

American Counseling Association

Counseling Awareness Month Celebration Guide

Background and Rationale for Celebrating Counseling Awareness Month (CAM)

The more than 41,000 members of the American Counseling Association (ACA) take considerable pride in both their work and their accomplishments and seek to make the importance and counseling and the role of counselors better known throughout the nation and the world. To this end, ACA designates April of each year as Counseling Awareness Month, a time of advocacy for the profession and celebration of the outstanding efforts of counselors in myriad settings as they seek to facilitate the growth and development of all people.

The information that follows in this guide will allow members to plan and implement activities and events that call public attention to counseling and the role of professional counselors. Review the strategies herein and lay out a strategy in your work setting for improving awareness of the counselor's important work.

It's our month – let's pull out the stops in making it a success!

Levels of CAM Activities and Events

Counseling in the United States and the world is delivered via many human service settings and can be found in a variety of institutions. Statistics from the US Department of Labor indicate that more than 600,000 counselors work in agencies, schools, organizations, private practice, personal and health care delivery systems and other settings. These professionals work with people across the life span, from childhood through the senior years.

Counselors can engage in the celebration of ACA Counseling Awareness Month at multiple levels. Many of the activities and events cited in this guide can be individually driven---while others can be performed by teams and organizations. Celebrating Counseling Awareness Month can be an evolving experience with base strategies enacted first and then new and innovative items added over time. The eventual result will be improved awareness and understanding of counselor by individuals who might benefit from the counselor's services and the organizations, institutions and agencies that can support the counselor's work.

Consider a dual approach to celebrating Counseling Awareness Month. First, the observance can be used to inform the public being served by the counseling entity of which you are a part. Second, and possibly equally important, is the enhanced recognition you can achieve within your institution, organization and agency. CAM activities and events can be planned and implemented by the following:

- Individual counselors
- Counseling practices
- Schools and colleges
- Health, mental health and community agencies
- Centers, clinics and human service systems
- Local counseling organizations
- State counseling organization

Strategies for Celebrating Counseling Awareness Month in Our Workplaces and Communities

Open House/Meet the Counselor Program

Use CAM to host an event that focuses on counseling and counselors. Follow the “Back to School” night format utilized by many schools soon after the beginning of the new academic year. A “Meet the Counselor” program can also be a part of a regular event like the April meeting of a parent-teacher organization or similar body. Any open house or orientation program of this nature should address the following issues:

- Who we are?
- Audiences we serve
- Where we are?
- How to access?

Holding this event early in April will allow for the dissemination of information about other activities and events that will follow in CAM. When practical and cost efficient, include light refreshments as an added hospitality feature to your open house or program.

Counselor Presence on Institution/Agency/Organization Programs

Many mental health, community agency and other social/human service organizations hold regular governance or public meetings to address administrative, management and consumer issues. These meetings provide an environment during in which counseling can be advanced and information shared with leaders, decision-makers and stakeholders alike. Seek agenda time during Counseling Awareness Month for the delivery of a short, concise message.

Tips on Making Public Presentations

If you are successful in getting the opportunity to address governance or public meetings in your community, consider the following presentation tips:

- Prepare your remarks and make certain they are appropriate for the audience. Simple and to the point is the best approach in orientation presentations.

- Rehearse your presentation.
- Use any tools (e.g., PowerPoint, handouts, posters, etc.) that will enhance your presentation.
- Remember that you are the counseling expert and act the part.
- Be prepared for a range of questions, from the basic (What do counselors do?) to the complex.
- Invite follow-up, including site visits, telephone conversations, etc.
- Thank your host or sponsor for the opportunity to promote counseling.

Counseling Brochure

Does your counseling entity have a public information brochure that outlines the mission of the school, agency or organization? If yes, CAM can be motivation for revising it and targeting existing and new audiences for a distribution campaign. If not, CAM may be an excellent time to create such a tool and get it in the hands of individuals who need to know about your services. Brochures that transmit a simple message like “What Rehabilitation Counselors Do” or “Services Available at the Franklin Career Development Center” work best as orientation tools.

Also consider other methods (web site) of delivering your message. If appropriate, have the counseling orientation brochures translated into Spanish or other languages if prospective clients do not read or speak English as their primary language.

