



Peer Support Specialist Times

“Recovery and healing happen in relationship.” - PSL for the 21st Century

Let’s Reason Together about Some Matters of the Heart

By Chris W. Martin



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Try, if you can, but I bet you can’t think of love without visualizing a picture of the heart. In fact, if we do the math by walking down the greeting card aisle, we may discover that more than 80% of all the “I love you” cards have a picture of a heart on them. Why do these heart pictures symbolize love?

In many ancient cultures, the heart represented the seat of passion, emotion, and wisdom. Studies show that emotions like love cause the heart to beat faster. Having loving relationships in one’s life even lowers blood pressure pumped by the heart. And of course, healthy, emotionally supportive relationships reduce stress and promote cardiovascular health.

It’s no secret, then, that this little, simple symbol has long stood for dynamic action. “In 1977, the heart icon underwent yet another transformation when it became a verb. **The “I Heart NY” logo was created to boost morale for a city in crisis.** Trash piled up on the streets, the crime rate spiked, and it was near bankruptcy. Hired to design an image that would increase tourism, graphic designer Milton Glaser created the famous logo that has since become a cliché. With the logo, Glaser extended the heart’s meaning beyond romantic love to embrace the realm of civic feelings and thereby opened the gateway to new uses. **“Once it became a verb, the heart symbol could connect a person with any other person, place or thing.”** 1

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Let's Reason Together about Some Matters of the Heart

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Recovery and peer support work is primarily a work of the heart. It involves all those heart-level skills of compassion, empathy, active listening, affirming, empowering, “being with,” and bearing witness. The great psychologist Carl Rogers called this heart-centered way of working with people as having “unconditional positive regard” which is a scientific way of saying and doing heart work. Or another way to put it is simply... “love.”

As someone once said, **“when our hearts are broken, that is when they become open.”**

They become open to not only receiving love, but also to giving it. Today let's think about the all the ways we can love the people in California who are experiencing tremendous tragedy, trauma and loss. And for those of us who live far away from this state or live in any other state, we may not have to look very far for someone who needs a little love as well. They may even be right next to us. And if we do the math, we may discover that the truth about all this love work can be found in our own hearts. As that great French mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal said, **“The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of... We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart.”** Let's make every day an action from the heart.

1. How did the human heart become associated with love? And how did it turn into the shape we know today?
Feb 12, 2019 / Marilyn Yalom Retrieved on Jan 11, 2025 from <https://ideas.ted.com/how-did-the-human-heart-become-associated-with-love-and-how-did-it-turn-into-the-shape-we-know-today/>



CMPSS Specialization Training for Parent, Caregiver, Family Member Peers-Supporting Family Resilience

40 hours [32 CES available upon request]

The “Supporting Family Resilience” course is a fun, skill-based, and highly interactive workshop for individuals providing specialized peer-to-peer family member and caregiver support services. This 40-hour learning experience will prepare and equip participants with the latest generation of knowledge, skills, and tools for providing, promoting, and empowering family resilience.



CMPSS Specialization Training for Justice Involved Peers—Recovery, Resilience, and Reintegration

40 hours

This dynamic 40-hour, skill-based, and wholly interactive course will provide participants with an understanding of how to provide person-centered support to individuals with justice involvement experiences.



By Lori Ashcraft



It seemed only fitting to talk about superheroes so we took a picture of my dog, dressed in her Spiderman outfit and focused on the special powers peers received once they finished their training and become peer support specialists.

Do you realize how much we ITEs have in common with Spiderman? There are some amazing similarities. Think about it. Peter Parker (the teenager who becomes Spidey) is just a stressed out, awkward, nerdy guy who happens to be bitten by a radioactive spider. He goes through a painful process of learning how to use the powers the “bite” has bestowed upon him. **Once he learns how to use his special powers, he turns the pain of the bite into ways to save himself and others.**

Sound familiar? When we are first stricken by trauma and/or mental health challenges, we reel in the pain. But once we learn to use that pain to develop the power to recover, we are superheroes too.

On February 26th, Jim Ritchie, Chris Martin and I had the honor of attending the PELC graduation at Crestwood Pleasant Hill. **Ten wonderful graduates celebrated their achievements and shared with us their hopes and dreams for the future.** It was a very inspiring event.

The history of the program is also inspiring, and we share it with you now since it illustrates the power of vision and commitment to a cause. It took a year and a half to get a permit to operate due to NIMBY issues. **Staff actually had to cross a picket line to open the first day with four guests.** That was many years ago and the program is alive and well today.

