



HISTORY OF RECOVERY INTERNATIONAL

In 1937, the year Recovery was founded, a self-help association for former mental patients was unthinkable to many in the psychiatric profession. Dr. Abraham Low braved criticism and rejection as he formulated the principles and techniques of self-help aftercare. The STIGMA of mental illness was pervasive among the general public, the media, the legislature, as well as the patients and their families. Dr. Low was developing and practicing cognitive behavioral training before this was even an accepted term in the field.

Abraham A. Low:

- **1891** - Abraham A. Low born in Baranow, Poland to Bluma and Lazar Low.
- **1919** - Abraham Low graduates from University of Vienna Medical School as MD.
- **1921** - Dr. Low arrives in New York City.
- **1922** - Dr. Low completes necessary exams, begins practice as a psychoanalyst.
- **1923** - Dr. Low begins practicing in Chicago, where he will spend the rest of his life.
- **1925** - Dr. Low joins staff of the University of Illinois Medical School as a neuropsychiatrist.
- **1927** - Dr. Low becomes a naturalized U.S. citizen.
- **1931** - Dr. Low becomes Assistant Director of Psychiatric Institute, University of Illinois.

RECOVERY:

Nov. 7, 1937 – Recovery, The Association of Former Mental Patients and Their Relatives was founded by thirty ex-patients who had regained their mental health after receiving shock or insulin treatments. Meetings are held monthly, and grow to 74 regular attendees, out of 103 patients discharged from Chicago institutions that year.

Oct. 27, 1938 – The Association held its first public meeting at the University of Illinois College of Medicine, attended by more than 500 people. The evening’s program addressed the issue of *mandated court records* for those with mental illness, which stigmatizes the former patients.

1939 – Panels including Dr. Low and Former Patients are held in conjunction with meetings of the Illinois Psychiatric Society, the American Psychiatric Association, and the Illinois Society for Mental Hygiene. Groups are formed at other state hospitals including Peoria, Alton, and Kankakee. WGN Radio hosts a series of four broadcasts featuring doctors and patients on the “Good Health and Training Hour.” Social events begin, to help build a sense of belonging among people who have felt shunned and stigmatized by society and their families.

1940 - Recovery is incorporated a non-profit. Public lectures and advocacy continue. The newsletter, "Lost & Found" includes employment ads by and for former patients, many of whom have difficulty finding jobs. The organization focuses on reducing relapses among former patients through its aftercare programs. Recovery collaborates with other psychiatric organizations and the Dean of Northwestern Law School to draft new statutes regarding the commitment process for the Illinois Legislature.

1941 – Recovery moves to the Chicago State Hospital, with the aim of testing techniques in a facility with close to 5,000 patients. However, overburdened staff have no time to learn or implement new methods. Patients who have never been hospitalized are admitted to membership in Recovery for the first time. Picnics, beach parties and sleigh rides provide social opportunities that supplement Recovery's weekly classes and lectures. Illinois House Bill 631 to revise the laws regarding mentally ill persons passes the Legislative vote, but is vetoed by Governor Dwight Green after the Attorney General deems it unconstitutional.

1942 - Dr. Low steps back from the organization and seeks a commission in the U. S. Army, hoping that his new methods can help in military hospitals. Annette Brocken, one of Dr Low's patients, organizes a "new self-help project" of Recovery, with local groups led by trained laymen and meetings held in people's homes. When Dr. Low fails to get his commission because of his age, he rejoins Recovery and asks Annette to continue as President.

1943 - Dr. Low publishes The Techniques of Self-Help in Psychiatric Aftercare in three volumes:

- Volume I - Recovery's Self-Help techniques, History and Description, now a book titled *Mental Illness, Stigma and Self-Help*.
- Volume II - Group Psychotherapy
- Volume III - Lectures to Relatives of Former Patients, now titled *Peace versus Power in the Family*.

1946/47 – Dr. Low encourages patients who live elsewhere to start Recovery groups in their hometowns. Recovery groups in Muscatine, Iowa and in Brighton, Michigan are formed.

