



*The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force is the voice of the community on issues related to the quality and responsiveness of mental health and substance abuse disorder services.*

## **Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force 2019 Karen Avery Award**

**Mary Neubauer** is the sixth recipient of the *Karen Avery Award*. The award was established to honor Karen Avery's legacy as an advocate, mentor, peer, and leader in advancing the rights of people with disabilities. Mary is a respected leader in the mental health community. She is the Public Policy and Advocacy Coordinator for Mental Health America of Wisconsin, and most recently served on the Health Policy Advisory Council to Governor Evers Transition Team. Mary serves as a Co-chair of the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force, and represents the Task Force on the Milwaukee County Mental Health Board where she chairs the Quality Committee. She was instrumental in the statewide establishment of peer specialists, as well as a trainer for the Crisis Intervention Team training program. For 17 years she was active in the Office of Consumer Affairs at the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division. She is a consumer of the mental health system, recovering alcoholic of 36 years and tireless advocate for persons who are experiencing similar challenges.



The nomination noted that Mary is “a dynamic and inspirational leader in mental health rights who has overcome tremendous odds. She continues to barrel through physical and mental obstacles to deliver vital information - often with her incisive wit that underlines the severity of needs still not met for individuals and their families who have a mental illness.”

### **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, then joined *IndependenceFirst* in 1998 as Associate Director. A respected leader in the mental health consumer/ survivor movement, she worked to advance the rights of people with mental illness and 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. She spoke about the system and about recovery with such impact, 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, to mentor and encourage others in finding their voice. She was known for her T-shirts featuring irreverent messages – “Feisty and Non-compliant” was a classic. Karen was also an incredibly loving and caring Mother and Grandmother, and a treasured friend and mentor to so many. When Karen passed away in 2013, the disability community lost a champion. The MHTF established this award to honor her legacy and commitment to advancing the rights of people with disabilities, and to the mental health consumer movement.



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## **Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force 2019 Rising Leader Award**

**Marie Perry** will be the first recipient of the Rising Leader Award, in recognition of her outstanding leadership to advance mental health and recovery values in our community. This new award was established to celebrate and recognize younger leaders in the Milwaukee mental health community – they are the future! The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force is grateful to Marie for her leadership and dedication to advancing recovery.



Marie began demonstrating outstanding leadership to advance mental health and recovery values early in her own recovery. She has been performing in a thought provoking play written by Brenda Wesley, *Pieces In My Own Voice*, for several years, going into schools and the community teaching youth and adults about stigma and what life is like living with a diagnosis. Marie is a Certified Peer Specialist and peer specialist trainer. She is the supervisor of the Community Linkages and Stabilization Program (CLASP) at La Causa. Marie is currently pursuing a graduate degree in clinical mental health counseling at Northern Vermont University, in the Children and Youth track because of her commitment to intervene early to help change the course of recovery.

Marie also excels as an educator. She is a State of Wisconsin Independent Certified Peer Trainer and has played an active role in mentoring other peers. She has a natural ability to inspire other peer specialists to excel, drawing on her experience as a former Milwaukee Public Schools Special Education Teacher. Marie has convened a study group for anyone preparing to take the state exam and has helped to support and encourage many peers who are pursuing this certification. In addition, she advocated with others for needed improvements in the curriculum and as a result, it is being rewritten. She recently was appointed as a member of the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force Steering Committee. As noted in the nomination, “this is a young woman on a trek. She is truly a visionary leader making a daily impact in our community.”