

Patrick Alan "Pat" Risser, B.A., Advocate and Activist for Human Rights and Social Justice

Pat was born at the Samaritan Hospital in Ashland, Ohio on September 24, 1952. He is survived by his wife and his everything, Trish Risser, with whom he enjoyed 20 years of marriage, and their beloved dogs, Harley and Mindy Sue. Also surviving are three children from a previous marriage and other family.

After completing high school, Pat studied at the Arapahoe Community College in Littleton, Colorado where he obtained an A.A. in Political and Social Science. He went on complete his B.A. in Philosophy/Psychology at The Colorado College in Colorado Springs in 1981. He also studied at the University of Denver Law School from 1983 to 1985. Pat had a life-long love of learning and completed over 1000 hours of continuing education in mental health related topics throughout the remainder of his life.

Pat was always a fighter for human rights, social justice and unmitigated respect for all people. For him, there was no one "less" and no one "other". He was a pioneer in the field of self-directed services in mental health, and a formidable opponent of coercion and abuse in that field. His first work was in Colorado, where he traveled the state starting mental health consumer self-help networks, peer support groups and consumer drop-ins. He left Colorado to become the director for a patients' rights advocacy and self-help organization in California. While with this organization, he and his staff represented thousands of people in civil commitment and medication competence hearings. Under his leadership, the agency had the highest institutional release rate in the state for many years. Pat helped grow the agency budget to over \$1 million.

In 1997, Pat met Trish on an internet group for psychiatric survivors, consumers and ex-patients called "Madness". He soon joined her in Oregon, where he continued his mission for radical change in the world of mental health services. He led and served on numerous planning councils and advisory boards, and worked as a curriculum developer, trainer and consultant on such topics as crisis management, peer counseling and mental health consumer rights.

Pat and Trish returned to Ashland, Ohio in 2006. He quickly became involved in local and state issues around the services for and rights of mental health service users, while continuing his work nationally. His Ohio affiliations included the Ohio Empowerment Center, the Ohio Community Support Planning Council, the Ohio Adult Recovery Network, the Ashland County Mental Health and Recovery Board, Ohio Legal Rights Service and the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Council. He continued his work in curriculum development and consultation, while also serving as a trainer for many Ohio Peer Support Specialists. He wrote and published a number of articles and blogs and maintained a website that continues to serve as an invaluable resource for individuals attempting to navigate or exit the mental health system in a self-directed manner.

Nationally, Pat served on several Alternatives Conference Planning Committees, the Subcommittee on Consumer/Survivor Issues (an advisory committee to the federal government), the National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy (Board Member and past President), the National Association of Case Management (board member) and as a peer reviewer for the organization of Federal Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness. He was recognized numerous times for the volume, quality and integrity of his work, receiving the National Association of Case Management XCEL Award as Consumer Case Manager of the Year in 2000, the National Mental Health Association Clifford Beers Award in 2005, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration "Voice" Award in

2011, among others. In the last three years, much of his work was around opposition to National House Bill 2646 (the Murphy Bill), which would severely limit the human rights of individuals receiving psychiatric services, decrease their privacy and advocacy options, and allow for an increase in the latitude of courts to force psychiatric treatment on them against their wishes.

Pat died on June 15, 2016 at Hospice of North Central Ohio following several months of difficult health issues. He was abundantly clear on the fact that his years of treatment with multiple psychiatric medications contributed to his health problems and untimely death. Pat often reminded others of the established fact that consumers of mental health services die, on average, 25 years short of an average life span. He is missed terribly by Trish, Harley, Mindy Sue, his colleagues in advocacy and activism, and his friends who number in the thousands around the world. His passing leaves an enormous void in the community of people who share his work and his passion. His life created a body of work and a legacy of compassion and integrity unmatched by any other to date.

Memorial contributions in Mr. Risser's memory may be made to Denbow-Gasche Funeral Home, 313 Center ST. Ashland, Ohio 44805 to help defray the funeral expenses.