

## Peer Support Specialist Times

*"Recovery and healing happen in relationship."* - PSL for the 21st Century

### Nobody Told Me Zoom Required Hiking Boots

By Gloriana Hunter



I don't mean that literally. But after a few years facilitating most of my classes online, my body had a few things to say about how I had been treating it.

Sitting for hours without breaks. Irregular sleep. Meals whenever I could fit them in. Exercise was simply not happening. I was showing up for my students and my team and quietly running on fumes. I knew it. I just kept waiting for things to slow down before I addressed it. Things did not slow down.

The turning point came from a student in one of my classes. She mentioned that **she practiced what she called mindful rest**. Not sleeping. Not relaxing while binge-watching or doom scrolling. She described it as **doing something completely outside her normal routine and being fully in the moment while she did it**. Savoring it. Engaging her mind, spirit, and body and just being there in the experience.

That is when I started, or restarted, hiking. In my younger years I was a serious hiker. I took deep trails into King's Canyon and climbed Mt. Whitney. Now older, I no longer desire to take hard trails up mountains or into deep canyons. I love simply walking an easy trail.

**For me, hiking is the one place where the noise genuinely stops.** The only agenda is the *(Continued on page 2)*

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trail in front of me and whatever my senses are taking in right now. The smell of it. The particular way light shines. It leaves me with the feeling of being small and in the presence of awe at the same time.

That is the thing about peer support. We often run in every direction, supporting everyone but ourselves.

**The people we serve are not just listening to what we say. They are watching how we live.**

There is a real disconnect when we talk about recovery and wellness as a full life and then they see us skipping meals, tired, and overstretched. It is not a judgment. It is just a gap, and we can close it in small ways that actually stick.

Think about active rest in your life. Maybe find or rediscover something you already love. A playlist or podcast that only gets played on walks. A phone call you save for the grocery run. Dancing while you cook, if that is your thing (no one is watching). The research on habit formation is clear: behaviors we enjoy are behaviors we repeat. **The key for me is to stop trying to add discipline to my life and start building pleasure in.**

In this work, self-care is not a luxury we earn after we have taken care of everyone else. It is part of the job. It is, in fact, part of the model. Take care of yourself with the same energy you bring to caring for others. You are worth the effort.

## 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.



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

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.



## Part Two: Being Seen vs. Being Watched—Why the Difference Matters

By Lori Ashcraft, Ph.D., ITE



*This column explores the elements of “Recovery Medicine” that compliments and goes beyond what pills can do. While the medicine prescribed on our campuses plays a role in the healing of our guests, they are only one piece of the puzzle. As we’ve been discussing, relationships are the key to initiating and sustainable recovery.*

In part I of this article, we explored the healing impact of actually being seen, rather than just being watched, monitored, or assessed. Now we will take a deeper dive into how to notice when we are “watching” instead of relating and we’ll explore different approaches that increase our ability to integrate **Being Seen** skills.

But first, there is another step to take that plays a critical role in the process of **Seeing**. In fact, without this step, we may not be able to successfully learn the **Being Seen** skills. This step takes us on an internal journey, learning the skills of **seeing**

### 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.

**ourselves**, not just watching ourselves, as we use the **Being Seen** skills of relating to others. Learning to **see ourselves instead of watching ourselves** may be the deepest part of this whole process. Many of us learn to watch ourselves long before we learn to see ourselves. We monitor our behavior, judge our reactions, and measure whether we’re doing things “right.” That inner observer can be useful — but when it dominates, we start to feel like an object even to ourselves.

Seeing ourselves is something different. It is meeting our own experience with the same warmth and curiosity we would offer another person. In earlier articles we’ve talked about the difference between being a “role” verses being a “soul.” When we are focused on being our “role” we tend to monitor ourselves constantly — trying to live up to expectations. When we focus on coming from our soul, everything shifts, allowing for real healing connections for the person and for ourselves as well. So instead of standing outside ourselves, tucked away in our roles, let’s imagine standing **beside ourselves**, the way we would with a good friend, inviting understanding instead of judgment.

Now that we’ve laid the groundwork for seeing others by first seeing ourselves, let’s get back to the external process of learning to **see people instead of watch them**, which is less about technique and more about a way of being. It’s a shift from observation to relationships; from standing outside

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## Part One: Being Seen vs. Being Watched—Why the Difference Matters

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someone's experience to being willing to meet them inside it. So how do we do this? Without getting lost in techniques, let's identify a few approaches.