Awards/Recognition Programs

Counseling organizations or the institutions, agencies and organizations where counselors function and serve can use CAM for those awards and recognition programs that honor outstanding counseling work and service to students and/or clients. Plan to use April gatherings to honor outstanding counselors and invite the media to cover the event.

Newspaper Coverage

The basic rule of thumb in obtaining newspaper coverage is to do something “newsworthy.” For that reason, CAM promoters will need to plan well in advance to get the appropriate attention. The greatest success in newspaper coverage is likely to come from smaller community daily papers, weekly papers and those paid for by advertising and distributed on a complimentary basis to readers. It also helps to have an editor or reporter friend on the “inside,” someone with whom you might share a story idea.

Consider one or more of the following as your “newsworthy” suggestion for approaching a newspaper in your community:

- Counselor added to the staff
- Counseling program introduces new service or dimension
- Public interest stories – Counseling staff collect coats for homeless shelter

- Counselor achieves certification or licensure credential
- Counselor elected to local, state or national organization office or appointed to committee
- Profile of school, agency or organization - Day in the Life of a Counselor
- Counselor wins award or earns advanced degree
- Counseling credential story – Explain of licensure, certification, etc. to a public that can benefit from knowing

Some newspapers are open to the suggestion of editorial subjects and contributions for their opinion editorial pages (op-ed section). How a community addresses the education or mental health issues of its citizens can make for excellent editorial subjects.

Clip and save any stories you are able to get reported. They will serve as a future reminder that getting newspaper attention is possible.

Radio and Television Coverage

Gaining attention for CAM on local radio and television will be even more challenging and require considerable advance planning. Like newspapers, the electronic media are looking for “newsworthy” stories, but they have far greater limits with respect to placing your story or message within allotted times when they are disseminating information to their listeners and viewers.

Radio and television stations are required by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to make programming time available for community interest pieces, but unfortunately programming of this nature is often so far away from prime airing times that limited audiences ever hear or see the messages. The result, nevertheless, may be worth the effort.

Many stations across the country are willing to run public service announcements (PSA) that are brief, prepared in advance and presented in a format that doesn’t require modification to play. Local and state counseling organizations may wish to work with a commercial media producer or the students engaged in media studies at a local college or university to create these PSAs. CAM planners should also consider the images or voices of recognizable celebrities (e.g., athletic coach, government official, etc.) when making PSAs.

Similarly, both radio and television stations in many communities offer “People in the Community” profiles where a local mental health or school counselor might be the subject of a three-four minute “good neighbor” piece that would air several times during the day on radio or during the evening news on television. Explore with your local media outlets how such coverage might be generated.

Finally, radio and television outlets often create “hotline” programming when members of their audience can call in and get information and guidance on certain “hot button”

topic like taxes, flu shots or back-to-school concerns. Unlike permanent crisis intervention hotlines, these programs tend to be limited in time and provide resources callers can use to connect with more in-depth services. Again, the programming director at local radio and television stations can be the best source of information about these activities.

Cable television providers around the nation provide community access programming and some will even provide facilities, equipment and personnel for those engaged in delivering an important messages to the public. The downside is that such programming receives limited attention by viewers and may not yield the same results as other outreach ventures.

Strategies for Dealing with the Media

The Texas Cultural & Arts Network offers a series of questions that can guide counselors who may be in a position to advance a story in either the print or electronic media. Editors, according to TCANet, are constantly looking for “newsworthy” items and often apply one or more of these questions as their litmus test regarding what they will eventual print or air.

- Is the story unique?
- Is the story timely?
- Is there a local angle?
- Is the story visual?

To learn about how these four questions might determine whether your counseling story will ever see the light of day, visit the TCA Network web site at <http://www.arts.state.tx.us/news/prpower/worthy.htm> and you will find the answers, along with an excellent primer in advocacy and public relations strategies.

