

Regional Funding Application

Application for Consumer-Operated Mini-Grants

For individuals and consumer-operated programs in Northern Virginia

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Part 3. Status of Applicant

3-A. Briefly describe your organization.

I'm retired and a freelance writer. I have a mental illness--bi-polar disorder and paranoia--which has figured in my life for the past 37 years. It hit me at the peak of my career, as environmental assistant to the U.S. Senator as he founded Earth Day in 1970. Since then the illness has cost me nine jobs and two marriages, with one psychotic episode after the other.

It is only in the past six years that the illness has been properly diagnosed and treated, beginning with a six-week stay in the hospital, with intensive psychotherapy and the application of a new medicine regimen. Even then, the condition lingers, with high moods and frequent paranoid thinking.

Another major, but more positive factor in my life has been writing. After reporting jobs with two newspapers, I took the environmental job with the Senator. The speeches, articles, and press releases I wrote for his name were instrumental in launching Earth Day, involving millions of people. With the psychotic breakdowns which ensued over the years afterwards, however, I wasn't to write successfully again until the late 1990s, when, as a free lance writer, I placed five opinion pieces in major newspapers, including two in *The Washington Post*.

I have had a less public writing and publishing career, which I believe could become more meaningful to me and to others. It began in my teens and has continued throughout the hard times and the good ones. This form of writing has been in poetry, and its focus has been on the topic of mental illness, particularly as I have had to struggle with the condition.

My position as the Senator's environmental assistant during Earth Day involved planning, organizing, speaking, and media relations, as well as the writing. My later editorship of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's magazine gave me a ten-year look at the printing business as well as planning and putting together a publication. My recent volunteer work organizing courses for the Shepherd's Center, a community of older adults in Vienna-Oakton, has exposed me to intensive contact work with potential speakers as well as to the presentation of material in class.

Part 4. Proposed mini-grant project.

4-A. Describe the proposed project

I believe I could touch a significant number of consumers in Northern Virginia with the application of job experience which I have acquired over the years, even with interruptions by the illness, and with the resources of this grant. This project will include:

1. **Publishing A Poetry Book-** I would publish a book of poems to be distributed to other consumers. I have already had the experience of putting together and reproducing a simple 81-page book of my typed poems. With the help of a print shop, 40 bound copies were made with clear plastic covers. The cost was modest: \$160. The preparation for reproduction was done by a friend on his computer. With more sophisticated equipment and upgraded computer skills, it would be an easy step for me to repeat the process of self-publishing, albeit in larger quantity (and lower per unit price).
2. **Distributing Poetry Books and Other Poetry by and for Consumers -** I would distribute free copies of this book, and other poetry journals written by consumers. In the past, I distributed the 40 copies of my poems primarily in the Unitarian church to which I belong. The reaction was uniformly one of interest and support, encouraging me to consider wider distribution. Then I have had the idea of sharing the poems with other consumers, a thought which has been triggered by my learning that at least two publications are written for those like me. They are *The Awakenings Review* and *The Open Mind Quarterly*. In fact, I have come to believe that the greatest potential value of the poems is not in some kind of renown for me, but in what they have to offer to those struggling with illness themselves. In this same spirit, I would seek other writings on mental illness to share with consumers, using my journalistic and research skills to locate such resources.
3. **Running Consumer Poetry Groups -** I would approach organizations such as LEMC, EXCEL, NAMI, and PRS, proposing that I organize groups of consumers to read and discuss the poetry of mental illness. My writings could be a source to consider as well as other sources I had located (Some funds would be necessary for the limited purchase of these other materials.).
4. **Writing About Mental Illness -** As part of this project, I also plan to write newspaper opinion pieces and Letters to the Editor on timely topics regarding mental illness, potentially reaching wide audiences in the reading public, consumers included.

5. Training - For feedback as my writing is under way, a course at the Bethesda, Md., Writer's Center would be useful. A computer course is also needed to upgrade my skills.

4-B Describe the target population in your community that will be served and how it will benefit from your project

The road to empowerment is through self-understanding. My goal would be for the poetry to reach and motivate consumers in Northern Virginia, aiding in their insights and inspiring them to write poetry themselves. My poems could be of benefit to fellow consumers by offering them my struggle for self acceptance. Thus, I would not present myself as a "good" writer to be appreciated, but as a person who is using words to challenge himself and to grow.

Some of my poems reflect the very depths of human pain. Thus, there is one with the title, "The Paranoid Terror." And another with the title, "On Psychosis." Others are hopeful, such as "Feelings." And "The Labyrinth." Also, there are three poems printed in *The Awakenings Review*. Thus, more than a simple chronicle, the poems are philosophic and reflective, and perhaps above all, they portray the struggles one can experience with mental illness, but also the optimism with which one can cope and prevail.

I ask myself: Could these poems be an education and inspiration to persons living with a condition such as mine? Could my life, as I have fought to express my writing ability in the face of the illness, be encouraging to others? I am ready to seek answers.

4-C What critical need of the target population does your project address? How will it help to meet that need?

The need is to write, and in writing, to realize and heal oneself, and to cope. Partners in this process--fellow group members, for example--would give it validity and inspire it. The consumers' groups will be very much like the writer's workshops at the Writer's Center, which I have participated in. In these groups, participants gather round and read and discuss their work, under the guidance of a mentor, who is invariably a writer. Most of the actual writing is done at home. Often, the mentor makes available copies of pertinent articles and makes reference to books of interest. But the core of the program is the person doing the actual writing, on the assumption that classmates will seek to support and encourage, rather than criticize.

Writing isn't a tool for everyone, but to my knowledge, there is no writer's group for any consumers in Northern Virginia. Thus, these groups would fill a need among those who enjoy and benefit from writing. In fact, a key element of this project would be to advertize the groups and invite consumers to attend.

In their very existence, the groups would complement the other mental health programs in the region, working in cooperation with them for space, contact with consumers, and involvement in programs.

“Sharing” is a key word in describing this project--sharing one’s creativity in a nonthreatening environment, writing one’s way to wellness in the company of one’s fellows. Writing because of the need to write, filling a vacuum that I believe exists in the area.

Part 5. Staffing and Budget

5-A. Amount requested: \$2430

5-B. \$2130 (minimum amount acceptable)

5-C. Not applicable.

5-D. Not applicable.

5-E. Budget:

Proposed Budget

Item	Amount	Description	
Computer and Printer	\$675	A computer and printer to replace my troubled equipment are needed, so that I could prepare materials for the print shop and search the web.	
Software	\$300	For computer	
Training	\$450	For two courses. A computer course is needed to update my skills. For feedback as my writing is under way, a course at the Bethesda, Md., Writer's Center would be useful.	
Office supplies	\$150		
Mileage	\$100		
Printing	\$450	For 150 copies of my poetry book to distribute to consumers. Work in a print shop would be necessary to bind and print poems.	
Materials	\$175	For other poetry books and magazines to distribute to consumers.	
Telephone	\$130	For long distance phone calls to other writers and groups	