



COMMUNITY ADVOCATES
Where Meeting Basic Needs Inspires Hope

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COMMUNITY ADVOCATES TO UTILIZE \$300,000 GIFT TO SPEARHEAD MENTAL HEALTH REFORM IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY

Wildflower Communities President Paula John: Kindness, Compassion Necessary in Treating People Suffering from Mental Illness

Milwaukee (Jan. 22, 2009)—At a news conference today, Paula John, president of Wildflower Communities announced a gift of \$300,000 to Community Advocates, Inc. to spearhead reform of mental health treatment for Milwaukee County residents.

Wildflower Communities, which works to improve the quality of life for people suffering from mental illness, will provide \$150,000 in both 2009 and 2010 to fund the Mental Health Policy Project at Community Advocates. This multiyear collaboration among local mental health advocates, public health organizations and policymakers will work to ensure the availability of mental health services in Milwaukee County and increase coordination between agencies that serve the mentally ill.

Wildflower Communities' gift continues their commitment to Milwaukee's mentally ill and homeless populations by working for policies that fully integrate men and women suffering from mental illness into everyday society, according to John, a longtime mental health advocate.

“As a society we don't address mental illness appropriately: instead of showing the kindness and compassion we show toward those with other illnesses, we react with discrimination and fear because we do not understand that mental illness is as physically based as any other illness,” John said at the news conference. “With medication and appropriate supervision for those with mental illness, they can lead stable lives and be fully functioning and contributing members of society. I am proud to partner with Community Advocates, which has been a strong voice for men and women experiencing mental illness in Milwaukee County, on much needed reform of the mental illness treatment system.”

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According to Joe Volk, Community Advocates Executive Director, mental illness has long been looked upon as a moral weakness and not the chronic medical condition that it is.

“There are many acceptable options for treatment of the mentally ill, and many unacceptable ones. As we move to end homelessness in Milwaukee, leadership to attack one of its root causes—mental illness—is critical to our success and the stability of Milwaukee County as a whole,” said Volk. “We’re excited to embark on this effort that is, frankly, long overdue, and we thank Ms. John and Wildflower Communities for funding this important work.”

The Mental Health Policy Project will:

- Help eliminate stigmas associated with mental illness through a statewide public awareness campaign to ensure that it is regarded and treated as the chronic medical condition that it is.
- Increase available mental health services as part of an extension of insurance to all Wisconsin residents.
- Integrate mental health treatment with alcohol and other drug addiction treatment, physical health services, and non-health services such as employment and housing.
- Coordinate governmental agencies and private organizations that play a role in the financing and delivery of mental health services.

The Mental Health Policy Project will be part of Community Advocates’ Public Policy Institute, headed by Director David Riemer, in conjunction with both public and private advocates and mental health service providers.

“This generous donation will allow us to work toward lasting, significant policy and systems changes that will benefit the entire Milwaukee County community,” said Riemer.

“The systemic barriers prohibiting men and women from receiving mental health treatment are vast,” said Thomas Brophy, president of Community Advocates’ Board of Directors. “We intend that this reform ensures readily available treatment integrated with other crucial services. Although this effort is currently Milwaukee-based, it is our hope that the initiative will have statewide impact and eventually be replicated nationwide.”

The gift was announced at Community Advocates’ Autumn West Supportive Housing Project, which serves individuals who are homeless and mentally ill. Autumn West is located at 1615 S. 22nd St.

Since 1976, **Community Advocates** has provided basic-needs advocacy and services to low-income and at-risk Milwaukee families and individuals by offering more than 30 specialized programs, including health care advocacy, case management, protective payee services and energy assistance.