the importance of vocational and employment services to support economic self-sufficiency and most notably, the need to hire persons with 'lived experience' at all levels of an organization. To paraphrase Jay Mahler – 'nothing about us, without us.'

Her legacy continues with the successful recruitment of Andrea Wagner and Mary Hogden to take the helm at CAMHPRO. The California Association of Mental Health Peer-Run Organizations was her latest effort to ensure a statewide voice for the consumer/provider movement.

For those of us who have known Sally for over 40 years, we are deeply saddened by her passing but eternally grateful for the pleasure and inspiration she has given us personally and professionally. She joins an amazing group of consumer/survivor advocates who have kept us honest and focused on what is important to best serve the people of California who turn to the public mental health system for help.

Thank you, Sally. We miss you.