



## **Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority**

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### **Mental Health is About People, Not Labels**

**September 26, 2018--DETROIT, MI** – A diagnosis doesn't define people. That statement couldn't be more true when it comes to Kathy O'Donnell, who just received the Director's Award for Consumer Empowerment from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

"I am grateful for this honor from the state of Michigan, but more gratified knowing that we all are recognized as a community and that our voices are heard," said O'Donnell who is a certified Peer Mentor through the Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority and offers support and advocacy to people receiving mental health services.

"O'Donnell is an example of how our services encourage and empower individuals," said Willie Brooks, DWMHA President and CEO. "We are proud of her determination to stand up and speak out for herself and her peers."

O'Donnell began work as a Peer Mentor years ago while living in Muskegon, then moved to the Detroit area to take care of her parents and seek mental health services for herself and her son. She is involved in many programs including coordinating with hospital personnel to ensure peoples' rights are being respected and is also a member of the Constituents Voice Board, an advocacy and advisory group that influences policy and creates development opportunities for people receiving services.

"Our presence and our voice is our strength," said O'Donnell who remains engaged in activities, programs, and training opportunities and encourages others to invest in their personal and professional growth. "There is hope for the future if the community is willing to get out and fight for their rights."

O'Donnell is well known for her moving speech at the 2018 Community Mental Health Association of Michigan's Walk a Mile in My Shoes Rally that inspired over 2,000 peers to advocate for themselves.

"Kathy personifies the courage and determination of those we serve," said Dr. Donna Coulter, Administrator for the Member Engagement division. "She is well deserving of this recognition."

*The DWMHA is the largest and most diverse Community Mental Health system in Michigan. We are committed to being people and community focused, data driven and evidence based. Through programs and services that utilize promising best practices we promote a community that is supportive and embraces individuals with mental illness, developmental disabilities and substance use disorder. We offer supports in Infant Mental Health, Integrated Healthcare, Supportive Housing, and Recovery to support self-determination and improving the health and quality of life for nearly 80,000 individuals and their families.*