CAM may be just one of the times when counselors will find themselves talking with reporters. When you want attention you will be the one initiating the contact, but you may be just as likely to be contacted by a reporter as a potential “source.” In either situation, operate from the premise that you are the “expert” about counseling and the counseling environment in which you work. It is also important to understand and abide by any policies which your employer may have about speaking to the media. Once you have the “green light,” these abridged tips from the Connecticut Health Policy Project, may be useful:

1. Call the reporter back immediately. Determine the deadline for the story.
2. Find out what kind of story the reporter intends to do. Solicit the questions you will be asked and do any required homework.
3. Prepare as much as you can.
4. Be helpful. Refer the reporter to others if they will be more informative.
5. Relax and don’t be afraid to ask questions. A good reporter wants to get it right.
6. Listen carefully to the questions. Take a few seconds to frame your response.

7. Speak slowly and avoid jargon. Speak with confidence and enthusiasm.
8. Smile when you speak. Even if they can't see you, it comes through.
9. Don't be thrown off by pauses after you answer. Taking notes or typing your answers takes time.
10. Be brief. Keep to the major points and the broader issues.
11. If you don't know the answer, say so. Offer to get back to the reporter with the information.
12. If it appears you've been misunderstood, fix it immediately. Be gentle, but fix it.
13. Be clear about your position and/or that of whom you represent. Offer support materials when relevant.
14. Assume nothing is ever "off the record" and that anything you say or give them could end up in the story. Be careful making jokes.

The entire tip page can be viewed at:

<http://www.cthealthpolicy.org/toolbox/opinion/reporters.htm>

Internet and Website Promotion

Today, most institutions, agencies and organizations that have a counseling dimension in their programming maintain a web site to provide general information for their "stakeholders." The same is true for many private counseling practices. CAM planners should work with the web managers and designers to make certain that April is identified as Counseling Awareness Month and other messages are shared with individuals, families and others that go to the web site on a regular basis.

A number of web site strategies follow that will allow you to call greater attention to counseling and counselors:

- General counseling center information - Mission, location, hours of operation, etc.
- Counselors Up Close & Personal - Weekly profiles (including photos) of counseling staff.
- Question of the Day or Work - Posting of timely issue or question with link to full counseling information.
- FAQ postings -Answers to questions of a general nature and frequently asked.
- Virtual Tour of the Counseling Center – Photos and words that promote the counseling effort within the institution, organization, agency, etc.

Community Calendars/Information Boards

Newspapers and radio/television stations regularly post important community events in their daily, weekly or monthly calendars. These calendar-only listings can publicize CAM and any special events you may be holding in April.

Expert Resource Directory

A number of counseling organizations and enterprises have engaged in effective outreach by creating a directory of experts of the various issues and concerns addressed by professional counselors. Often this directory is published or made available online where reporters can identify a “source” or organizations can learn about a prospective speaker or program contributor. The exposures created by maintaining such a directory extend far beyond April and Counseling Awareness Month, but they are outreach ventures that can pay huge dividends. Regular updating of the information in an expert directory is critical to its success.

Institution/Organization/Agency Communiqués

Counselors live and work in environments, public and professional, that depend on print, electronic and Internet communiqués to educate and inform. Those responsible for CAM must take stock of the various information dissemination mechanisms that they can tap to help call attention to counseling. A simple message in ten church, synagogue or mosque bulletins stating that “April in Counseling Awareness Month in [Insert City] – Learn More About Counselors in Our Community” will be read by a significant number of people and can be done at minimal human and fiscal cost.

Will Rogers, noted American humorist of the last century, once said: “Get someone else to toot your horn and the distance will travel twice as far.” Gaining inclusion in school, hospital, agency, college, religious and related communiqués is a perfect example of his wisdom.

VIP or Organization Proclamations

Observances like ACA Counseling Awareness Month can always bask in the attention received when an official leader or governing body proclaims April as Counseling Awareness Month in the state, city, and town or within an organization or body. At the end of this guide, CAM planners will find a template that can be modified and used to place a draft proclamation before public and professional leaders. Consider the following VIPs as prospective proclamation makers:

- Governor
- Mayor
- Secretary of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor
- Commissioner of Mental Health or Employment Services
- Legislative Bodies
- City/County/Town Council
- School boards and community health/mental health advisory boards

Planners will enjoy a greater chance of success at acquiring an official Counseling Awareness Month proclamation if they combine their efforts with fellow counseling professionals and seek a single proclamation, rather than ones that focuses on their counseling specialty or a singular setting. In states and communities, the lead for proclamation acquisition should be taken by ACA state branches and local counseling

organization. Remember that governing offices and bodies have procedures and timelines that need to be followed to engage in official acts and allow sufficient time to accomplish the task.

