

THE TWO-WAY BENEFIT OF PEER MENTORING

I have been diagnosed with bipolar, anxiety, and PTSD. I have been in recovery from these mental health conditions for about four years. I attribute much of my recovery to being a young adult peer mentor since early 2006. I find this position to be very rewarding and empowering. It is great to have a job that has meaning and allows me to help others using my past experience. I went through something that may have been negative but I was able to get through it and come out a stronger person in the end. My experience can help other young adults going through similar situations now who want support from people who have experienced it themselves.

For most of my life I felt that I was unheard and had to struggle with my illnesses alone, making it much more difficult to recover. Since working with young adults through mentoring, I now see that many feel the same way that I did while going through this period in my life. I feel that because I share similar experiences with my peers we are able to connect on a much deeper, more personal level than, say, a psychiatrist or therapist who has not had the lived experience of a mental illness.

I remember feeling like people did not understand what I was going through. I felt judged—people made assumptions about me because of what I was dealing with. The young adults that I have worked with tell me they feel this way too and that they feel more comfortable talking to someone who is on the same level as them, rather than an adult who is much older because this can be intimidating. They know that when they go out with me one-on-one that I am not judging them, trying to prescribe them medication, or evaluating their behavior.

I have worked with a couple of young adults who, after a few weeks of meeting with me, seem much happier than when we were first introduced. This position allows me to take young adults out into the community and accomplish a set of goals that they created during the intake process. In some cases the young adults do not have someone they feel comfortable talking to or they just do not get out much, but the mentoring program gets them out and allows them to talk with someone around their age about common experiences. Mentoring connects them with another young adult who is in recovery from a mental health condition and this is proof to them that recovery is possible. They have the opportunity to learn that they do not have to go through this alone and that they can be a stronger, happier person.

— Liz Pepin

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