

Peer Support Specialist Times

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

Are You a Resource Distributor or a Resource Connector

By Gloriana Hunter



Last year, I spent 10 days in a city I had never been to. I had a friend who had lived there for decades, and I planned to spend my first day with her. I was on my own after that, so I searched the internet and pored over travel ideas to build an itinerary. On my first day, I shared my plan with my friend. She chuckled. "Why don't we spend a few extra days together and I'll show you what you really want to see." **Over the next few days, she connected me with amazing experiences** that I would have otherwise missed if I had stuck with the plan distributed by an impersonal search engine. Later, on my own, I was able to continue exploring the additional places she knew would be right for me.

In our peer support role, we will serve people who require a wide variety of community-based resources. With such a heavy reliance on resources, we will acquire flyers, pamphlets, and booklets, plus lists upon lists of phone numbers, emails, and websites. These will most likely be shoved into desk drawers and overloaded binders that never seem to be up to date. We will have amassed such a collection of resources that we could easily open a one-size-fits-all store called

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PAMPHLETS R US, where we can distribute our bulk of resources through vending machines.

Think twice before you hang the OPEN! sign in the window and begin distribution. Being a Resource Distributor is a Disservice, a Distraction, and a Detriment for the people we serve. Here's why...

It's a Disservice: When we give someone an overabundance of information that they did not ask for and will never use, we misdirect their focus from what they truly need.

It's a Distraction: People get frustrated when we provide information on services that no longer exist or for which they do not qualify. It redirects their focus and energy away from getting their needs met and hearing too many "NO's" can make a person want to give up.

It's Detrimental: If we provide resources without first building a recovery relationship, we pass up the opportunity for the person to become empowered and grow their self-efficacy. Instead of supporting individual resourcefulness and self-advocacy, we become advocates for learned helplessness.

As peer supports, we are Resource Connectors, not distributors. To be most effective in our support, we

must offer something entirely different by opening a new and unexpected storefront: PERSONALIZED RESOURCE 4 U!

Of course, when there's an urgent need, we would type into a search engine and pull applicable pamphlets out of that drawer. **Yet, even in moments like these, we want to give ourselves a gentle reminder** that expedient and efficient distribution does not require a human being. Artificial intelligence and internet searches can provide transactional information quicker than any of us can say, "Let me get my binder."

Our call is to create meaningful relationships so we can connect people to resources specific to their needs. As Resource Connectors, we listen deeply to understand what will open the door for hope and personal power. Distribution gets information into people's hands. Connection fuels optimism and allows people to face fears of not getting their needs met. No pamphlet, phone number, or website will walk beside them as they explore new ideas and find creative ways to build resilience and self-efficacy. **That's a job made for us, the very human peer support.**

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

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.

