

Advocating for Mental Health at the Virginia General Assembly

Mental Health Advocacy Day - January 26 | 8:00-11:00 AM

On **January 26 from 8:00-11:00 AM**, **Vocal Virginia**, **Mental Health Virginia**, **NAMI Virginia**, and **Voices for Virginia's Children** are coming together for a powerful **Mental Health Advocacy Day** to amplify the voices of individuals, families, and communities across the Commonwealth.

This advocacy day offers both in-person and virtual options, making it accessible to advocates from every corner of Virginia. Participants will unite around shared priorities to promote strong mental health policies, increased access to services, and sustained investment in community-based supports.

Those attending in person will gather at the Virginia General Assembly Building in Richmond, where advocates will hear from policy leaders, learn about key legislative priorities, and engage directly with lawmakers. The event provides a meaningful opportunity to share lived experiences and highlight the real impact of mental health policy decisions on those with lived experience of mental health challenges.



Advocating for Mental Health at the Virginia General Assembly (Cont.)

For those unable to travel, virtual participation options will allow advocates to engage remotely, receive timely policy updates, and take action from home. Whether in Richmond or online, participants will be equipped with the tools and information needed to effectively advocate for impactful mental health policies.

Mental health touches every community, and collective advocacy plays a critical role in shaping policies that support recovery, prevention, and well-being. By joining this collaborative advocacy day, participants help ensure that mental health remains a priority during the legislative session, especially as it relates to Virginia's peers.

Together, we can make our voices heard and help build a stronger, healthier Virginia.

To register for this important event, please click [here](#).



Advocating for Mental Health at the Virginia General Assembly (Cont.)

MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY DAY

REGISTER HERE:

[HTTPS://BIT.LY/VAMHADVOCACYDAY2026](https://bit.ly/VAMHADVOCACYDAY2026)



IN-PERSON & VIRTUAL OPTIONS



vocal
virginia



Jan. 26, 2026
8 - 11 a.m.

Vocal Virginia Announces Appointment of Martin Mash as Executive Director

Richmond, VA — October 31, 2025— Vocal Virginia’s Board of Directors is pleased to announce the appointment of **Martin Mash** as the organization’s new **Executive Director**, effective October 29, 2025.

Martin brings a deep commitment to advocacy, peer-focused education, and peer-led mental health recovery. With years of experience in public policy and nonprofit leadership, he is well-positioned to lead Vocal Virginia into its next chapter of growth and achievement.

“The Board of Directors looks forward to working with Martin as he takes the helm of Vocal Virginia, ensuring the growth and sustainability of the organization” said Thomas Pratt, President of the Vocal Virginia Board of Directors.

As Executive Director, Martin will oversee statewide education and network programs, partnerships, and advocacy efforts that empower individuals with lived experience of mental health or co-occurring challenges to shape the systems and policies that affect their lives.



Martin Mash, Executive Director

Vocal Virginia Announces Appointment of Martin Mash as Executive Director (Cont.)

“I am honored to be promoted to this important role at Vocal Virginia and to continue building on its powerful legacy of peer leadership and community engagement,” said Mash. “I look forward to working with the Board of Directors, staff, and Vocal Virginia members and partners to strengthen the recovery movement through peer-led initiatives aimed at building awareness of mental health and co-occurring challenges.”



Jessica Daggett, Education Program Director

The Board also extends its sincere gratitude to Jessica Daggett, Education Program Director, for her dedication and hard-work during the transition.

Vocal Virginia is the Commonwealth's only state-wide mental health advocacy and education nonprofit that is 100% staffed and governed by individuals with lived experience of mental health challenges. For more information about Vocal Virginia and its mission, please visit <https://www.vocalvirginia.org/>. To contact Vocal Virginia, please email network@vocalvirginia.org.