1948/49 – New groups open in Burlington, Iowa, and Evansville, Indiana.

1950 - Dr. Low publishes *Mental Health Through Will Training*, still Recovery's main text. Branches open in St. Louis and Louisville. Recovery's first national conference is held in Chicago in November.

1952 - *Dr. Low develops the self-help panel procedures and four steps used in creating examples of Recovery practice.* Close to one hundred people attend Saturday talks by Dr. Low which are recorded and edited for print. Dr. Low turns management of the organization over to its members. Leader training methods are developed.

1954 - Dr. Low dies November 17th. His widow, Mae Willett Low and former patients ensure Recovery and Dr. Low's work live on. More than 60 self-help groups exist in Michigan alone.

1956 - The Recovery Reporter is launched as a by-monthly publication, still sent to paid members, though now published quarterly.

1957 – The Joint Committee on Mental Illness and Health, Cambridge, Mass., receives a research grant from the U.S. Department of Health, Welfare and Education to study Recovery, Inc. (Results are published in the *Journal of Mental Disorder*, April, 1960; 130: 297-314, “The Self-Help Organization in the Mental Health Field: Recovery Inc., a Case Study,” by Henry Weschler, Ph.D.)

1959 – Recovery, Inc. crosses a border when John MacDonald opens a meeting in Toronto, Canada. Recovery reaches the maritime provinces later this year and Vancouver in 1971.

1960 – Membership totals 2000 people, with 370 active groups.

1963 – Recovery, Inc. is featured before a professional audience at the President’s Commission of Employment of the Handicapped. By-laws adopted at the annual meeting establish a nine-member Board of Directors. Treasure Rice becomes President, serves through 1968.

1966/1967 - *Selections from Dr. Low’s Works, Volumes I & II* were published separately. They are now a single volume and also a series of Compact Discs, including Dr. Low’s articles from 1950 through 1953. Ann Landers recommends Recovery to her readers for the first time among many to come, and the office is inundated with phone calls.

1967 - Recovery celebrates its 30th anniversary with Mrs. Mae Low as guest of honor and more than 800 members attending. A new logo, with two human forms in a circle is introduced on charms and lapel pins.

1969 - Dr. Hanus J. Grosz conducts study of Recovery. (Abstract published in *Current Psychiatric Therapies*, 1971; 11: 156-60. “Self-Help through Recovery, Inc.”)

1970 – Recovery reaches Puerto Rico. Treasure Rice serves as President for an additional year. Membership reaches 7782 people, with 780 active groups.

1971 - Recovery stretches overseas when Gary Burgess establishes a meeting in Ireland; Mike Shuster opens first group in Israel. *My Dear Ones*, a biography of Dr. Low by Neil and Margaret Rau is published.

1977 - Recovery celebrates its 40th anniversary. California, Wisconsin, Arizona and Texas area groups are quite active in representing Recovery at health fairs, hospitals and radio programs.

1978 – A panel of Recovery members appear on the Phil Donahue show on March 8, resulting in thousands of calls and letters. The most-asked question at an exhibit at the American Psychiatric Association annual meeting is “Did you really suffer from mental disease?” The leader of Puerto Rico groups visits the new Spanish-speaking group in Miami.

1979 – 1000 weekly group meetings are held in 55 areas throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, Ireland, England and Wales.

1980 - "Self-help groups: The members' perspectives" is published in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*. Knight, Bob; Wollert, Richard W.; Levy, Leon H.; Frame, Cynthia L.; Padgett, Valerie P. (February 1980).

1984 - Recovery moves from 116 So. Michigan Ave. and buys headquarters building at 802 N. Dearborn St. A study found that following participation in Recovery, former mental patients reported no more anxiety about their mental health than the general public. Members rated their life satisfaction levels as high, or higher, than the general public. Members who had participated two years or more reported the highest levels of satisfaction. Raiff, N. R. (Oct. 1984). "Chapter 14: Some Health Related Outcomes of Self-Help Participation". In Gartner, Alan; Riessman, Frank. *The Self-Help Revolution*. New York, NY: Human Sciences Press. pp. 183–193

1987 – Recovery celebrates its 50th Anniversary with a special history booklet and a dinner honoring long-time volunteer leaders.