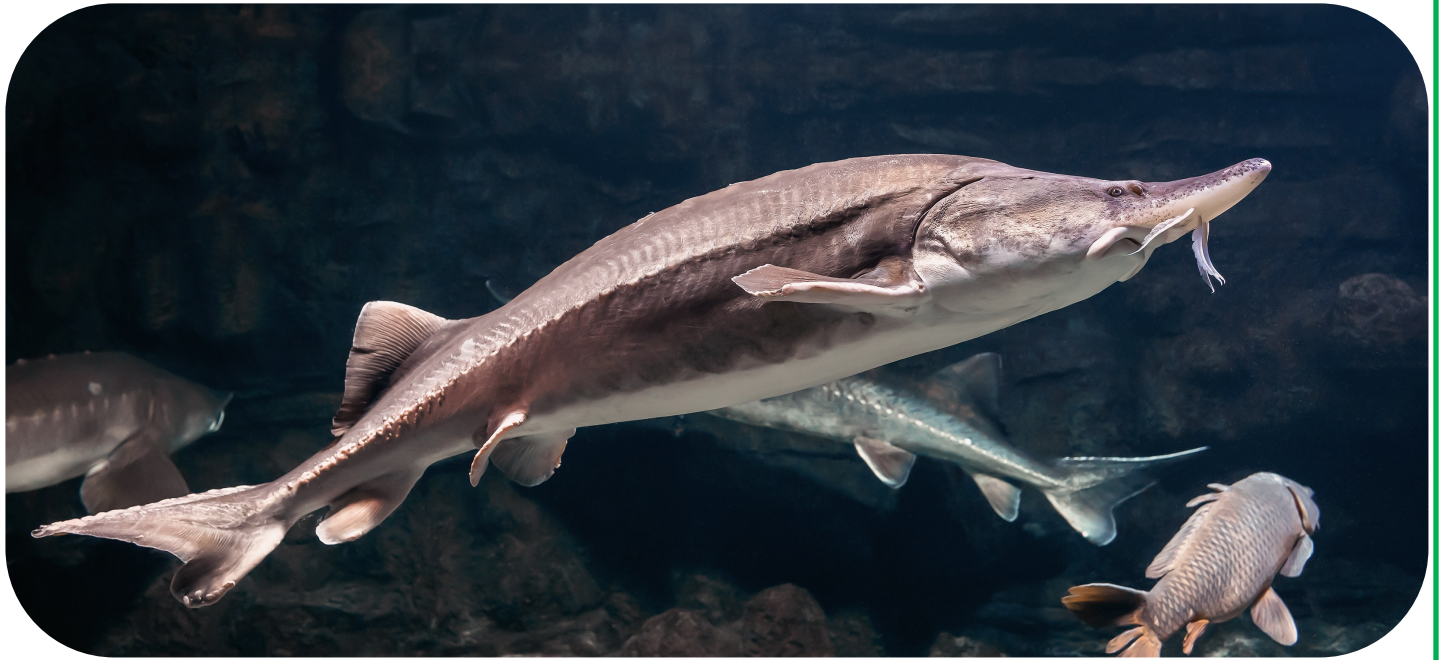


CMPSS Specialization Training for Justice Involved Peers—Recovery, Resilience, and Reintegration

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.



By Lori Ashcraft



Taking stock, letting go, and finding our way forward

Hello again, fellow travelers on the recovery journey—whether you are walking that road yourself or have the privilege of walking alongside someone else.

Listen to enough recovery stories and you begin to notice a pattern.

The details are always different. Different people, different circumstances, different struggles, different turning points. But underneath those differences, most recovery stories seem to follow a surprisingly simple arc:

This is how things were.

This is what happened.

And this is how things are now.

Within that arc are three important pieces of work: taking stock, letting go, and moving forward.

We hear versions of this again and again in the [Viva La Evolution](#) podcasts on the Recovery Resilient Solutions website. A recent conversation with Richie is a particularly good example. His story, like so many recovery stories, isn't simply about circumstances changing. It's about looking honestly at what is, deciding what can no longer come along, and discovering what might be possible next.

Which, strangely enough, brings me to a fish.

Enter the Sturgeon

The Sturgeon Moon takes its name from one of the more remarkable creatures still swimming around this planet.

Sturgeon are ancient. They have endured enormous changes in the world around them and somehow kept going.

I happen to have some personal experience with this.

Many years ago, I met a sturgeon when he ran into the back of my boat and knocked himself out.

This was not how I expected to spend my Tuesday afternoon.

With the help of some neighboring boaters, we managed to haul approximately 60 pounds of unconscious, prehistoric-looking fish out of the water. We stood around admiring him, as one apparently does when a large sturgeon unexpectedly arrives in one's life.

Then, without warning, he came back to life.

He thrashed around, awkwardly launched himself back into the water, and disappeared.

For a few moments, all of us just stood there looking at one another, wondering

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whether we had experienced some kind of consensual hallucination.



We had not.

There really had been a 60-pound sturgeon there.

And then there wasn't.

I hadn't thought about that fish for quite a while, but lately I've found myself wondering whether the sturgeon knows something about recovery.

Here is a creature that has survived in a world that has changed dramatically around it. It adapts. It persists. It keeps moving through an environment that is not always particularly accommodating.

And, judging from my experience, when it gets knocked sideways, it apparently lies there for a while, gathers itself, and eventually gets back in the water.

There are worse metaphors for recovery.

Taking Stock

Recovery requires the courage to look honestly at where we are.

That is true for people experiencing recovery, but I believe it should also be true for those of us who work alongside them.

We spend a great deal of time encouraging other people to examine their lives. Every once in a while, it seems only fair that we turn the flashlight around.

How am I doing—not just professionally, but personally?

What gives me energy these days? What consistently drains it?

Where am I still growing? Where have I become

comfortable, complacent, or maybe just a little too certain that I already know the answer?

Am I truly listening to the person in front of me, or am I listening just long enough to decide what I'm going to say next?

Am I present, or am I operating on autopilot?

These aren't questions designed to make us feel guilty. An honest inventory is not about finding fault. It is about becoming aware.

Because we cannot intentionally change what we are unwilling to notice.

Letting Go

Once we notice what we're carrying, we may discover that some of it has become surprisingly heavy.

Some things are obvious. Others are harder to recognize because we've been carrying them for so long that they feel like part of us.

An old expectation. A resentment. The need to be right. The need to have an answer for everything. Perfectionism. A habit that once protected us but now limits us.

Even a way of helping people that worked beautifully ten years ago—or ten months ago—but doesn't work particularly well anymore.

Recovery teaches us something important here:

Not everything that helped us get this far needs to come with us into the next season.

That doesn't mean those things were mistakes. Something can have been useful and still have reached the end of its usefulness.

Letting go doesn't erase its value.

It simply makes room.

And room, as it turns out, is where new things have a chance to grow.

Moving Forward

Which brings us to the more hopeful part of the inventory.

If we are willing to release some things, what do we want to grow in their place? (Continued on Page 5)

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Maybe patience. Curiosity. Humility. A willingness to listen before responding.

