



Peer Perspective February 2020

As we head into the New Year, we often take a new perspective on life. Our relations with people including our relationship with self hopefully grows more compassionate as each year goes by. Coping with loved ones and the general public can be ways this compassion is expressed. How we respond to each other and help each other while advocating mental health recovery has been of on going importance for ourselves and the communities we live in.

In some instances, this new-found compassion might be confusing with trying to be aware of a person's level of functioning at the time. We all grow, mature, and recover at different ages and different speeds which might bring some misinterpretations to the table. Sometimes, we might need to slow down and better assess the situation, taking time out to extend a helping hand in coping. Do not to be afraid to put yourself in the other person's shoes. I would like to bring up some instances where Peer Support Specialists and I needed that extra hand with getting simple tasks done while trying to stay as independent as possible.

Extending a hand for coping and recovery can often make one think they need to be less supportive to try to get the person in need to "do it for themselves" and they will be more independent. When assessing a situation with somebody, don't assume because you can not see the disability that the person is not struggling. There have been many times in my life when I was too scared to admit that what was going on in my head was keeping me from completing a task. Those times I needed someone ask, "*what can I do to help you get this done?*" and to sit with me and go through the task step by step; Especially vital tasks such as healthcare renewals or making appointments, but also simple tasks such as laundry and putting the food away from the grocery store. It wasn't because I couldn't eventually do them it was because at those times, I had racing thoughts, paranoia, or was just uncomfortable in my own skin from past trauma. Either way, if the people in my life would have just said "You can do it yourself" I would have been too embarrassed to admit I couldn't. I would have thought "why can't I do this...I must be really ill. What if they just pass me off as demanding or rude for telling them I can't? If I show weakness, where are they going to send me?" Just walking the hall and not forgetting where I was going was so much of a challenge. I would tend to apply my conversations as if I could handle it, I thought that was the appropriate thing to do and if someone asked "*Do you want me to...*" as apposed to "*What can I do...*" I would respond in my head to the overall fact I did not "want" any of this. I needed a hand.

So many times, I was oblivious to my treatment and oblivious to my level of functioning. When I was finally ready to participate fully in the coping and recovery of mental illness, I remembered the things that were said from the years when caretakers and family thought I was incapable of taking care of myself. It was not until I started taking action toward coping and recovery, that I remembered to request an adult foster care, a social workers name, and such to be able to start my recovery finally from within by utilizing all the suggestions that I had toured when I could not help myself. Thank you to those people with the will to make things better even when there are no signs of recovery because it is those hands that make recovery happen in the toughest of times.

-Kirsten Downs, Peer Support Specialist Northway IRT

We are the evidence; We hold the hope.