

Excerpt from Chapter 7, On Our Own, Together

GROW in Illinois

by Lorraine Keck and Carol Mussey

Mental illness is no respecter of persons—it can happen to anyone. The GROW mental health movement was born out of a creative response by ordinary people to their own mental and emotional suffering. It did not matter when, why, or even how the early founders of GROW became sick and tormented by inner demons, obsessions, or delusions. What did matter was that these tenacious and dedicated individuals did something about it. They conquered the giant within—through a proven method of mutual help, shared learning, and friendship—and then passed on to others the good news that there is a way to recovery.

GROW is an international mental health organization run by its members. It is based on a network of structured mutual help groups and a “caring and sharing community” and is guided by the written GROW Program of Recovery and Personal Growth.

The organization that became GROW was founded in Australia in 1957 by Con Keogh, a Catholic priest who had suffered from mental illness himself. He was searching for a way to help himself and others like him and initially attended Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) for friendly support. In AA, Con and his fellow mental sufferers discovered something essential—people recovering together by sharing personal resources and finding their way back to full and lasting mental health. Inspired by his AA experience, Con brought together other recovering patients to form their own mutual help group. Soon this one group grew into a network of groups and became known as RECOVERY, which eventually spread throughout Australia and then to other countries.

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Our network of groups, the GROW program, and the caring and sharing community represent the pearl, and the organizational structure functions as the shell to protect the valued ingredients. This organizational structure includes teams for group development, leadership training, and administration. In any formed GROW area, there are leadership meetings, organizers’ and recorders’ meetings, and training events to protect, administer, and develop the GROW groups, program, and community; and there are administrative teams to execute and serve the practical needs of the organization as a whole. All members of program-related teams are GROW leaders, as are most members of the administrative teams.