

Faces & Voices of Recovery - Rally for Recovery Organizing Network Notes - Wednesday, April 23rd

Thank you to everyone who attended the call! The organizing network was represented by many organizations all across the country on the call last Wednesday to help each other provide advocacy ideas and opportunities for their Rally for Recovery events next September.

For those of you that were unable to attend the call please take the time to read the notes. The topic for this call was Voter Registration.

Conducting Successful Voter Registration at your Rally for Recovery

We heard from a number of speakers that have experience with conducting voter registration drives to help everyone with new ideas and to help prepare everyone to conduct their own drives at their recovery events.

Guest Speakers included;

Aaron Kucharski, Field Organizer, Faces & Voices of Recovery
Antonio Ruberto, Gay & Lesbian Center, New York City
Tayna Fogle, People Advocating Recovery, Kentucky
Mellisa Herren, Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery, Boston

Aaron Kucharski is the Field Organizer for the Recovery Voices Count Project. He has been involved in organizing activities and voter engagement work for many years. He spoke about when he volunteered to conduct a voter registration drive at the RICAREs Rally for Recovery event in September 2007. He talked about how he prepared before the drive, and what the registration drive looked like during the event. Also he took a lot of good ideas from the Recovery Voices Count guide which can be found at http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/pdf/08VoicesGuide_final.pdf

Four things he needed to do before the drive included

- 1. Recruit volunteers** - Aaron set goals for how many people from the recovery community he wanted to get registered. In order to meet his goals he recruited three other volunteers to help with the drive. Together they were able to meet the goal set between the four volunteers.
- 2. Get a supply of voter registration forms** - Aaron called his local board of elections and asked how many voter registration forms he could get. Got 100 forms, and then sent a friend to get an additional 100 forms. Other places where you can get forms include some libraries, and post offices. Most states allow you to download and print a form off of the Secretary of State's website.
- 3. Research the state laws** so you can answer any questions that people have that might include felony voting status in the state, or voting rights for people who might be on probation or parole. A good place to research is your Secretary of State's website. The Sentencing Project (<http://www.sentencingproject.org/IssueAreaHome.aspx?IssueID=4>) also has a great state by state analysis of current law.
- 4. Basics** - Secured a table to have the drive at prior to the rally. It is always good to check with the property managers/rally coordinators of the location you are at just to

make sure things run smoothly. Bring pens, and clipboards to make it easy for people to register.

At the voter registration drive two volunteers stayed at the voter registration table, which was actually called an action center, and we had voter education information, Recovery Voices Count stickers, copies of Rising, petitions to end insurance discrimination, face painting for kids whose parents were registering to vote and of course, voter registration forms.

Each person that said they were registered already or registered at the table got a Recovery Voices Count sticker. It was important to sticker people because we also had two volunteers walking around with clipboards registering people, so it helped know who we already talked to.

We asked the registered voters why they thought it was important to vote so the discussion would encourage people who were not registered to get registered.

We made the event fun and easy for people to register and in the end we got over 50 new registered voters, dozens of pages of petitions signed, and felt like we were able to set a good theme to the rally of being politically active, and the discussions were empowering .

Antonio Ruberto from the Gay & Lesbian Center in New York City (www.gaycenter.org) also registered voters at the Rally for Recovery in New Jersey and New York last year (for more info on the NJ/NY Rally see <http://www.ncaddnj.org/2008/Celebrate/Afterrecoverywalk2007.asp>). They also took part in having an action center and gave people "I registered to vote today" stickers to keep track of who they talked to. He added that they needed to include forms from both states to register a lot of voters at the rally that were people in recovery, as well as family, friends and allies of the recovery community. There was research done for both state laws.

Tayna Fogle from People Advocating Recovery (<http://www.peopleadvocatingrecovery.org>) in Kentucky has been working hard on the felony voting laws in Kentucky, as they work for felony voting rights across the state. She said it is important to register the friends and family members of those who might not currently have the right to vote so they can go out and vote on behalf of those with felony records. They are also working to call 15,000 people from the recovery community to get out the registered voters in Kentucky and to educate them on issues concerning people in recovery across the state. Holding voter registration drives has proven to be a powerful tool to move the campaign forward in KY. Tayna is also involved in Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (<http://www.kftc.org/our-work/voter-empower>)

Mellisa Herren from the Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery (<http://www.neaar.org/moar/>), in Boston researched her state laws and found felons can vote, as long as they are not incarcerated. She added that they made signs to educate the public about the state laws, and talked to people with felony charges about their rights. They made their voter registration a focus on fun and education for the community.

National Updates

Tom Coderre, National Field Director of Faces & Voices of Recovery shared some of the updates from the Recovery Voices Count project. The Recovery Voices Count Tool-kit is being printed and will be available to everyone soon. The tool-kit will contain a printed guide, information on how to organize successful events, questions to ask candidates, candidates'

pledge, and a new Recovery Bill of Rights that has recently been developed. The tool-kit is designed to give you everything you'll need to conduct successful civic engagement activities this year.

Tom also gave an update about the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act. He said that the House and Senate are continuing negotiations and trying to reach a compromise. Please watch for alerts from Faces & Voices asking you to contact your Senators and Members of Congress.

Next Meeting

The next organizing network call is May 29th – 3pm EASTERN – Topic: Recovery Voices Count - Voter Education

2008 Conference Call Schedule

5/29: Recovery Voices Count - Voter Education

6/26: Recovery Voices Count - Get-Out-The-Vote

7/31: Rally for Recovery Media Outreach

8/28: Wrap up / Final Plans

(All calls are at 3pm EASTERN)