

PEER PERSPECTIVE- MARCH 2018

“Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing we’ll ever do.” – Brene Brown

Owning my story is not something I truly understood until last fall when I attended the Peer Support Specialist training in St. Paul and is a process I continue to face each day. When I thought back to how my mental illness has impacted my life, I realized how much I learned from each of those experiences and how fortunate I am that they have brought me where I am today. I have struggled with depression and anxiety for over 20+ years and although I have an appreciation for the struggles faced by my peers with mental health diagnoses, I never realized how my diagnosis shaped my path. I always have just said “I have anxiety and depression” and left it at that. When I was going through training I got the opportunity to reflect on my story and reflect on how my diagnosis has shaped who I am and then when given the opportunity to share it with my peers in class I was humbled by the reactions, surprised by the responses of how many of them could relate to my story and at peace finally realizing I wasn’t alone. Although my brain knew I wasn’t the only one suffering with the challenges of mental illness, my heart needed to hear I wasn’t alone.

As I have started to work in the community with Peers in my new role I have been continually rewarded by sharing my story. A smile, a sigh of relief, even a few tears have all been the outcome of peers finally feeling the connection to someone who gets it. I am lucky. So many others struggle with debilitating symptoms and are often unable to see a path toward recovery, while I was on a journey of recovery and never saw the path! As I share with peers I continue to encourage their strength and encourage them to give themselves credit for things they have accomplished and to be proud of themselves for overcoming even the smallest of obstacles. I encourage them to see the path that their journey has brought them on and try to identify if they can see where they are going or if they can set small goals of where they want to go. My favorite part of my role as a Peer Support Specialist is being able to join my peers on their recovery journey.

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