### Curiosity

Watching often asks: What's wrong? What should I do? Are they okay?

Seeing asks: What is this like for you?

Curiosity softens the distance between people. So from a softer vantage point, we might wonder what matters most to the person right now, or what this present moment feels like to them, or how they experience themselves in this moment. Do a little exploring using curiosity as your guide.



### Slow Down

Watching is usually quick — scanning for problems or risks. Seeing takes time.

Let's take a deep breath and listen to the silence for as long as we can stand it. Then, with a curious and

respectful spirit, follow the pace of the person. If it seems speedy, see if you can slow it down while staying present with yourself and the person.

### Look for the Person, Not the Behavior

Behavior is the outer layer, seeing means sensing the inner story. When we engage in watching we are focusing on behavior. When we are seeing, we ask what might this behavior be protecting? What needs might be underneath this?

### Be Real

People often feel seen when they sense they are meeting a soul, not a role. A "watcher" stands at a distance, above or outside the other. A "seer" comes from mutual ground, and shares from the perspective of a fellow traveler.

### Stay With the Person — Not Just the Task

Watching is task-focused: documentation, safety checks, checklist. Seeing happens we commit to being present and alert, remembering the person's story, their goals, their hopes and dreams.



### Listen for Meaning, Not Just Information

Watching listens for data. Seeing listens for meaning. This takes intention and concentration but pays off in ways that connect with and motivate the person to become their true self and move toward their hopes and dreams. Keep in mind that people usually know immediately whether they are being watched or seen. The difference is felt in tone, posture, and presence.

**The Crestwood Recovery & Resilience Solutions (CRRS)** team has been actively engaged in conferences, trainings, and statewide workforce development efforts over the past month, continuing to elevate peer support practice and expand learning opportunities across California and beyond.

In April, members of our team attended the NatCon 2026 Conference in Denver, representing Crestwood Behavioral Health, Dreamcatchers, and CRRS. **This year's conference brought together more than 5,500 attendees from across the United States and Canada, offering a dynamic space to explore emerging trends in behavioral health.** Key themes included the continued growth of Peer Support, the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence in service delivery, and opportunities for cross-regional learning and collaboration. The event also provided a valuable opportunity to reconnect with longstanding colleagues while building new professional relationships.

Closer to home, CRRS was invited to facilitate two in-depth sessions at the Los Angeles County Peer Conference in early April. Our team delivered interactive trainings on *Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation*, as well as *Sharing My Story*—both of which were met with strong engagement and meaningful participation from attendees. **These sessions created space for skill-building, reflection, and dialogue among peer professionals working across diverse settings.**

CRRS also had the opportunity to present at the San Bernardino County Peer Conference, where we focused on the integration of professional Peer Support Specialists into multidisciplinary teams. This session—*Empowering Recovery: Addressing Challenges in Peer Support Integration*--emphasized the importance of clearly defined expectations, alignment with CMPSS scope of practice, and adherence to ethical guidelines as part of building a sustainable Recovery-oriented culture. With more than 150 attendees—largely consisting of Peer Support Specialists and Family Advocates—the discussion was both energetic and impactful. **Presenters explored key topics such as intersectionality, best practices in peer engagement, and advancing professionalism within this growing field.**

In support of ongoing workforce development, CRRS is proud to share that we are now an approved Continuing Education (CE) provider through CalMHSA for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) statewide. We are currently developing a consistent schedule of no-cost, two-hour interactive webinars designed to help peers meet their bi-annual renewal requirements while continuing to build skills and community. More details will be available soon on our website.

Looking ahead, CRRS will be presenting at the Peerocalypse 2026 Rooted and Rising, taking place May 4–7 in Seaside. Our session, *Rising as Leaders: Maximizing Your Impact in Advanced Peer Roles*, will focus on leadership development and expanding the influence of peer professionals within behavioral health systems.

We're grateful for the continued opportunities to collaborate, train, and grow alongside peers and partners across the field, and we look forward to sharing more updates in the months ahead.

**- Jim Ritchie, CRRS Director of Operations**

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A podcast on Growth, Resilience, and Transformation



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