Crestwood Pleasant Hill was the first program in the state of California to be written by “persons served” with leaders like Jay Mauler, Lynn Gurko, Carol Peterson plus local faith community, Contra Costa Patients’ Rights advocate sitting at the table re-writing the original program plan.

Recovery Practices for Ethics and Law for Peer Support

6 hours [6 CES available upon request]

This fun six-hour dynamic, skill-based, and wholly interactive course will provide participants with an understanding of how the recovery movement and principles became the foundation for peer support ethical codes as well as many laws regulating behavior healthcare and psychiatric treatment.



By Mike Zeeb



March 31 is Transgender Day of Visibility. This is a day that “celebrates the lives and contributions of trans people.” It honors trans people who are open and visible in the community as well as those who, due to discrimination and safety concerns, are not. The prevalence of discrimination and violence against transgender people is well documented.

As Peer Support Specialists, we invite people to “remember who they are and use their strengths to become all they are meant to be.” We strive to create environments where all people feel safe, accepted and celebrated for their individuality. How do we help create environments that feel this way for members of the transgender community?

When trans people serve as respected members of the staff at a peer support organization, this sends a strong message that trans individuals seeking services will be safe, respected and included. Some peer support organizations offer services and groups that are specific to the needs of the trans community. Some of these organizations are listed in the “Resources” section below.

Any Peer Support Specialist can offer a light of hope to transgender people as they come to our organizations by being kind and open and staying true to peer support principles. **When we show interest in learning who a person is without preconceptions, honoring the time and space they need to open up, it is more likely that trust and connection will take root.** As trust and connection grow, the person becomes our best source of information about what helps them feel

safe, included, and affirmed.

There are many additional ways Peer Support Specialists can help create environments that feel safe and affirming for members of the transgender community. What are your ideas? Below are links to some articles and resources that may be helpful.

Articles:

<https://glaad.org/transgender/allies>

<https://transequality.org/trans-101/supporting-transgender-people>

California Resources

Trans Advocacy and Care Team:

<https://www.yourtact.org/>

Transgender Support Groups:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/groups/california?category=transgender>

Pacific Center for Human Growth:

<https://www.pacificcenter.org/current-peer-groups>

The Source LGBTQ+ Center:

<https://www.thesourcegbt.org/transgender>

National Resources:

Trans Lifeline:

<https://translifeline.org/>

Advocates for Trans Equality:

<https://transequality.org/>

GLAAD Transgender Resources:

<https://glaad.org/transgender/resources/>



CRRS Update



Our CRRS update for March begins with the 5 Resilience Steps of **Optimism, Facing Fears, Belonging, Community of Wellness, and Spiritual Connection.**

Optimism: our optimism begins with the level of workforce development happening across the State for the Peer Support discipline. This commitment in our State is a model of hope and inspiration that everyone can achieve Recovery and Resilience. In the first couple of months of 2025, our entire CRRS team continues working alongside a large population of compassionate and skilled Peer Support Specialists variously through our Department of Health Care Access and Information grant (HCAI), through the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) grant, and our Peer Employment Learning Center (PELC) work. We are inspired every day at the quality and passion our

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PSS workforce has in supporting the belief that Recovery and Resilience work.

Facing Fears: While we are all currently experiencing a lot of unknowns rising to the level of fear for many of us regarding chaos being arbitrarily forced into our lives, we are called to face these growing challenges with an optimistic and unwavering resolve to continue the work of Recovery and Resilience, with love, compassion and an iron-clad commitment to cultural humility, trauma-informed sense of safety, and a full commitment to celebrating diversity and inclusion.

Belonging: Our CRRS Team remains focused on continuing and growing opportunities to collaborate with others and to grow our connections with all those with whom we share common purpose and vision. Specifically, CRRS extends gratitude for all our county and agency partners who have given us the opportunity to train 82 individuals within the first two months of 2025. The enormous sense of belonging generated by this investment in compassionate and dedicated Peer Support Specialists is immeasurable.

Community of Wellness: CRRS is also excited to announce our latest Peer Employment Learning Center (PELC) graduation in Crestwood Pleasant Hill, on February 26, 2025. This graduating class will make enormous contributions to our Community of Wellness as models of Recovery and Resilience who will now re-enter the workforce with a career that brings their life experiences and newly acquired professional PSS skills in service to others and thereby enhancing our Recovery and Resilience outcomes. For more information on PELC, please visit www.RecoveryResilienceSolutions.org.

Spiritual Connection: As we navigate the uncertainties being forced into our lives, creating connections that go beyond just ourselves is now more important than ever. **When we collaborate and cooperate, the outcome is a greater bond than the sum of our individual contributions.** It is a wonderfully magical and powerful force that will continue to pay itself forward.