

ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMERS'  
SELF-HELP CLEARINGHOUSE HOUSE:

- **INFORMATION AND REFERRAL**

The Clearinghouse handles thousands of inquiries annually concerning the needs of the consumer/survivor movement. Consumers, family members, professionals and other interested people request information about everything from locating local groups to how to get more involved in the self-help movement. We have contacts who provide technical assistance in over forty states, in Puerto Rico, Canada.

- **ON-SITE CONSULTATION**

The Clearinghouse provides on-site consultation for self-help project development.

- **TRAINING EVENTS**

The Clearinghouse has organized several national conferences and national and regional teleconferences, and co-sponsored several additional national conferences. The Clearinghouse provides trainings that focus on issues affecting consumers/ survivors. Training topics include fundraising, leadership development, public relations, self-help group development, and many others.

- **CONSUMER LIBRARY**

In addition to the pamphlets and manuals listed inside, the Clearinghouse has compiled a library of materials of over 100 topics including: How to Organize a Self-Help Group, Public Relations, Fundraising, Recruitment, Newsletter Development, Advocacy Techniques, etc. These materials are available for a nominal fee that defrays the costs of printing and postage.

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## HOW TO DEVELOP A CONSUMER-RUN NEWSLETTER

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**“Knowledge is the key to open new doors.”**

## Bibliography

**Brigham, Nancy, with Ann Raszmann and Dick Cluster, *How to Do Leaflets, Newsletters and Newspapers*, c/o PEP Publishers, P.O. Box 289, Essex Station, Boston, MA 02112.**

**Gordon, Robbie, *We Interrupt This Program..... A Citizen's Guide to Using the Media for Social Change*, Citizen Involvement Training Project, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Massachusetts at Amherst.**

The length and the type of layout you use are important in determining subscription cost. You should compare your newsletter to other, similar ones to determine a fair price.

For the Project Overcome newsletter, *Voices*, the general price for annual subscriptions usually is \$10 to \$20. Low-income individuals pay from nothing to \$5. Instead of charging other consumer-run newsletters for a subscription, Project Overcome has found it of mutual benefit to exchange newsletters. That way your organization can keep up with developments in the consumer movement in other areas.

*Your Choice*, the newsletter of the National Mental Health Consumers' Association, is available free to NMHCA members.

If you are not charging for a subscription, you can distribute your newsletter by hand. Look for storefronts and offices your audience is likely to visit. Try cafeterias, variety stores, supermarkets, social service centers and hospitals, schools, unemployment offices, Laundromats and City Hall. Ask permission to leave them; otherwise they may be removed and thrown away.

**Good Luck With Your  
Newsletter!**

# How to Develop a Consumer-Run Newsletter

By  
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## Why Publish a Newsletter?

Mental health consumers are organizing all over the country. They are becoming aware that they have a voice and are capable of demanding and getting many needed changes in the mental health system. They are also struggling to end the stigma of mental illness, which causes economic and social discrimination. Many groups are finding that publishing a Newsletter can help them get closer to achieving these goals.

A consumer newsletter can educate readers about legislative, judicial and medical developments relating to mental illness. A consumer newsletter is also a way for consumers to help others by sharing their personal experiences within the mental health system, such as the problems they encountered, what helped them most and how they learned to cope with the stress of everyday living. Reading about people who have overcome problems is inspiring to people who are still struggling.

**Mental health providers, too, can benefit from the newsletter. They can become better informed about mental health issues and the consumer movement, and gain insight into what they may be doing well or changes that they may need to make in order to help their clients.**

**A consumer newsletter also helps combat stigma. The general public can gain special insight into mental health issues because the information is coming from consumers, who are experts. Also, a consumer-run newsletter is a source of revenue for many consumer organizations.**

**No matter how small your group is, you can develop a newsletter – and you should. Whether one page or longer, a newsletter can create recognition for your group and put you in touch with other mental health groups, both consumer and non-consumer.**

**To sum up, there are several reasons to publish a newsletter:**

- ❖ **To inform your readers.**
- ❖ **To advocate.**
- ❖ **To sound a call to action.**
- ❖ **To serve as a forum for readers' opinions.**
- ❖ **To recruit and maintain membership.**
- ❖ **To use as a fund-raising tool.**
- ❖ **To establish and maintain a network.**

### **What's First?**

**The first step is choosing a name for your newsletter, which is just as important as the name of your organization. You want a name that reflects your program as well as one that is easily recognized.**

- **You can find wonderful old pieces of art to illustrate your newsletter in "clip art" books . Dover Publications puts out a large selection of books containing reprints of old woodcuts, decorative frames and borders, alphabets and ornaments. Most of these are in the public domain, which means that they can be reproduced without permission. (Dover books are paperbacks, and are available in many bookstores.)**
- **If you use photographs in your newsletter, use black-and-white only; they reproduce better. Remember, candid action shots are better than posed pictures.**
- **If you are mailing your newsletter, design a mailing space right on the back page; then you won't need to use envelopes. The mailing space should be in the lower right-hand corner, at least three inches tall and five inches wide. Check with the post office to make sure you've met their requirements.**

