

Operation Snowball Overview

HISTORY

“A COMMUNITY OF CARING”

Operation Snowball began in 1977 through the efforts of several Rockford, Illinois area youths and adults who had attended the Illinois Teen Institute on Substance Abuse (ITI) sponsored by the Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Association (IADDA), now the Illinois Association for Behavioral Health (IABH). This group saw an opportunity to develop a prevention program focused on youth leadership and empowerment through adapting the ITI model to local community needs.

The Rockford group decided to hold a weekend training experience using the ITI agenda as a model. From the beginning, Operation Snowball was planned and implemented entirely by youth – with adults serving in advisory roles. They chose the name Operation Snowball from the belief that “If I have a positive impact on you, you can have a positive impact on someone else, and the effect snowballs.” And, just as they envisioned it, the program picked up speed, like a snowball rolling downhill.

The first Operation Snowball training experience was held nearly a year later and built the foundation of “A Community of Caring.” Operation Snowball Chapters began to develop all over the state of Illinois, from community to community. The first efforts were directed toward high school age youth. Then Chapters began to ask teens to serve as facilitators and presenters in events for middle and elementary school students. These programs are Operation Snowflake, for junior high age youths and Operation Snowflurry, for elementary school age youth.



In 1981 the Operation Snowball name and logo were registered as service trademarks. A statewide steering committee began approving Chapters. IABH provided staff and technical assistance to support the growth and development of Operation Snowball with funding from the Illinois Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse.

In 1987, the steering committee incorporated as a not-for-profit organization affiliated with IABH, using the corporate name Operation Snowball, Inc. The Board of Directors of Operation Snowball, Inc. formalized a process of accrediting new Chapters to ensure the program’s integrity. While this was occurring, Operation Snowball began to expand to surrounding states.

Operation Snowball currently has accredited Chapters in Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, New York, and the countries of Lithuania, Poland, and Belarus.