

Westside ROSC Council

Lead Agency: Chicago Recovering Communities Coalition

Thursday, November 21, 2025

10am – 12pm

Zoom Meeting Information

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/695761637?pwd=eVVOUzJlN3VUcXl6WFJzSnVNOVJXdz09>

Meeting ID: 695 761 637 | Password: 038839

Meeting Minutes

Welcome Extended by; Venessa Moreno: The meeting began with Venessa welcoming attendees and providing an attendance link for ROSC Council meetings and events. Venessa emphasized the importance of filling out the attendance form for staying connected and updated on future meetings and events and continued support, also mentioned that ROSC will offer CEU's.

Participant Introductions: Candyce Banford, CRCC; Mary Roberson, NIRCO; Linda Sharp, Individual; Debra Laws, Renewed Hope; Mary Dowling, West Side Heroin Opioid Task Force; Charlotte Estell, Kalimba Foundation NFP; Arbutus Winfrey, WSHOTF; Derrick Brewer, CRCC; Tom Johnson, CRCC; Yulanda A Thomas, CRCC; Vegletta Lewis, Loretto Hospital; Sandy R. Mays, Individual; Kyna Stinson, Westside Rising; Shelly McElroy, Child and Family Connections #9; Lareka Smith, Westside Rising; Venessa Moreno, CRCC; Walter Houston, Kalimba Foundation; Belinda Farr, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois; Johanna Gonzalez, IDHS - SUPR; David Troy Stinson, Westside Rising; Aimee Potter, VA; Charlotte Estell, Kalimba Foundation NFP; Dora Dantzler-Wright, CRCC; Gail Richardson, Westside Task Force; Ruthie Williams, Faith Way Men's Independent Living; John Wright, CRCC; John Hardin, CRCC; Christopher Leavy, CRCC; Lisa Cook, Advocates for Human Potential, Inc.; Angelina Sanchez, Brighter Behavior Choices Inc., NFP - The Recovery Cafe Chicago
Our council is made up of members including Hospitals, Treatment Centers, Mental Health Facilities, First Responders, Recovery Programs, Schools, Local Government, Employment Agencies, and importantly persons with lived experience.

ROSC Goals and Objectives; Candyce B.: A Recovery Oriented Systems of Care (ROSC) is a coordinated network of community-based services and supports that is person centered and builds on the strengths and resilience of individuals, families, and communities to experience recovery and improved health, wellness, and quality of life for those with or at risk of substance use and/or co-occurring conditions. The central focus of a ROSC is to create an infrastructure, or "systems of care", with the resources to effectively address the full range of substance use and/or co-occurring disorders within communities. The Objectives: 1. Create communities of recovery that encourage and integrate resources for the recovering individual, families and friends. 2. Develop supportive recovery communities that foster growth, respect and understanding of those who have identified problems in the areas of substance use and mental health. 3. Implement effective communication that will allow for inclusion of PLEs (persons with lived experience) voices to be heard.

MOU's & Linkage Agreements; Venessa M.: Reminded the attendees that an MOU and linkage agreement between CRCC/ROSC and all partners should be signed. He noted that the MOU and linkage agreement defines the working relationships between agencies, defines collaborative roles and responsibilities of the two agencies with respect to improving the local infrastructure supporting the establishment of a ROSC council. She noted that a link to the MOU was placed in the chat.

Community Needs Assessment; Chris L.: Reminded the attendees to fill out the Community Needs Assessment that is due December 30, 2025, and all partners should share with everyone they know. Please share with family, friends, coworkers, and participants in your programs so everyone has a voice, and we can continue to offer more supportive programs to our West Side Recovery Community with your help. Survey responses are confidential. Only aggregate and summary data will be released. Thank you so much for being part of our ROSC Community Assessment. Make Your Voice Heard to help with improving the local infrastructure supporting the establishment of a ROSC council. He noted that a link to the Survey was placed in the chat.



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ROSC Council's Integrated Recovery System

The meeting focused on the ROSC Council's goals and objectives, particularly advocating for the development of an integrated system of recovery. The council aims to create communities of recovery, develop supportive recovery communities, and implement effective communication. The panelists shared their experiences and their roles in providing support to individuals and families in the area of recovery.

Topic Discussion: Serving Those Who Served: Recovery & Mental Health Support for Veterans

ROSC Council Presenters: Aimee Potter, LCSW, Harm Reduction Coordinator, Jesse Brown VA Medical Hospital; Dr. Mary Roberson, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Northern Illinois Recovery Community Organization

Summary

Veterans' Mental Health Support Discussion

The Westside ROSC meeting began with introductions and a request for attendees to fill out an attendance form. The meeting's main topic was "Serving Those Who Served: Recovery and Mental Health Support for Veterans," featuring two guest speakers. The agenda included an overview of the ROSC Council and time for attendees to share upcoming announcements and events.

Substance Abuse Recovery Collaboration Introduction

The meeting served as an introduction session for various participants from different organizations involved in substance abuse recovery and community support. Attendees included representatives from the Westside Heroin Opiate Task Force, Kalimba Foundation, Renewed Hope, CRCC, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois, Loretto Hospital, Westside Rising, and Jesse Brown VA. The session aimed to foster collaboration and introduce participants to each other, with plans to discuss ROSC (Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care) in the following segments. The conversation ended with an invitation to join a shared form for further engagement.

