

Vermont's Youth in Transition (YIT) Grant

Article by Courtney Bridges, YIT Social Marketing Coordinator

If you have never heard Gary Blau say the words, “Everybody is a social marketer”, you have been living under a rock! The beauty about everybody being a social marketer is that we all have our work cut out for us. Granted, the “Who, what, when, why, and where?” may be taken care of by your marketing specialist in the office, but no matter your age, you have the power to spread the word.

In Vermont, Gary Blau’s famous words ring more than true, especially with one population: our young adults. If any of you have worked with the age range of 16-21, you are certainly aware how passionate and assertive these youth can be. As we navigate the system together, our YIT staff and young adult leaders have developed four unique and exciting marketing campaigns:

1. **Celebration of national Children’s Mental Health Month, Week, or Day** – In 2010 the celebration consisted of a statewide event on May 7 that drew 219 people (about 160 young adults - half of whom were minority youth - plus their case managers and community mentors) to hear Active Minds speakers and to participate in a ropes course and workshops about: “UMatter” (a youth suicide prevention social marketing campaign); “Speak Up” about harassment (a cultural and linguistic competency [CLC] activity); the experiences of being LGBTQ (another CLC activity); expressing self through art (theater and visual); organizing youth voice in their regions; etc. For a vivid impression of this Young Adult Voice Movement Conference, visit <http://www.youth-in-transition-grant.com> (see the home page and the youth involvement page).
2. **WEST (We Eliminate Stigma Together)** - adapted from the STARS model developed in Minnesota and now being piloted in one of Vermont’s 12 regions to encourage students to inform their high/alternative school and their community of the importance of positive mental health. Mini-grants are being awarded to groups of students to plan (*often over pizza*) and lead their own events. For details about this opportunity, visit the official Vermont Youth in Transition Grant website: <http://www.youth-in-transition-grant.com> (see the social marketing page).
3. **Your Voice Matters** – for the Vermont Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health (VFFCMH) to help families and young adults become leaders in the system of care. For more information about these leadership opportunities, go to the VFFCMH website: <http://www.vffcmh.org> .
4. **BringChange2Mind** (a national anti-stigma campaign) will be supplement in Vermont by bringing together the statewide counterparts of the national partners (ex: NAMI-VT, VFFCMH, VAMH, SAMHSA grantees for youth suicide or substance abuse prevention, etc.) to consider what they can do together to promote mental health.

These four campaigns – and others which may emerge as the YIT project moves through the next 3-4 years – implement the YIT Social Marketing Plan posted on the social marketing page of the YIT website: <http://www.youth-in-transition-grant.com> . The core message of the plan is that “Young adults with and without serious emotional disturbance, their families, allies, friends, and other supports can be a valuable part of their communities when given opportunities and respect. They know what is best for themselves and their community-based systems of care.”

John Quincy Adams once said, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” So maybe our young adults do not have formal leadership training or letters behind their name that symbolize how long they went to school, but they inspire. Young people here in Vermont have shown us that they can do what they set out to do; they can share what they want to share; and, most importantly, they can change the world because everybody is a social marketer.

Courtney Bridges was hired by the YIT grant at age 22 soon after her completion of a Public Communications degree at the University of Vermont. As an employee of the VFFCMH, she has been instrumental in the creation of the YIT Social Marketing Plan and all its campaigns and activities, including the May 7, 2010 Young Adult Voice Movement Conference and adaptation of the STARS materials for WEST. To contact her, email cbridges@vffcmh.org or call 802-244-1955