

Advocate of the Year

Kristy Hommel, Thetford

In 2024, Kristy Hommel has relayed her own personal story to 5 different Vermont Police Academy classes, to 6 different Team Two trainings across Vermont and to the only Crisis Intervention Team training held in 2024. These 12 public speaking engagements are on top of Kristy's work in hospital settings and some school settings, where she relays her very personal experiences of living with a diagnosis of treatment resistant major depressive disorder.

Kristy has travelled, at her own expense, to the Police Academy in Pittsford to speak to both new law enforcement recruits attending the police academy from multiple different police agencies – municipal, sheriff and state police - and to police officers who have transferred to Vermont from other states or who are seeking Level II certification. In addition to her efforts at the police Academy, Kristy has volunteered with Team Two, travelling to Brattleboro, South Burlington (twice!), St. Johnsbury, Barre and Rutland to impart to mental health first responders the importance of listening, to treating people in crisis with respect and dignity, and to thinking about word choice when responding to a mental health crisis. Kristy talks about her lifetime of living with mental illness in a very open and caring manner, resulting in offering the audience an opportunity to ask questions and interact with her in a way they would never have a chance to if Kristy was not present and willing to share her own struggles and experiences. In written evaluations after day long Team Two trainings, participants are asked what they liked best about the training, and they often point to hearing from Kristy and how valuable and helpful her story and message is to them. Participants use what Kristy tells them as they respond to crises – “you are not in any trouble” being one of the small yet critical tips that Kristy imparts to the audience as an example of what was so very helpful to her when she was experiencing a mental health crisis just a few years ago.

I cannot think of a more deserving advocate of the year.