1988 - A study found that Recovery decreased members' symptoms of mental illness and the amount of psychiatric treatment needed. About half of the members had been hospitalized before joining. Following participation, less than 8% had been hospitalized. Members' scores of neurotic distress decreased, and scores of psychological well-being for longstanding members were no different from members of a control group in the same community. Long-term members were being treated with less psychiatric medication and psychotherapy than newer members. Galanter, M. (1988). "Zealous Self-Help Groups as Adjuncts to Psychiatric Treatment: A Study of Recovery, Inc". *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 145 (10): 1248–1253.

1989 - The Abraham A. Low Institute is established by Dr. Low's daughters, Marilyn Low Schmitt and Phyllis Low Berning, along with Treasure Rice and others, to "promote the study, dissemination and application of the work of Abraham A. Low, M.D., to improve mental health in society and the home."

1993 - The Relatives Project is introduced, providing support for family and friends of people with mental and emotional problems. It teaches coping skills and stress management through meetings similar to those of RI groups, but uses literature written specifically for the families of patients. Relatives are taught to maintain empathy and positive regard for their ill family member, while providing an empowering atmosphere for all.

1995 - Donald T Lee publishes "Professional Underutilization of Recovery, Inc". *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*. 19 (1): 63–71.

1996 - Abstract published by Peter Murray, "Recovery, Inc., as an adjunct to treatment in an era of managed care". *Psychiatric services*. Washington, D.C. 47 (12): 1378–1381.

2000 - In recognition of Recovery's contributions to its field, the organization was given the Arnold L. van Amerigen Award in Psychiatric Rehabilitation from the American Psychiatric Association.

2004 – Monthly attendance has grown to 15,000 people, and free-will offerings generate \$185,000. Joan Nobiling, Recovery Training Director, introduces the first telephone meetings. With support from the Kellogg Foundation, the Power to Change program focusing on anger management and impulse control is developed and tested in the Chicago Public Schools and the Los Angeles Twin Towers Correctional Facility.

2005 – Los Angeles County sponsors one-week RI training for 60 Spanish speakers. Recovery *en Español* is established at Harbor-UCLA, in conjunction with the Latino Access Program, serving Spanish-speaking clients.

2006 – Recovery has a booth and poster session at NAMI's national conference in Washington, DC, and many RI leaders speak regularly at local NAMI programs. Team Recovery runs in the Chicago Marathon to raise funds for RI. Studies of Chicago youth participating in the Power to Change indicate statistically significant improvement in self-restraint, conflict resolution, and a reduction in violent behavior, yet program is dropped due to funding cutbacks.

2007 - Recovery celebrates 70th anniversary. The organization's name is officially changed to Recovery International, Inc., reflecting its global nature. Recovery sells building at 802 N. Dearborn Street. The Abraham Low Institute merges with Recovery International.

2009 – RI Discovery is created as a contemporary interpretation of Dr. Low's concepts and offers a shorter meeting format. Programs in San Diego area grow thanks to a major bequest from a long-time participant. Planning begins for a Veteran's Program utilizing the RI Method.

2010 – Financial crisis results in staff layoffs and severe cutbacks. Rebuilding takes many years, but organization benefits from cash reserves and does not go into debt.

2014 – National Training Conference offered in San Diego. Phone training offered several times each year. On-line meetings established, and continue with several meetings per year.

2015 – Recovery Offices move to Oak Brook, IL. Programs in San Diego area expand to reach younger participants and underserved populations through collaborations with Mental Health Resources and the Community Research Foundation.

2017 – Recovery celebrates its **80th Anniversary Year** with local celebrations, member and volunteer recognition, and special programs including piloting the Veteran's Program. It currently holds more than 500 meetings per week, including Puerto Rico, Canada and Ireland.