Maybe we need to pay more attention to our own physical and emotional well-being. Reconnect with colleagues. Continue our education. Ask for help sooner. Laugh more often.

Maybe we simply need to remember why we chose this work in the first place.

Growth requires nourishment. Whatever we consistently give our attention to tends to become stronger.

For those of us working in recovery-oriented environments, caring for ourselves and continuing our own growth isn't separate from the work.

It is part of the work.

Because eventually, everything we cultivate in ourselves walks into the room with us.

What Do We Bring Into the Room?

Ultimately, that may be the most important inventory of all.

We cannot do another person's recovery for them.

We cannot determine their choices. We cannot dictate their pace. We cannot decide which path they will take, how many detours there will be, or when they will be ready for the next step.

But we do have some say over what we bring into the room.

Viva La Evolution!

A podcast on Growth, Resilience, and Transformation



Join The Conversation!



Do we bring patience or frustration?

Curiosity or assumptions?

Presence or distraction?

Possibility or pessimism?

Do we see the person standing in front of us—or have we gradually begun to see a diagnosis, a behavior, a circumstance, a problem to solve, or a box to check?

Recovery-oriented work asks us to continue believing in possibility, sometimes when the person sitting across from us has difficulty believing in it themselves.

That requires something from us.

It requires us to tend to our own capacity for hope.

Finding Our Way Back to the Water

So perhaps the surgeon offers a useful invitation.

Take stock of where you are.

Honor what helped you get here.

Put down what has become too heavy or no longer belongs to you.

Pay attention to what you want to grow.

And keep moving forward.

Not perfectly. Not without occasionally getting knocked sideways. And perhaps not always with a particularly graceful reentry into the water.

But forward.

Because resilience isn't about never getting knocked off course.

It's about remembering that getting knocked off course doesn't have to be the end of the story.

There is still water beneath you.

There is still possibility ahead of you.

And when you're ready, there is still a way forward.

Sometimes the next chapter of recovery begins with nothing more complicated—and nothing more courageous—than finding your way back into the water.



Staying Grounded in Recovery-Oriented Peer Support

Crestwood RRS is redoubling our efforts to support CMPSS workforce development as peer services continue to expand across behavioral health systems of care.

Our monthly, no-cost, two-hour CE training series in Advanced Peer Support Recovery Practices is designed to maintain an intentional focus on the practices that make peer support unique: empowering engagement, personal wellness, and leadership. **We are committed to ensuring that graduates of our training program are equipped with the recovery skills and practices needed to inspire and support people along their own recovery paths.**

A critical part of that commitment is accountability. Holding ourselves—and one another—accountable across the field of Peer Support is essential to our collective mission. We are called to be present, meet people where they are, and hold high expectations. But what does it actually mean to hold high expectations?

Recently, someone asked me:

“What if I hold high expectations for the person to get a job, for example, and they don’t want to get a job? Aren’t I just setting up the person for failure?”

It is an important question because holding high expectations should never be confused with putting expectations onto someone else. Doing so runs counter to our responsibility to be present, to practice mutuality, and to recognize each person as the expert of their own life.

Here is what we mean by holding high expectations: **We can hold the expectation that every person is capable of making decisions about their own life for reasons that are important to them—even when those reasons are not immediately known or understood by us.**

Consider the example of employment. If I hold the expectation that a person should work when they do not appear to want a paid job, I may actually be setting myself up for failure as a Peer Support Specialist. I may begin developing ideas about that person that are unfair or

untrue. I might question their motivation, their energy, or even their recovery.

But what happens when I instead hold the expectation that the person deserves to make their own decisions about the path forward—and I honor that decision?

I may learn that the person has fought long and hard to secure their benefits and fears losing them. I may discover that they would prefer to volunteer and support their community without pay rather than risk their current financial stability. The decision that initially looked like a lack of motivation may, in fact, reflect careful consideration and deeply personal priorities.

Remaining present also keeps us outside of judgment. When I am judging a person, I am often stuck in a past timeframe that no longer exists. When I am advising or directing someone toward a particular outcome, I am firmly lodged in a future that has not yet happened—and may never happen exactly as I imagine it.

The work of Peer Support calls us to something different.

It asks us to remain intentional in what we do, with a simultaneous focus on the person’s expertise, our willingness to be present, and a recovery mindset that shapes how we think about people and the language we use to describe our world. It asks us to maintain a never-ending openness to learning.

We share these thoughts as a bulwark against drift in our recovery practices. As peer services continue to grow throughout behavioral health, Crestwood RRS remains passionately devoted to the value of integrated CMPSSs at every level of the behavioral health system.

Our commitment is not simply to expanding the Peer Support workforce, but to strengthening the practice itself—keeping it grounded in mutuality, respect, self-determination, recovery, and the belief that people are the experts of their own lives.

- Jim Ritchie, Director of Operations