

Peer Perspective December 2021

By asking the client peers at work what would you like to know from a peer support specialist, the most often the response was, “How did you survive?”

This week at the IRTS we are studying resources; from using crisis phone numbers to job training tuition and everything in between. Even our creative coping group is having each person filling a manilla envelope with as many counties as we could in Minnesota’s social support network and including the National hotlines responding from anywhere in the USA such as the NAMI (National Alliance of Mentally Ill) suicide hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or Text: HOME to 741741.

When I was first diagnosed back in 1994, I had limited options. Mainly my option was a state hospital and no teaching of recovery, unlike the recent turns towards recovery from mental illnesses. To be honest, I do not know how I survived until doctors, nurses, therapists, and counselors started encouraging me to apply what I needed to do to recover, basing my treatment on the expert in my recovery—myself. I can say my strengths all those years were based on me already knowing I was the expert on my body and recognizing the situations around me that seemed to attribute to “healthy” and analyzing when not healthy; not caring what anyone was judging about my journaling or artwork; and yes, I was terribly scared. The resources started popping up with NAMI and 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and people in mental health fields in 2013 started believing there was a decent person under all the labels and struggles in my case. I was finally given the opportunity to put myself together and become a Peer Support Specialist. Don’t get me wrong, this opportunity did not just fall in my lap; I pushed and pushed for my opportunity to be accepted into the schooling. I was nervous like my struggles across the years; however, my inner self knew right from wrong according to my body and I studied spiritual healing.

I guess the question is not “How did I survive?” rather “What saved me?” It was me, my choices, and research.

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