Now Hiring: Network Program Director

Join Vocal Virginia and help shape the future of mental health advocacy in our Commonwealth

Vocal Virginia is excited to announce an opening for a **Network Program Director**, a key leadership role within our peer-led, statewide mental health advocacy organization. If you are passionate about systems change, community organizing, and elevating the voices of people with lived experience, this may be the opportunity you've been waiting for.

About Vocal Virginia

Vocal Virginia is a statewide nonprofit dedicated to empowering individuals with lived experience of mental health challenges. Through organizing, education, and strategic advocacy, we work to transform individual lives, local communities, and Virginia's mental health system. As the **only statewide mental health organization in Virginia that is 100% staffed and governed by people with lived experience**, we center peer voices in everything we do.

About the Vocal Virginia Network

The Vocal Virginia Network is our outreach, advocacy, and community engagement arm, connecting more than 2,000 members across the state. The Network supports adults with lived experience, builds emerging leadership, advances policy and systems change, and promotes wellness and recovery. The Network Program Director plays a central role in strengthening this work and expanding our statewide impact.

Now Hiring: Network Program Director (Cont.)

Position Summary

The **Network Program Director** provides strategic leadership, coordination, and day-to-day management of the Vocal Virginia Network. Working closely with the Executive Director, Board, staff, and community members, this role helps build power among people with lived experience, advance advocacy priorities, and deepen engagement across Virginia.

This is a **highly collaborative and public-facing position** that combines advocacy, policy analysis, community engagement, and program leadership. From tracking legislation during the General Assembly session to facilitating member-led advocacy and leading our annual statewide conference, the Network Program Director helps shape the future of mental health advocacy in Virginia.

Key Areas of Responsibility

- **Advocacy and Systems Change:** Supporting and empowering individuals with lived experience, helping develop and implement our annual advocacy agenda, tracking behavioral health policy and legislation, and representing Vocal Virginia in coalitions and public forums.
- **Community Engagement and Education:** Building relationships statewide, representing Vocal Virginia at events and meetings, and providing education through writing, training, social media, and other platforms.
- **Program Leadership:** Leading the Advocacy Committee, supporting individuals seeking mental health resources, collaborating on outreach and membership growth, and planning our annual statewide conference.

Now Hiring: Network Program Director (Cont.)

Who Should Apply

We are seeking candidates who bring strong communication, organizing, and relationship-building skills, along with a deep commitment to peer leadership, equity, and lived experience. An associate's degree is preferred, and experience with public speaking, advocacy, or behavioral health systems is a plus.

Individuals with lived experience of mental health, co-occurring, and/or trauma-related challenges are strongly encouraged to apply.

Position Details

- **Reports to:** Executive Director
- **Type:** Full-time, exempt
- **Salary:** \$50,000-\$55,000, commensurate with experience
- **Benefits:**
 - 100% employer-paid health, dental, and vision insurance
 - Retirement benefits
 - Short- and long-term disability insurance
 - Flexible work schedule
 - Paid vacation and sick time
- **Location:** Remote (Virginia residents only)
- **Travel:** Frequent travel to Richmond during the General Assembly session (January-March) and occasional statewide travel throughout the year

Now Hiring: Network Program Director (Cont.)

