

MindFreedom Seattle

"MindFreedom Seattle advocates for the human right to a self-directed path for emotional and mental well-being". To read their vision statement and a full list of their activities go [HERE](#).

MindFreedom Seattle began in 2015 with several psychiatric survivors who began meeting informally at a coffee shop in Seattle. They found others who contacted them through Meetup and flyers they posted on utility poles in Seattle. In addition to providing mutual support, the core group decided that consciousness-raising was a priority. They were able to build a large mailing list after hosting a number of events, including movie nights and advocating mostly against proposed mental health legislation in Olympia.

One of their movie showings, 'Healing Voices' by Oryx Cohen, attracted over 80 individuals. Eventually, MindFreedom Seattle evolved to fill an important need - to amplify the voices of psychiatric survivors and help shape the future of Washington's mental health system in a time when the state was under great pressure to improve conditions.

The demand for alternatives to jails and prisons for people with psychiatric disabilities exploded precisely at a time when Western State Hospital - the state's largest mental hospital - lost its certification in 2018 due to poor conditions there. WSH also violated the Olmstead ruling which says that it is unconstitutional to keep people warehoused in highly restricted settings.

Simultaneously, disability rights activists in Washington had been blasting the high rate of incarceration involving people considered unable to assist in their defense. A class action lawsuit known as 'Trueblood' resulted in a multimillion dollar settlement enforcing a person's constitutional right to timely competency psychiatric evaluation and competency services.

Meanwhile, Joel's Law and Ricky's Law were both created by concerned family members and friends of Joel and Ricky to make it easier to force Washington residents into psychiatric 'treatment'. Opinions and subjected information from family members and friends can overturn a decision to forcibly commit someone with mental health challenges with Joel's Law or substance use with Ricky's Law. Unfortunately, many people's mental health and substance use challenges stem from family and friends, so there could be bias or revenge for some family members and others intentions with these laws.

The solution is more than putting someone in a hospital and medicating them, which is the first approach used in a psychiatric hospital. Members of MindFreedom Seattle and other activists pushed back on these laws. In contrast MindFreedom Seattle supports the Open Dialogue model of people mutually learning how to communicate one's needs, setting healthy boundaries with others, and listening and understanding other's needs and requests.

The legislation split advocates. MindFreedom Seattle advocated against Joel's Law and Ricky's Law while organizations like the National Alliance of the Mentally Ill (NAMI) and Mothers for the Mentally Ill (MOMI) were in support. While both Joel's Law and Ricky's Law were passed all was not lost. MindFreedom Seattle members had been quietly working for several years behind the scenes to promote peer respites. Their efforts finally paid off when funding for peer respite was approved by Seattle's King County Council and also written in the final version of Washington State [House Bill 1394](#).

Peer respites are homelike, non-restrictive places run by peers, where people who are experiencing a mental health crisis can voluntarily stay overnight up to several weeks in order to receive emotional support. Having peer respites in King County and WA State is a huge accomplishment, given that there are currently only 34 peer respites in the US overall.

When asked about their success, two MindFreedom Seattle co-founders stated that their strategy was to gather a lot of peers and initiate introductory meetings with lawmakers and policymakers. To cultivate these relationships they requested follow up meetings and attended the county and state monthly meetings where they shared knowledge, benefits, and outcomes of peer respites during public comment. Meetings were used to cultivate mutual trust and inform lawmakers and policymakers using data obtained from other activists and peer organizations. See example [HERE](#).

MindFreedom Seattle continues to advocate, check out their website [HERE](#). One member created and facilitates the Seattle Hearing Voices Group, a free all peer run group for people who have unshared experiences, such as hearing voices, seeing visions, tactile sensations, unusual beliefs and more. They meet every Saturday from

12noon to 1:30pm at Peer Seattle on Capital Hill. One of members of MindFreedom Seattle served on the Advisory group for MindFreedom International's 'Voices for Choices' campaign resulting in the production of a series of training videos and an organizing handbook for psychiatric survivors. MindFreedom Seattle is responsible for bringing new energy and youth activism to the psych survivors movement in the Northwest.

Activists in the Seattle area who want to contact MF Seattle can email:
seattle@mindfreedom.org