



**MENTAL PATIENTS LIBERATION ALLIANCE**

# **The Alliance**

**When you need someone to listen**

**AVAILABLE AROUND THE CLOCK 24/7**

**732-5377 or toll free @ 1-800-654-7227**

## **The Alliance Peer Support Line**

### **When to call the Support Line:**

- When you want to talk to someone confidentially
- When you need support from a "peer" who has "been there"
- When you are feeling sad or upset
- When a friend or family member doesn't understand, but a peer might
- When you have an advocacy issue
- When you don't know where else to turn

### **What the Support Line is about:**

- Opportunity for confidential discussions about the kind of support that would be helpful to you now
- Non-judgmental listening
- Open sharing of thoughts and feelings
- An alternative approach to growth and healing
- Referrals to peer-run self-help groups
- A way to help ourselves and each other

**Support Conversation:** Any conversation between two or more people in which support is gained and given by the participants. Support can be encouragement, information, assistance, or companionship. Is it as simple as that? Yes. Most people gain and give support from and to others throughout their daily lives in almost imperceptible means and moments... a friend speaking to a friend, co-workers discussing the minutiae of day-to-day life, or a quick conversation with a friendly sales clerk. A smile might be the easiest expression of support; a returned smile demonstrates mutual support.

It certainly can seem more complicated when we are faced with new, painful, sudden, perplexing, or seemingly extraordinary circumstances. An emotional disturbance can embrace all of that; it can pull us into a hurricane of confusion and fear - perhaps particularly the first time we experience one. For many, the experience finds us without preparation - resources to gain support, understanding, information, safety and comfort. Such experiences may range from "challenging" to "horrific".

Most believe that support from a person or people who have experienced similar circumstances and feelings is vital to their recovery. Many people who have had those experiences feel it is equally vital to their recovery to offer support to others.

#### **SUPPORT PHONE LINE - STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of The Alliance Mutual Support Line is to provide the opportunity to offer mutual support to people calling the line with active listening and participation.

Support Line volunteers are self-defined as people with personal experience of the mental health system and experience with emotional difficulties/challenges. We do not claim any expertise other than our knowledge of the success of self-help and mutual support. With acceptance and empathy, we offer our own understanding and experiences to help others move toward wholeness and recovery. Our responses are person-centered. We impose nothing. We share our perspectives and experiences, if it is appropriate to the caller's expressed desire or need. We have no hidden agendas.

**Thinking Outside the Box:** Some of the people who phone The Alliance Mutual Support Line have stated that they "have no one else to call" and that is fully understood. The Alliance Mutual Support Line began among a small number of people who knew that they needed and wanted "someone to call" for support as part of their personal support system. In other words, they agreed that they would benefit from always having a number available to call, 24-hours a day, as part of their recovery journey or *just in case*.

The Support Line began with a handful of people who took turns "operating the line" on a scheduled basis that provided them defined boundaries and provided callers a comfortable sense of "not intruding" on the person answering the phone. A couple of rules were agreed to and applied - respect and privacy was strictly maintained, for example. Today, although the Support Line has grown to be state-wide and receives from 700-900 calls each month, it remains the same and is still fully operated by volunteers.

To Whom It May Concern:

On occasion, I have called the mutual support line. At times, I have been very up front with my need for support. At other times, I was not - benefiting from a short chat with the person who answered - without his/her awareness of my particular need. I have used the line in a time of personal crisis, as well as a time when I simply needed to "check in".

When I needed the line the most - in a crisis - I don't recall having said thank you to the person who helped me. I may have been too preoccupied with myself or my stress. It doesn't seem likely that I said thank you when I called for a brief chat, either; though perhaps I did. For me, the gratitude isn't realized at the time. It comes afterward or beforehand, when I consider that you are all there for me whenever I need you. It's true that I am not always grateful and take it all for granted. But when I stop and remember that the line (PEOPLE who understand) are always available to me... I DO feel great gratitude.

I guess that is how it works for lots of folks. "Thank you's" may or may not be stated. It's good to know that it doesn't matter much. You'll answer the phone when anyone calls, regardless of the reason, regardless of the outcome.

It's also good to know that none of you are better than me, or even think you are. You aren't working on the line because you are without troubles, challenges, and concerns. You still work hard on feeling happy and getting through the day. Just like me.

It is very important to me that the support is mutual. I need to know that I have some value to you. If it was all one-sided, I wouldn't call. Oh, sometimes it is one-sided, I know! Sometimes I am so caught up in myself and my life that I am not thinking about you and yours. But still, even then, there is balance to our relationship, and that is important. YOU know that I DO have something to offer, and that matters.

Just this once while everything is pretty okay in my life and I can think of you, let me say thank you. Thanks for having been there for me; thanks for sticking around for the future. You've helped me to stay free. You've helped me get through a day, or a tough morning, or even a desperate moment when your voice was the only one that could help. And there you were!

Sometimes I'd like to think that you get paid generously for what you do. Sometimes I need to know that you do it for free. Either way, I like knowing that you are compensated... in the only ways that truly matter. You are part of my life at times, and I am part of yours.

Thank you for sharing with me the best of who you are.

- A Caller