ROSC Goals and Community Engagement

The meeting began with Candace providing an overview of Recovery Oriented System of Care (ROSC) goals and objectives, emphasizing community recovery, supportive recovery communities, and inclusive communication. Venessa highlighted the importance of establishing MOUs with all participants to define roles and responsibilities and encouraged those without an MOU to contact John Hardin. Chris discussed the community needs assessment survey, emphasizing its confidentiality and importance for improving services. The conversation ended with plans to discuss recovery and mental health support for veterans, featuring speakers Amy Potter and Yolanda.

VA Harm Reduction Initiatives Update

Amy Porter, the Harm Reduction Coordinator at Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, discussed her role and initiatives. She explained the VA's harm reduction efforts, including the use of vending machines to distribute supplies like fentanyl test strips and condoms. Amy highlighted the success of these machines, noting that over 5,200 condoms and 4,200 fentanyl test strips have been distributed since February 2024. She also described her outreach efforts, including a monthly newsletter and support groups for veterans interested in harm reduction. Amy emphasized the importance of community support in her work and expressed gratitude for the collaboration with organizations like the Chicago Recovery Alliance.

VA Mental Health Services Overview

Aimee presented on her work at the Jesse Brown VA, highlighting the cost efficiency of donated machines for remote Wi-Fi and showcasing the VA's substance use and harm reduction materials ordering system. She explained that she provides services to veterans, their caregivers, and families, regardless of discharge status for mental health services, and discussed how she helps connect veterans with hepatitis C treatment. The group discussed referral processes, with Dora inquiring about MOU or linkage agreements for the ROSC Council, which Aimee agreed to complete.

Veterans Recovery Support Overview

Dr. Mary Roberson, CEO of Northern Illinois Recovery Community Organization (NERCO), presented an overview of her organization's work supporting veterans and individuals with substance use and mental health issues. NERCO, established in 2019, is the first and only Recovery Community Organization in Lake County and provides peer-based support services to veterans, including recovery capital



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assessments, Narcan training, and overdose prevention education. Dr. Roberson highlighted NERCO's involvement in the Veterans Treatment Court and their efforts to reduce stigma surrounding substance use disorders, particularly among women veterans. The organization offers a variety of services including peer support groups, veterans' outreach events, and connections to other veteran service organizations and resources.

Reducing Mental Health Stigma

The meeting focused on reducing stigma around mental health, recovery, and substance use, with Dr. Mary and Aimee sharing their personal motivations and community support strategies. Dr. Mary emphasized the importance of managing recovery without stigma, while Aimee highlighted the need to meet people where they are without judgment. The panel discussed community actions to reduce stigma, including creating safe spaces for dialogue, educating the public, and advocating for better support systems. Participants also addressed the role of organizations like The VA and community groups in supporting individuals seeking help.

Homeless Veterans: Challenges and Solutions

The group discussed challenges faced by homeless veterans, particularly in West Chicago, where a significant portion of the unhoused population consists of veterans. Dr. Mary explained that many veterans, especially those from Vietnam, distrust the system due to past mistreatment, preferring to live on the streets rather than in facilities. Aimee highlighted the VA's efforts to address homelessness, including outreach workers and housing vouchers, but noted that contacting and housing veterans remains challenging due to lack of contact information and discrimination by landlords. The discussion concluded with a focus on the role of peers in improving reintegration and access to services for veterans.

VA System Integration and Support

The group discussed the positive changes in the VA system, particularly the integration of peer support specialists and a strong housing component. They emphasized the importance of culturally competent care and suggested that community organizations can access training through various resources, including the VA and Faces and Voices of Recovery. The discussion highlighted the value of having veteran staff members to better connect with the veteran community, and Dora expressed interest in organizing a "Cup of Joe" event for veterans. The panelists advised veterans struggling in silence to find a buddy for support and emphasized that help is available with no judgment.

Veterans Recovery Services Collaboration

The meeting focused on discussing recovery services for veterans and the broader community, with Dr. Mary Roberson and Amy Potter presenting on available resources and support systems. Dora emphasized the need to work more with justice-impacted veterans and suggested organizing community events like coffee meetups to build connections. The group agreed to collaborate on veterans' services, with plans to involve community members and organizations in creating a managed system of care. The conversation ended with an announcement about an upcoming end-of-year celebration on December 4th and a reminder for Westside Rising.

Closing by; Venessa M.: Thanked the membership for sharing openly and respectfully and we will see everyone next month. Next Westside ROSC Council meeting will be hosted by Zoom on December 19, 2025. The conversation ended with a reminder to fill out the attendance form for those who wanted to receive CEUs.

Next steps:

- John Hardin: Monitor chat for organizations wanting to establish MOUs and collect their information for follow-up
- Candyce: Get MOU paperwork to Amy Potter so she can fill it out
- Amy Potter: Email contact information to be shared with ROSC Council members
- Dr. Mary Roberson: Provide contact information to be shared with ROSC Council members
- Amy Potter and Dora Wright: Collaborate on organizing a Cup of Joe coffee meeting for veterans
- Lareka: Post link and information for December 4th end-of-year soiree in the chat

Please Join Us in Building a Sustainable Westside ROSC Council

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