



*The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force is committed to being a leader in identifying issues faced by all people affected by mental illness, facilitating improvements in mental health services, giving consumers and families a strong voice, reducing stigma, and implementing recovery principles.*

## **Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force – Nominations for 2017 Karen Avery Award**

The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force is seeking nominations for the fourth annual **Karen Avery Award**, which recognizes an individual who has demonstrated a commitment to advancing the rights of people with disabilities and to the peer movement. We are especially interested in nominees who have been active in advancing the rights and independence of people with mental illness.

**Please email nominations by August 4, 2017 to [barbara.beckert@drwi.org](mailto:barbara.beckert@drwi.org)**

Letters of nominations should be no more than two pages in length and address the following:

- Why you are nominating this individual for the **Karen Avery Award**.
- A description of the nominee's commitment to advancing the rights and independence of people with disabilities, including people who have experienced mental illness.
- Any work to support and advance the peer movement and elevate the voices of peers.
- How Karen's values and/or her legacy are reflected in the actions of the nominee. If the nominee knew Karen, please address this, including any influence Karen had, as a mentor, colleague, friend, etc.
- Given Karen's leadership as a mental health advocate, and her commitment to the peer/survivor movement, we encourage nominees with lived experience of mental illness.
- Given the focus of the Task Force, preference will be given to nominees from Milwaukee County.
- **IMPORTANT:** Include your contact information and contact information for the nominee.

The award will be presented at a Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force Forum ***Building Bridges Towards Authentic Inclusion, Tuesday, September 12 at IndependenceFirst. Save the date and stay tuned for program details!***

### **About Karen Avery**

Karen Avery was an advocate, a mentor, a peer, friend, and leader in the fight for disability rights, dedicated to giving power and independence to people with disabilities. She began her career as an advocate for fair housing, before joining IndependenceFirst in 1998 as Associate Director. She was known as an advocate extraordinaire, not only in Milwaukee, and Wisconsin, but nationally and even internationally. She was a respected leader in the mental health consumer/ survivor movement, working to advance the rights of people with mental illness and to ensure a strong consumer voice. Karen was a founding board member of the Grassroots Empowerment Project, and a leader in the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force, where she was a longtime member of the Steering Committee. She spoke about the system and about recovery with such impact and conviction, because she lived it. She was generous in sharing the challenges of her experience with mental illness and her recovery journey.

In her work as a leader in the disability movement, as well as to friends and family, Karen set the standard for being "selfless to a fault." She gave everything – her intellect, corny sense of humor, time, attention, empathy, kindness, authenticity, love of family, wonderful laugh, zest for life with a bit of indignation. Karen never wanted to be the center of attention in the public eye, but she was willing to speak truth to power to advance the rights of her peers – and, even more impactful, to mentor and encourage others in finding their voice. Karen was also an incredibly loving and caring Mother and Grandmother, and a dear friend and mentor to so many.

When Karen passed away in 2013, the disability community lost a champion. The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force established this award to honor Karen's legacy and her deep commitment to advancing the rights of people with disabilities, and to the mental health consumer movement.

### **Award recipients to date include:**

- 2014 - Phillip Corona, an Independent Living Services Coordinator at IndependenceFirst and Certified Peer Specialist
- 2015 - Melissa Butts, Coordinator of the Peerlink Program at NAMI Greater Milwaukee and a Certified Peer Specialist
- 2016 – Mary Lou Burger – Certified Peer Specialist at Pathways to Permanent Housing