



Peer Recovery Supporter Perspectives

Mike DeWine, Governor
Lori Criss, Director

My substance use disorder started 15 years ago, and I have been battling it on and off since. My last interruption in my recovery ended on February 18, 2018, after attempting to give up on life. I found myself in a homeless shelter in Chillicothe, OH. That's where I found a connection with others. I found people and support that saw me for who I was. They became my chosen family. I went to a family support group, had case managers, and finally took a mental health assessment. Focusing on my mental health had never occurred to me until I met counselors that cared about me.

While making many connections in the community, I was asked if I would like to be a part of the first OhioMHAS Certified Peer Recovery Supporter training in Ross County. After being certified, a few of my new peer friends and I gained employment in peer support. We went from grant to grant trying and starting different programs around the community. We spent time learning at a new outreach drop-in center offering resources to people off the street who needed a meal and a shower. The outreach center's motto was meeting people where they are at.

I continue my recovery journey by trying on as many peer support hats as I can. I do this by outreach and public speaking in schools, jails, and courts, and by supporting clients in detox and inpatient programs. Even with all my different job titles, my favorite is being a Peer Recovery Supporter. I love being positive and spreading a strength-based approach hope to recovery, and I hope to be at least one of the many voices that helps heal our world.

I once was lost but have now found an entire community of people that support me in a way that I could have never imagined! I am no longer alone—I now have friends, family, support, and love.

Vanessa

Ross County Community Action Commission, Inc. (Chillicothe)

Throughout my life, I have experienced traumas of different kinds. Family drama, abuse, fighting, stealing, and lying were frequent in my childhood, and as I grew older, I found an escape from those troubles in alcohol and drugs. I struggled during my time in the Air Force, and after being honorably discharged at 21, my substance use disorder led me to many treatment centers and nearly 28 years of trying to find recovery.

While living in Texas I connected with Emmanuel, a church-going man who was on his recovery journey as well. I started my spiritual journey and began preaching at the Salvation Army in Texas, as well as visiting various prisons with The Winner's Circle Peer Support Network. After a phase of different life challenges, I relapsed, but Emmanuel was there to pick me up and get me back into treatment. After this experience, I began to put God and my recovery together by studying the Bible and educating myself on why I couldn't stop using drugs on my own. I became a Certified Recovery Coach in Texas and worked at the APAA Recovery Center in Dallas under Joe Powell's supervision.

After moving back home to Dayton, I trained to become a Peer Recovery Supporter and a Trainer for Peer Recovery Supporters by Cindy Heitman. I helped launch The Recovery Café Dayton, and God has allowed me to teach Bible Study at the Salvation Army ARC. I now work at Goodwill Easter Seals under Cindy as a Peer Recovery Supporter. I help people just like me to engage and maintain their recovery journeys.

My clean date is November 2, 2015. Today I realize how important Peer Support is. Together we can be the change agents in the lives of our peers to help them become what they hope to be and be productive members of society.

Gilbert

Goodwill Easter Seals Miami Valley (Dayton)

Most of my life had been spent navigating the trauma I had experienced. When you're 12 and you suddenly remember your childhood trauma, nothing really makes sense anymore. Your world shifts and a whole new version of yourself sprouts from the cracks in the foundation. My story is a lot like an old brick house on the corner of a street that no one wanted to buy. The cracks were visible, but no one took the time to ask why.

I spent a good amount of time trying to navigate a system that kept telling me "You're young, what do you have to be sad about?" And in a lot of ways, I believed it. Every time I shared my pain, it was invalidated. It wasn't until I read a blog post online that I understood how I could actually start helping myself. That's where my true journey with peer support began- on the internet, reaching out to people who shared my experiences of family dysfunction, trauma, chronic illness, and using substances and alcohol to run away from it all. If it wasn't for those spaces where I felt seen, heard, and valued, I wouldn't be here writing this story now.

It was my desire for connection that led me to the Recovery Center of Hamilton County and to peer support. I stumbled upon it by happenstance, and it became my lifeline. I didn't realize until the OhioMHAS Peer Recovery Supporter training that I had been doing this all my life. Between message boards, running an open mic night where teens would spill their souls on a microphone, and then finally working in the field. This ability to connect through shared experiences, especially as a young kid, was my saving grace and it truly kept me alive. When I took the peer supporter training, it was like a moment of clarity. I finally had a guidebook to understand and navigate through my role. The people I get to sit with every day, provide resources to, and connect with are so rewarding. Seeing them feeling seen is what this job is all about.

As I finished the first-ever pilot training for the Youth Peer Support model, I looked back and realize how much peer support can impact a community. This youth training and its material could've saved me a lot of hurt and pain had it been a resource for me when I was young. But ultimately, I learned how much that sense of connection, system navigation, and shared lived experiences can truly save the lives of others. Seeing these peers get inspired, watching their faces light up in these training sessions- we are fostering the hope these people always needed.

During the pandemic, my organization had to move completely virtual because not having peer support wasn't an option. I was able to use my lived experience and internet navigation to spearhead it. Peer support is and has always been a necessity. Those online classes and peer support groups kept most of our population out of the hospitals and connected with one another. Every day I look forward to coming to work, connecting with others, and providing people with the support I so desperately needed. I am happy to say peer support saved my life and will continue to.

Amanda

Recovery Center of Hamilton County (Cincinnati)