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## Powerful Voices

If I had a crystal ball, I would not have been able to predict how successful this legislative session was going to be for persons in recovery from a psychiatric disability or a substance use disorder. Shame on me for thinking that perhaps this year, the wonderful community of advocates, providers, and family members would come up empty handed. From the moment folks from CCAR turned out to defeat the “sober house” bill to the Keep The Promises Coalition members who came to the Capitol weekly to protect their Medicaid benefits and community services, the die was cast and the behavioral health community was not going to be ignored.

Once again, those powerful stories of recovery saved the day. In a year with a projected budget deficit, your accomplishments included the following:

- additional resources for individuals with behavioral health needs as they enter or leave the criminal justice system,
- prevention of increased Medicaid co-pays,
- funding for additional community services such as intermediate care beds and discharge dollars,
- new dollars for supportive housing,
- prevention of sober house legislation that would have created additional stigma for people in recovery,
- defeat of the proposed social services agency merger bill.

All along, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the advocacy community as they attended public hearings, spoke out for what was needed, talked to their local legislators and fought against stigma. I heard legislators talk about visits, phone calls, letters and emails from people in recovery. When the gavel came down at midnight on May 5<sup>th</sup>, I was smiling inside and out as I counted up our legislative victories.

So, lets take a few days off and pat ourselves on the back but we cannot rest on our laurels. In the next few weeks, we should celebrate our wins and thank our supporters. Then we need to roll up our sleeves and look at the candidates that are running for office. Many opportunities will exist to have our issues taken seriously. Let your powerful voices be heard again. Let the candidates know what is important to your continued recovery. The work does not end, but the victories will continue.

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