

Eulogy to Bill Kyles

This is a day of great sadness, for me personally and for the National Council. I'm joined here today by the National Council's Executive VP, Jeannie Campbell and Board members Liz Earls, Rich Leclerc, Shelly Chandler and Pat Connell. But it is the entire National Council family – our staff, the full board and our almost 2000 member organizations – that mourns the loss of Bill Kyles. We can't imagine a National Council without Bill.

Bill's enthusiasm for our shared mission — the recovery of people with mental illnesses — and his belief that all is possible, nothing is beyond our reach — was viral. It's impossible to believe that someone so full of life is gone.

Like you, we are shocked, struggling to find words to adequately honor Bill, his life and his contributions.

As a colleague on the board said, "Bill was truly one of a kind – a man with a rich legacy of accomplishments and a personality second to none."

Bill served the National Council Board of Directors with great distinction and in June he completed a 2-year term as Chairman of the Board. A staunch grassroots advocate, in Missouri and in D.C., his National Council tenure will be remembered as a time of growth and accomplishment, all enabled by Bill Kyles.

During Bill's tenure, National Council membership more than doubled. Leading the board's Membership Committee – he strategized, cajoled, and did everything in his power to engage new members, believing that once an organization joined they'd be satisfied customers. And his belief in us encouraged it to be so.

Bill urged us to tackle the lack of leadership diversity head on. As one board member said, "Bill was more than a mental health champion he was a good human being. His story — from Boys Town to great professional success — is the stuff of books and movies." And given his own story, Bill was committed to the success of up and coming leaders from diverse and sometimes troubled backgrounds. His vision led the National Council to establish the only one of its kind Addressing Health Disparities Leadership Program. We remember his joy a few months ago when he spent the day with the incoming class of 20 young leaders. The project is a tribute to Bill and his belief in a better future.

And we will never forget Bill's pioneering role in bringing Mental Health First Aid to the USA. He had the vision to see what this program could do — to educate; to fight the stigma of mental illness; and how it enables neighbor to help neighbor. MHFA USA is a legacy to our communities from Bill.

But beyond Bill's many accomplishments, I am struck by how everyone — from each of my staff to board members that saw Bill just a few times a year — has a story to share about a very personal and special Bill experience.

And I have many of my own, from our every Tuesday morning phone calls to our trip this past May to visit member organizations in Europe, capped off by Bill gallantly and gamely squiring 4 women through the streets of Paris in high Bill style.

Maya Angelou said in an interview, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” We will never forget how Bill made us feel — that we are kind, we are smart and we are important.

A year ago, Bill helped us film a video titled “Fighting for our Future.” (link to <http://vimeo.com/10378584>). He was asked to sum up in one word the experience of his life’s work and his response was “Incredible.” And that, in one word, is Bill. Incredible. And we will miss him beyond measure.