CAM “Get the Message Out” Suggestions

The observance of Counseling Awareness Month, as well as any other publicity or public relations campaign, requires the full consideration of every communication mechanism available to you. Consider the following “Get the Message Out” suggestions:

- **Bulletin Boards** – Use the primary bulletin board in the school, agency, clinic or organization to promote April as Counseling Awareness. Use photos of the counseling staff and provide a brief mission overview and contact information for those who see the bulletin board and want additional information. Don’t forget the larger message boards that also appear on the grounds in front of schools, hospitals, shopping malls and religious facilities. These will be seen by countless passers-by.
- **Badges/T-shirts & Caps/Banners** – Many CAM sponsors will look to novel and inexpensive message delivery tools to garner attention. Badges and buttons can often be obtained inexpensively in quantities. Some school counselors will get students to assist in making paper badges and tags that honor the counseling staff. Those with the financial wherewithal may wish to consider T-shirts and caps to generate attention. Finally, a banner over the door to the counseling center or entrance to the clinic can tell all who pass that it is Counseling Awareness Month.
- **Contests** – Many observance celebrators use events such as Counseling Awareness Month to engage their “stakeholders” in recognition efforts. Poster and essay contests are any excellent example of how creative writers and artists can use their talents to help counselors promote counseling. Awarding prizes to the winners will result in even more “newsworthy” attention within the school, agency or organization. Art and poster contests can yield personalized, low-cost decorations for the counseling facility.
- **Give-Aways** – The CAM Book Mark. If you have access to any graphic software, you have the ability to make a special CAM Book Mark, an excellent “give-away” device that can carry the message to many. Go to your copier or have a quick copy printer, prepare the book marks, four up, front and back on card stock. Then cut and distribute. You can also run the book marks through a laminator to make them more durable.

Dos & Don’ts of Public Outreach Campaigns

This guide has offered a number of suggestions that individuals, staffs and organizations can use to observe Counseling Awareness Month. With every endeavor of this nature,

there are certain dos and don'ts that should be followed to ensure maximum observance exposure and efficient utilization of human and fiscal resources. They include:

DO

1. Engage multiple counselors and "stakeholders" in planning and conducting CAM. The more minds and hands available to do the work, the greater the outreach results. Find students, board members, volunteers and others willing to help create and conduct observance activities and give each a job to perform.
2. Start small and allow your CAM activities to grow and expand. Then repeat the things that worked and proved to do the most effective job of reaching the intended audiences.
3. Use the observance of Counseling Awareness Month to call attention to the work of the American Counseling Association, its' divisions and branches and the professional partnerships ACA has created to advance professional issues and call attention to the work of counselors. Advocacy efforts like CAM represent one of many reasons why counselors should hold members in ACA.
4. Celebrate counseling awareness throughout the year and insert the public outreach tasks in this guide whenever they will be most effective. April may become the focal point for CAM, but public and professional outreach has no calendar limitations.
5. Respect the privacy and confidentiality of your clients and your work setting. More appropriately than calling attention to specific clients and situations, this is a time to be general and all encompassing in our communications efforts.
6. Blend calling attention to both counseling needs of clients and the various roles played by counselors in responding to those needs.
7. Collaborate with fellow counselors to advance a notion of counseling across settings and the needs of people at various life stages for counseling.
8. Engage in an after CAM evaluation of the things that worked and those that will require modification in order to remain a part of the effort in the future.

DON'T

1. Attempt to conduct Counseling Awareness Week without a plan that includes the roles of contributors and milestones around which specific tasks will be performed.

2. Invest major dollars in time-specific projects. Buttons that say “Counseling Awareness Week 2008” can’t be used the following year. A better alternative is a message like “April is Counseling Awareness Week.”
3. Pay for things that you may be able to get for free. As an example, students involved in broadcast studies at a local college may be able to take on the creation of public service announcements (PSAs) as a for-credit project and do a tremendous job of making the tapes that radio or television stations will run on your behalf..
4. Allow CAM and related outreach efforts to detract from the important work that you do for your clients. Being an effective counselor is your most important job.
5. Waste your energies attempting to engage non-responsive communications entities like newspapers, radio stations and television stations. When your request falls on deaf ears, move on to the next outlet.