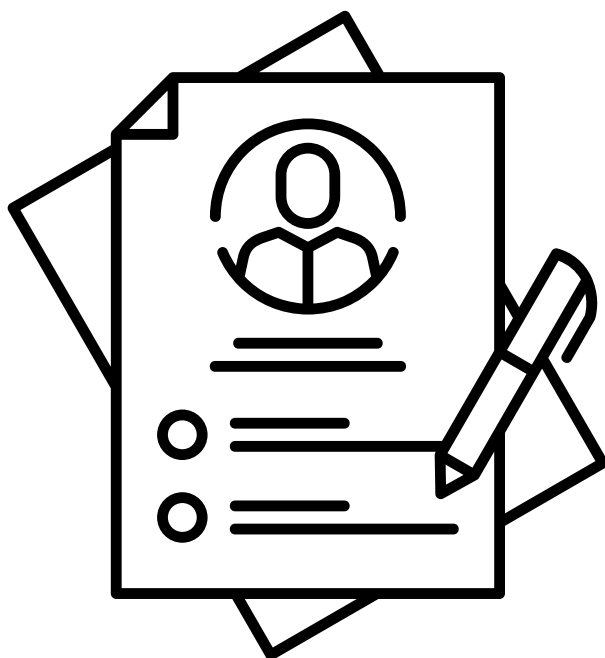
How to Apply

Please email a **cover letter, resume, and at least three professional references** to network@vocalvirginia.org with the subject line **“Network Program Director.”**

Applications will be accepted until **December 23, 2025**. Candidates selected for an interview will be asked to provide a writing sample.

Vocal Virginia is an equal opportunity employer.

If you are ready to lead, advocate, and help amplify lived experience voices across Virginia, we encourage you to apply and be part of this important work.



Member Spotlight: Kelly Argueta's Journey with the Hearing Voices Network

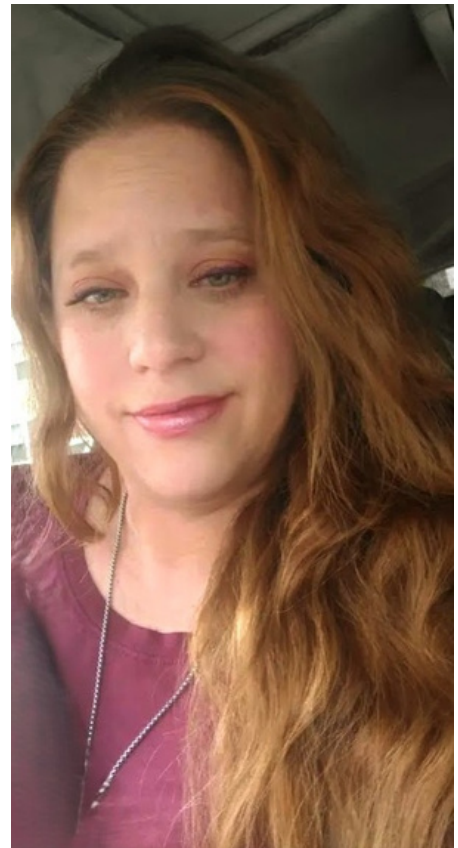
How one peer specialist is creating sacred space for experiences often silenced

Kelly Argueta didn't set out to become a Mental Health Outpatient RPRS and Hearing Voices Network Facilitator at the Rappahannock Area Community Service Board. Like many who find their way into peer support, she arrived through necessity -- searching online for credible resources to help her son, who hears voices.

What she found changed everything.

"What stood out to me was the focus they have on validating their experience and normalizing it," Kelly recalls of discovering the Hearing Voices Network. "They asked '**what happened to you, not what's wrong with you.**' HVN does not try to silence or fix anyone. You are accepted as you are."

Based in Fredericksburg, Virginia, Kelly now facilitates a Hearing Voices group that draws participants from across the globe. The transformation she witnessed in her own family life illustrates the profound difference this approach can make.



Member Spotlight: Kelly Argueta's Journey with the Hearing Voices Network (Cont.)

She shares a pivotal moment: "One day my son asked me to come to his room and see if I saw blood on the walls. I told him, 'I believe you see it, but I don't see it. Maybe you could take a picture so we could look at it together.'"

When her son looked at the photo and saw nothing, Kelly responded with compassion rather than correction. "Over time, this approach helped him feel supported and grounded. The experience became something we could explore together rather than him handling it on his own."



With 2.5 years of experience as a peer recovery specialist, Kelly has become intentional about the values she holds sacred: safety, respect, and choice.

"I focus on validation, curiosity, and presence," she says. "It is amazing to model these values and watch group participants support each other with these values as well."

