



*The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force is the voice of the community on issues related to the quality and responsiveness of mental health and substance abuse disorder services.*

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**Denise Johnson to Receive the  
Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force *Karen Avery Award*  
September 11<sup>th</sup> at IndependenceFirst**

The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force (MHTF) is delighted to announce that Denise Johnson will be the fifth recipient of the *Karen Avery Award*. The award was established to honor Karen's tremendous legacy as an advocate, mentor, peer, and leader in advancing the rights of people with disabilities, and supporting independence and power for people with disabilities. Karen was a leader in the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force and a mentor to so many.

Denise Johnson, BSW, is a Deaf professional working in collaboration with the 8 Independent Living Centers (ILCs) in Wisconsin, as the Wisconsin Statewide Project Coordinator SUD/MH Services for Persons who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind. Denise has dedicated her professional career to advocating for and with persons with disabilities, and especially those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf blind and live with a mental illness or substance abuse concerns. Among her many contributions, Denise serves on the Wisconsin State Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (SCAODA) Diversity Sub-Committee, is the Vice President of American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association (ADARA), and is the Chair of IndependenceFirst's Deaf Access Consumer Advocacy Team. Denise is one of the co-founding members of Deaf Unity in Wisconsin. She is an active member of the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force.

The nomination noted that "Denise is always willing to take on additional tasks and do what she can to improve program access and provide education on issues related to substance use and mental health as related to people who are deaf, hard of hearing and/or deafblind. We need more people in the field who are like Denise and willing to advocate and assist consumers and professionals in any way that she can."

Karen Avery was Denise's supervisor for 13 years, from the time she began her advocacy work, and a great mentor. In Denise's words, Karen "taught me a lot of things but one important skill that she taught me was to be a strong and stubborn advocate. I became a strong advocate not only in my professional life but the advocacy skills were useful during my personal journey with my two wonderful and beautiful children."

The Karen Avery Award will be presented to Denise, Tuesday, September 11th, at the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force 2018 Forum *Our Future Starts Now: Healing, Hope and Resilience*. The forum supports the MHTF's commitment to advancing recovery. Speakers include Michael Joranger, LCSW, Staff Development Coordinator, SaintA, Tammy H. Scheidegger, Ph.D., LPC, NCC, Associate Professor, Practicum & Internship Coordinator, Mary Neubauer, MSW, CPS, and the voices of youth, sharing their ideas about support and recovery.

Congratulations to Denise Johnson and we thank her for her dedicated advocacy.

*Additional information about the September 11th forum including online registration is available at:*

<http://www.milwaukeeemhtf.org/2018forum/>. *Registration is required, and space is limited.*

*For additional information, contact Disability Rights Wisconsin Milwaukee office at 414-773-4646.*

*ASL Interpreters will be available.*