A Final Note – Share Your Experiences with ACA

After you have celebrated Counseling Awareness Month, let ACA know about your outreach efforts. Share your experiences, proclamations, newspaper clips and photographs so ACA can pass along to others embarking on their own CAM campaign. Direct all information to: Brandt Heatherington, Director of Marketing, American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304. Telephone: 703/823-9800. Email: bheatherington@counseling.org. And don’t be surprised if your successes are reported in the next edition of this guide.

American Counseling Association

Sample Proclamation Supporting Counseling Awareness Month

Below you will find language that you may submit when soliciting a proclamation for Counseling Awareness Month. Feel free to modify to fit requirements.

Whereas: The American Counseling Association [and state or local association] has [have] declared the month of April [insert year] as Counseling Awareness Month, and

Whereas: Professional counseling contributes to the growth and development of people across the life span and assists them in achieving their full human, educational and career potential, and

Whereas: Citizens can utilize the services of professional counselors in schools, colleges, mental health agencies, community agencies, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, private practice and other delivery settings; and

Whereas: An improved understanding of counseling and how it can address citizen [insert student or other word here if appropriate] needs will be beneficial to all,

[Ending when proclamation is made by an official]

Therefore, I [insert name of governor, mayor or official] of [insert the name of state, city or community] do hereby proclaim the month of April [insert year] as Counseling Awareness Month and asked all citizens to learn more about the role of counseling in our lives and recognize the important contributions made by counseling professionals.

[Ending when proclamation is issued by a governing body or organization]

Therefore, the [insert identity of city council, school board, etc.] hereby proclaims the month of April [insert year] as Counseling Awareness Month and encourages greater understanding of the role of counseling in our lives and enhanced recognition of the contributions made by counseling professionals.

Signature

Date

American Counseling Association

Counseling Fact Sheet

Did you know?

- ✓ More than 600,000 professional counselors are working in educational (schools and colleges), mental health, community agency, private practice and related human service settings across the nation. (Source: US Department of Labor)
- ✓ Counselors address a variety of human growth and development issues and problems of people at all life stages, from childhood through the senior years.
- ✓ Counselors are a vital member of the cadre of professional human service providers working alongside psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and other helping professionals.
- ✓ The American Counseling Association (ACA) is the largest organization of professional counselors in the world. Since 1952, it has been providing an array of programs and services for its 41,000 plus members and the profession. In 2006, ACA was recognized by the national professional association community for its efforts in responding to the needs of people affected by Hurricane Katrina.
- ✓ ACA is the leading educational organization for counselors in the world and sets professional and ethical standards that guide the practice of counseling.
- ✓ The *Journal of Counseling and Development* (quarterly research journal), *Counseling Today* (monthly newspaper) and ACAeNews (biweekly electronic newsletter) keep counselors abreast of professional information, trends, news and resources.
- ✓ ACA publishes more than 100 new and recurring publications that are used in counselor pre-service and in-service training and personal renewal. Further, the association offers a wide selection of Internet and distance learning programs
- ✓ The annual convention of the American Counseling Association is the largest gathering of counselors in the world. Each convention involves an array of 150 professional programs and 50 Professional Learning Institutes. The March, 2008 site of the ACA convention is Honolulu, Hawaii.
- ✓ The ACA Foundation is the only philanthropic organization in the world dedicated to the advancement of counseling and working to advance the study of

counseling efficacy. The ACAF received national attention for its efforts in addressing the counseling needs of victims affected by the 2005 hurricanes in the Louisiana, Mississippi and Gulf region of the nation.

- ✓ Professional counselors study at institutions accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (www.cacrep.org).
- ✓ Professional counselors are licensed or certified by the state where they work and/or by a national certification body such as the National Board for Certified Counselors (www.nbcc.org), the National Academy for Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselors (www.nbcc.org/ccmhc) or the Commission on Rehabilitation Counseling Certification (www.crccertification.com)

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