

Peer Support Specialist Times

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

Embracing Recovery: Overcoming Imposter Syndrome as a Peer Support Specialist

By Theresa Mast



Many of us as peer support specialists experience imposter syndrome at some point in our careers. Despite extensive training, certification, and the unique expertise gained through lived recovery, it is common to question whether we are "qualified enough" or wonder if we truly deserve to be in the role. **These feelings can be unsettling, but they are also a normal part of both professional growth and personal recovery.**

One of the greatest strengths of peer support is that no two recovery journeys are the same. We all bring a diversity of experiences, strengths, and perspectives to our role. Some of us have navigated mental health recovery, substance use recovery, or both. Others have faced homelessness, incarceration, trauma, or countless other life experiences that shape who we are today. **There is no single "right" recovery story**, and comparing our journey to someone else's might only fuel our self-doubt.

Our value as peers comes from who we are: our lived experience, our peer support ethics, our specialized training, and our willingness to walk alongside people as they discover their own strengths on their path to recovery. Lived recovery experience cannot be taught in a classroom; it is earned through our strengths and resilience. **Every challenge we have overcome has equipped us with empathy and hope that can make a meaningful difference in someone else's life.**

When imposter syndrome begins to creep in, it can be helpful to reflect with gratitude on our own recovery journey. Think back to where we started and acknowledge how far we have come. Celebrate the milestones, both large and small. Remember the people who supported us, and the strengths we discovered within ourselves. **Gratitude reminds us that our recovery is not something we have to prove—it is something we have lived.**

For me, remembering that imposter syndrome is actually part of my recovery helps shift my perspective. Recovery has required me to challenge long-held beliefs about my worth and learn to trust myself. I've found that feeling uncertain doesn't mean I'm not qualified; it instead signals that I am growing

Inside

Page 2

Embracing Recovery
(Continued)
- Theresa Mast

Once Upon a Stormy Sea...
- Chris Martin

Page 3

CRRS Update
- Jim Ritchie



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into who I am meant to be. When I become aware of it, I choose to view it as an opportunity to practice self-compassion and affirm the progress I've made. (Supporters and colleagues can be a very helpful resource to remind me of this, as well.)

As peer support specialists, we empower the people we serve to recognize their strengths and believe in their ability to recover - and we celebrate their successes. We deserve to extend that same kindness to ourselves. Remember our I.T.E. (I'm The Evidence that recovery is real). This lived experience is our foundation, and our

willingness to share that hope is what makes peer support so powerful.

As our peer support certification course reminds us: **“Peer Support means being an expert at not being an expert – and that takes a lot of expertise!”**¹ We are not called to be perfect. We are called to be present.

Reference

Martin, C. W., & Ashcraft, L. (2025). Peer Support Learning for the 21st Century (8th ed.). Crestwood Behavioral Health, Inc.

Once Upon a Stormy Sea...

By Chris Martin



There was this young sailor who had a sailboat that was like an old friend. It gave him many pleasurable moments. In fact, he and the friends who knew him found it difficult to discern where he ended, and the sailboat began. He used to launch the vessel whenever he was feeling down and needed to escape. It wasn't long before those blue times were ever so frequent. And for what seemed like a long time now, the sailboat hit a stormy sea. The waves sometimes surged so high the man felt like he would literally be swept into the deep abyss. He wondered if his beloved pastime would be the end of him.

As the storm grew darker and more foreboding; the waves became turbulent. **It took all of the man's strength to grasp tightly to the rudder** of the little boat that he loved and needed so much.

Along came a huge battleship and the captain called out, "Your presenting problem is being in that sailboat. I will throw out a lifeboat to you. Just jump into it and paddle your way up to this ship." The sailor firmly shook his head 'no' and gripped the rudder even tighter.

Not long afterwards, a helicopter hovered overhead. The pilot called out on a bullhorn, "You're hopeless in that boat.

I will send down a ladder; just climb up to me and get inside the helicopter." The strong-willed and frightened sailor would have none of it. But he just kept glued to the rudder, holding on for dear life.

Eventually an experienced sailor pulled up in his motorboat next to the storm-tossed sailor. The seasoned sailor didn't say anything but jumped into the sailboat and tied his boat to it. He stood next to the young man and helped him steady the rudder, and they headed toward safe harbor. The amazed young sailor asked why did you jump into this storm with me? The seasoned sailor replied, "I know a good deal about stormy seas. I spent a lot of time in rough waters myself once. I just figured together we could get through this and find our way to shore.

Peer support specialists are great at providing recovery lifelines in times of life's storms. They know what it's like to go through turbulent times and come out on the other side. They can be an anchor in resilience. And as someone once said, "Life's roughest storms prove the strength of our anchors."

We are pleased to announce that we have begun providing program support through a new HCAI grant focused on workforce development for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS).

As part of this grant, there are several important updates for participants:

- **New participation requirements:** Applicants must affirm their intent to both obtain CMPSS certification and secure placement within a public behavioral health setting (either a county or county-contracted provider) in a peer support or peer-adjacent role within six months of graduating from the training program and throughout the grant's Ongoing Support phase.
- **Applicant eligibility:** We welcome applicants from a wide range of backgrounds and work experiences. Individuals who are not currently employed, or who are employed outside of a public behavioral health setting, are encouraged to apply. To complete registration, these applicants will be asked to identify two to three specific organizations or settings where they intend to seek employment or volunteer opportunities providing Peer Support Specialist (PSS) services after completing the program.
- **Professional commitment:** Becoming a Peer Support Specialist is both a meaningful opportunity and a professional responsibility.

Peer Support is an established behavioral health discipline that requires commitment, intentionality, ongoing learning, and professional growth. At the same time, we want to emphasize that individuals with lived recovery experience already possess the essential foundation for success. Through training, mentorship, and intentional practice of peer support, recovery, and resilience skills, CMPSSs play a vital role in strengthening integrated recovery services and supporting others on their own recovery journeys.

We also want to remind our CMPSS community of Crestwood RRS's ongoing commitment to professional development through our Recovery Practices in Advancing Peer Support continuing education series.

These free, two-hour monthly classes are held on the last Tuesday of each month from 2:00–4:00 p.m. and provide 2 Continuing Education (CE) credits per session.

To participate, attendees must:

- **Hold a CMPSS certification in good standing.**
- **Complete registration in advance.**
- **Attend using a computer or laptop with their camera on (smartphones are not permitted).**
- **Participate fully in the learning activities and curriculum.**

Please note that late arrivals and individuals who have not registered in advance will not be admitted.

For additional information and registration, please visit: <https://recoveryresiliencesolutions.com/training-products/>

We hope your summer has been filled with joy, wellness, and continued recovery. Thank you for being part of our community—we look forward to supporting your ongoing Recovery and Resilience journey.

All our best,

- The CRRS Team

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