The impact resonates across continents. "To hear the members of the group say, 'I thought I was the only one, I need these groups, I am stronger because I feel less alone' – it brings tears to my eyes to think about how they show up for one another every week."

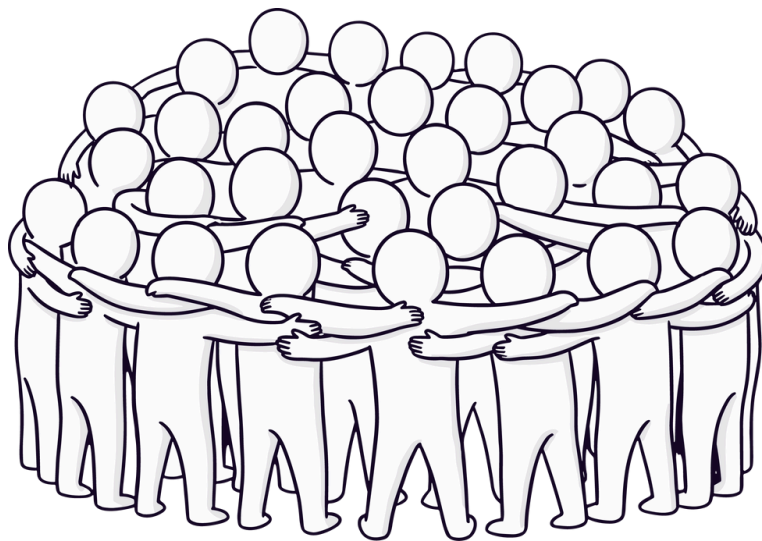
Member Spotlight: Kelly Argueta's Journey with the Hearing Voices Network (Cont.)

One group member told Kelly: "I wish others didn't see us as having disabilities because we have EXTRA ABILITIES." Kelly couldn't agree more.

Kelly brings something to this work that no clinical training can provide—lived experience and the wisdom that comes from sitting with uncertainty.

"My experience has taught me that safety, trust, and being genuinely heard is more helpful than answers," she explains. "We do not assume 'you need to take your medicine, or what you are hearing or seeing is not real.' Validation is key."

This approach has changed Kelly both personally and professionally. The voices community has deepened her compassion while teaching her to advocate not just for others, but for herself. "I have come to see how courageous, empathetic, and knowledgeable they are and seeing that has given me strength and support in my own life."



Member Spotlight: Kelly Argueta's Journey with the Hearing Voices Network (Cont.)

Looking ahead, Kelly hopes the peer movement continues to expand. But she's careful about the language used to describe this work.

"I have never connected with the phrase 'we change lives,'" Kelly says, "because what we do is support and witness people as they do the hard work of changing their own lives."

She wishes more people understood that voice-hearing "is not something to be feared or silenced. The Hearing Voices approach recognizes that these experiences can be meaningful, and that people can learn ways to understand and live with them."



When Kelly needs grounding, she turns to Eleanor Roosevelt's words: "Do one thing every day that scares you." And sometimes she listens to a playlist her Hearing Voices group created together – a reminder of connection and the many ways people find steadiness.

Kelly recharges best at home with her cats, practicing the slowing down and staying present that she shares in common with many of the people she supports.

It's in that presence, that willingness to sit with someone's experience without rushing to fix or silence it, that Kelly has found the heart of this work.

And week after week, participants from around the world log in to find that sacred space waiting for them.



Vocal Virginia's Board of Directors

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Martin Mash, Executive Director

About Vocal Virginia

Vocal Virginia advocates with and for the mental health community by sharing a unique, experience-driven perspective that empowers us to educate with empathy and collaborate with care. We are the only state-wide mental health organization in Virginia that is 100% staffed and governed by individuals living with mental health challenges. ***We speak from experience.***

The deadline for the next issue of the "Vocal Virginia Newsletter" is March 1, 2026. Send submissions via email to network@vocalvirginia.org, or by postal mail to:

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