### **How to Distribute a Newsletter**

**An important step is to put together a mailing list of subscribers. Your members can help by putting the word out that the newsletter is now available. To advertise, mail a free copy to state, county and community mental health organizations, consumer and non-consumer advocacy groups, provider groups, and whoever else you can think of who might be interested. Ask the post office about non-profit rates (if you qualify or have a fiscal sponsor that qualifies) and bulk rates.**

**The first mailing should include a questionnaire to find out what your readers like and dislike about your newsletter. The feedback will help you improve your newsletter.**

## Tips on Layout

- No matter how simple your newsletter, you need a special front-page banner with the name of the paper. (You can design one yourself using Prestype, "Chartpak" or similar press-on lettering, available in art-supply stores. You can also buy stick-on "rules" of different widths, from hairline to 1/8 inch or more; these can look more professional than hand-drawn lines.)
- Use Prestype for headlines. Typing everything makes the newsletter look monotonous.
- Use subheads to break up the text.
- Even if you're typing your newsletter and running it off on a Xerox machine, you can still make the layout interesting. For example, type articles into columns, rather than straight across the page. Another way to make it interesting is by varying it – typing some articles in columns, and others straight across – and by using graphics, such as line drawings.
- Don't draw or print headlines; it will just look sloppy and unprofessional.
- If you have to type your headlines, make them stand out by underlining them, by using a different typeface than you use for your text, or by typing them in all caps, leaving plenty of white space around them.
- Number the pages!
- Keep the design simple. Anything complicated is distracting.
- Don't use a typeface that is too small, it's hard to read.

**The next step is finding good, qualified people to put out the newsletter. Involve as many people as you can. However, you need an editor to oversee the operation and make everything run smoothly.**

**The editor must be constantly aware of any changes within the mental health community and the possible effects upon consumers. The editor must network with other consumer-run newsletters, select material that will make up your newsletter and make sure the material is relevant as well as entertaining. Although the editor has the final say, others should help network, select material and work on layout, graphics, production and distribution.**

## What Should a Newsletter Contain?

**A good source of material is consumers themselves, contributing articles about mental health issues, short stories, poetry, or writing about personal experiences. Editors of consumer newsletters have reported that this material has gotten an excellent response from subscribers.**

**A free yearly subscription is a great incentive for contributors, both consumers and non-consumers. Other data can be obtained by trading information with other newsletters, reading newspapers and journals, and getting on the mailing lists of such groups as the National Mental Health Consumers' Association, the National Mental Health Association, etc.**

**Keeping up to date with mental health issues in the community as well as advocacy initiatives should be a team effort. That way each group member is contributing something to the newsletter as well as gaining self-confidence and experience working with the community.**

**In sum, a newsletter may contain any or all of the following:**

- ❖ News articles on mental health issues.
- ❖ Legislative/policy updates.
- ❖ Editorial messages (including guest editorials).
- ❖ Contributions from readers about personal experiences.
- ❖ Letters from readers.
- ❖ Reprints of articles from books and other periodicals.  
(Get written permission before using copyrighted material.)
- ❖ Notices of upcoming events.
- ❖ Exposés.
- ❖ Analyses of mental health issues.
- ❖ Book reviews.
- ❖ How-to information.
- ❖ Graphics and artwork.
- ❖ Poetry.
- ❖ Advertising.

### **How to Produce a Newsletter**

**Once you have collected material for your newsletter, the next step is doing the layout and deciding how you will print it. This is where you decide length, format, graphics and how often your organization will put out a newsletter. All of these will depend on the organization's budget. A newsletter can be very costly. The most cost-effective method is typing, copying and collating the newsletter yourselves.**

**A one- or two-page newsletter printed on both sides would cost little. Producing it quarterly (four times a year) gives you enough time to collect information, articles and other necessary material. Since much of your material may be timely (that is, legislative and judicial information), you will lose much of your impact if you publish less frequently.**

**Some sample costs (the prices quoted are for Minnesota): It costs \$169 to copy and collate an informal newsletter, such as described above. A 12-page, computer-typeset newsletter with graphics costs \$294. Project Overcome decided to go with the more expensive version because it was a better product. The group raised the subscription cost, which increased revenue, and the newsletter paid for itself.**

**Graphics can be an important part of a consumer-run newsletter. If you cannot find someone within your organization who is good at graphics, look for sources in the community who will work for a tax write-off. (This is if your group has non-profit status or has a fiscal sponsor that does.)**

### **Additional Hints on Producing Your Newsletter**

- **Keep it simple, at least at first.**
- **Set up a production schedule, and stick to it. Your readers will take your publication more seriously if it appears regularly.**
- **Don't make it a one-person project. Get several people involved.**
- **Trim the fat. For instance, avoid phrases such as "I think," "I believe," "In my opinion."**
- **Double-check facts. Don't print anything you're unsure of. When you print startling facts, quote your source.**
- **Write, then rewrite – several times if necessary.**
- **Proofread! (Have several people do this; sometimes it's hard to catch your own mistakes.)**

