



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.

2020 Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force Karen Avery Award

Otis Winstead is the seventh 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. Otis Winstead, VPS, WCPS, NPS, Executive Director of Great Lakes Dryhooch has dedicated his career to serving as an advocate, peer mentor, and leader in his community, which makes him the perfect person to honor the values and legacy of Karen Avery. His heart can be found in walking alongside and providing support to other Veterans and peers in recovery. As a peer mentor, Otis uses his recovery as a way to connect with others and use his lived experience to spread the message of hope and resilience to the Veterans he mentors. Otis is a constant advocate for Veteran health. He teaches his community and academic partners from a first-hand perspective about the struggles of opioid recovery and the need to address personal life trauma, adversity, and mental health. A Vietnam Era Army Veteran, Otis is a leader among Veterans who leads by example and practices what he teaches.



The nomination noted that: *"Otis Winstead exemplifies what it means to be a community partner and a mental health advocate. He collaborates, he teaches, he questions, he advocates, and he always seeks to ensure the voice of the Veteran is included in the work we are doing. Strong leaders like Otis are essential to supporting peers and creating lasting community-academic partnerships that can develop innovative strategies to address complex problems. Wisconsin Veterans and Otis's academic and community partners are thankful for his dedication to serve."*

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. Karen was 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.



2020 Marie C. Perry Rising Leader Award

DeShanda Williams will be the 2nd recipient of the Marie C. Perry Rising Leader Award. The Award honors Marie's memory and recognizes visionary leadership by an individual who is a rising and/or young leader in the Milwaukee area mental health community.



DeShanda Williams, MSCP is the Director of Runaway and Homeless Youth Services for Pathfinders in Milwaukee. She has spent 9 years with Pathfinders. DeShanda is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Training and holds a MS in Community Psychology from Alverno College and a BS in Social Work from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her passion is in supporting and uplifting youth and young adults, especially those dealing with overlapping social identities. She has been a trailblazer in visioning non-traditional mental health services for Milwaukee youth, and has demonstrated a deep commitment to keeping young people's voices at the center of care. The nomination noted that: *"The positive changes DeShanda has made within the organization and for individual young people are immeasurable. Her ability and desire to genuinely connect with a young person's mental health challenges make her an exceptional, trustworthy ally to Milwaukee's young people and the mental health community in Milwaukee."*

As the recipient of the Marie C. Perry award, DeShanda will receive a scholarship for conference registration, fees, and logistics or continuing education to further her professional development in the field of health and human services. This was generously endowed by Marie's family.

About Marie Perry

Inspired by the dedication of our inaugural recipient, the Marie C. Perry Rising Leader Award honors Marie's memory and recognizes visionary leadership by an individual who is a rising and/or young leader in the Milwaukee area mental health community.



Just a year ago, on November 12, 2019, Marie was honored by the Mental Health Task Force as the first recipient of our Rising Leader Award. Marie displayed leadership in many different areas. She demonstrated outstanding leadership to advance mental health and recovery values early in her own recovery. She performed 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.

A Certified Peer Specialist and Trainer, Marie served as the supervisor of the Community Linkages and Stabilization Program (CLASP) at La Causa, A gifted educator, she was a State of Wisconsin Independent Certified Peer Trainer, who played an active role in mentoring other peers. She was 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.

Family, friends, and the mental health community were devastated when Marie passed away in February at the age of 32. The Award was graciously endowed by Marie's family to honor the legacy and memory of this remarkable young leader who inspired so many and had a lasting impact on the community, Our heartfelt thanks to the family and to Marie for continuing to inspire us.