



Crestwood Recovery Resilience Solutions

Community of peer support specialists

Deb tells us about peer support in Singapore.

By Dr. Lori Ashcraft

I believe my mental health condition is genetic because it runs in my paternal family and I recall that my symptoms started at a tender age of 8 years old when I started having suicide ideation. Thankfully God has preserved my life as I struggled through my childhood, teenage years & even into adulthood with extreme highs & lows, yet was being undiagnosed for more than 2 decades. It was only when I suffered postnatal depression & burnout from work that I eventually sought medical intervention and was prescribed psychiatric medication to manage my bipolar condition. The pivotal moment in my recovery journey was when I enrolled into Peer Support Specialist programme in year 2017 and met my Trainer Chris Martin, who's such an amazing evidence of recovery & resilience. That encounter with him & attending his training has truly changed my life beyond what I could ever imagine. I found the true meaning & purpose in my life, which is to model mental health recovery & resilience, to inspire hope to many others that recovery is truly possible! I'm currently at a very good place in my recovery having sustained my wellness consistently for over 7 years. I'm thriving in my work as a Senior Executive at a medical university, where I'm also appointed as a Peer Staff Supporter. Apart from my full-time job, I'm an active mental health advocate and I contribute actively in the mental health sector as a Local Assistant Trainer of Peer Support Specialist programme. I try my best to nurture a Community of Peer Support Specialists (CPSS) which I started and I also work closely with National Council of Social Service (NCSS) on peer support initiatives. This is a very brief version of my recovery story.

How and why did the peer support specialists in Singapore form the professional organization called Community of Peer Support Specialists (CPSS)?

Initially we were just a group of graduates (Batch 1 to 3) from NCSS Peer Support Specialist Program, who gathered to form a Community of Practice (CoP) in Dec 2018. Then when I

wanted to submit a workshop proposal for a Global Conference on Together Against Stigma in year 2019, I felt that we need to formalize our CoP so I initiated to develop our vision, mission & core values. Then we decided to name our Community CPSS since we're all certified Peer Support Specialists.

What is the vision and mission of the CPSS?

Vision: To establish, practice and advance peer support in Singapore

Mission:

- Dedicated to modelling recovery, resilience and hope for all.
- Professionally trained to provide support to persons with mental health challenges through leveraging on our lived experiences.
- Committed to advocating for the integration of the peer support discipline into our nation's mental health services across sectors (including throughout healthcare and community systems).
- Constantly striving to develop ourselves, both personally and professionally, in recovery-oriented practices and peer support principles.

What would you say have been the key accomplishments of this association?

1. Firstly, we published a book entitled "Holding the Hope", which is a compilation of recovery & resilience stories written by the Peer Support Specialists. It's included in a conference pack at 9th Edition of Global Conference on Together Against Stigma (TAS) in Oct 2019, where Singapore is the first Southeast Asian country to host it.
2. Participated in Together Against Stigma International Conference on 5 Oct 2019 by presenting a CPSS Workshop on "Hearing it from Peer Support Specialists about Recovery". I introduced CPSS, shared my recovery story & we also had a panel dialogue session to discuss the value of peer support.
3. Presented at "Peer Support Works!" Webinar on 10 October 2020, which is hosted by Institute of Mental Health (IMH) in support of World Mental Health Day.
4. Presented a virtual Engagement Session on "Peer Support Works!" at Singapore Mental Health Conference (SMHC) on 24 August 2021.
5. Developed a Code of Ethics for Peer Support Practice, which was unveiled during our Singapore Peer Supporters' Day Celebration on 1 Oct 2021.

6. In year 2022-2023, we're actively involved in Focus Group Discussions conducted by NCSS to enhance the content of Peer Support Specialist program.

What are some ideas CPSS has for promoting peer support within the mental health system and social system within the country?

- We are collaborating with a social service agency to provide peer support services to their members. Have submitted a grant application on the end of Oct 2023. The agency is still addressing NCSS queries. We're hoping for a favorable outcome to get the funding.
- Advocacy on mental health recovery by role modelling & sharing our recovery stories is important because many people still view mental health condition as a debilitating illness and the stigma is still around.
- Facilitating peer support group sessions to share wellness tips & healthy coping mechanisms with persons-in-recovery.
- Organize open dialogue session to address queries relating to mental health recovery.

What would you say are the present strengths and opportunities for peer support in Singapore?

Peer support is currently a hot topic in Singapore. With the limited resources from mental health professionals like psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists & counsellors, I believe that peer support can complement the mental health system. Our Health Promotion Board (HPB) is training peer supporters at the workplace and Ministry of Education (MOE) is also equipping students to be peer supporters in schools. Peer support can potentially be the first response to any mental health intervention, as it can be provided mutually on the ground without having to set up a prior appointment. There're many opportunities for certified PSS to contribute.

Here's the link to CPSS website

<https://communityofpss.wordpress.com>

The e-version of our CPSS book is available at both CPSS & NCSS website.

<https://communityofpss.wordpress.com/cpss-book-holding-the-hope-stories-of-recovery-resilience/>

https://ncss.aichat.site/ncss/uploads_media/CPSS-Holding-the-Hope-PDF-version-448.pdf