



Doors to Wellbeing Quarterly

# Newsletter

## WHY PEER RESPITES MATTER

**PERSONAL EXPERIENCE  
WRITTEN BY: ELIS AARON**

On September 22nd of last year, I took an Uber to the Karaya Peer Respite in Worcester, MA not knowing how long I'd stay. I had been suddenly fired. My identity had been stolen, along with all the money I had left to live on. The police gave me a 32-page booklet of things to do to resolve the situation as best as possible, but offered no other assistance in solving the crime. I was immobilized. Depressed. Unable to act.

I don't know how I found the Kiva Centers or Karaya, but I'm so thankful I did. My stay there saved and transformed my life. I lived among my peers (both guests like myself and staff with lived experience of trauma like mine) in a comfortable, beautiful house for three weeks. Everything in the cabinets and two refrigerators was mine to eat. Every item on multiple shelves of art supplies was mine to use. When I ran out of warm clothes, there were donations at my disposal. I wanted for nothing and no one handed me or my insurance company a bill.

I recovered from my crisis in my own time, in my own way, with as much of or as little help from staff as I wanted at any given moment. I learned to ask for help. I learned to deal with conflict healthily. I learned that a "normal life" of Monday through Friday, 8:30am to 5pm office work on top of a city commute wouldn't serve me. I realized I could do whatever I wanted, regardless of outside pressures, and what I wanted more than anything was to work in a peer respite and help others the way I was helped: through simple connection, support, and willingness to listen and assist—in as much as anyone wanted from me.



Kiva trained me in Trauma-Informed Peer Support (TIPS) in the beginning of October. I completed it before I even returned home. In November, I went through another Kiva training session and became a Certified Peer Trauma Guide in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. All of their trainings are free, by the way. If you're interested in them, go to [KivaCenters.org](http://KivaCenters.org), click on the three horizontal lines in the upper right hand corner, click "Trainings," and see if there's anything that might be beneficial to you.

Since November, I worked hard to learn more. I attended webinars through the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery and am currently going through their first seminar, "Developing Your Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)." I hope to take part in their second seminar, "WRAP Facilitator Training," in Springfield this June. I've also been taking classes in Person-Centered Therapy and Person-Centered Counseling to improve my knowledge of how to grow my knowledge of best practices within peer support work.

All the while, I applied for peer support jobs in Boston and the surrounding area, but knew I always wanted to return to Kiva. Nothing I read or saw compared to their practices, and I knew through personal experience, that their methods allowed guests to recover in their own way, in their own time, and with the help of staff, aka living resources and testaments to the ability to recover and keep recovering.

On February 2nd, I saw that Kiva was hiring for multiple positions at their new respite, Juniper. Immediately, I whipped up a new skills-based resume and passionate cover letter and applied, hoping beyond hope I would get a response. My first interview was on February 9th, my second was on February 15th, and my last was on February 28th. Today, at 12:10pm, I was offered the job of Peer Respite Advocate at Juniper and immediately accepted. I begin training next week.

Click below to see the beautiful place I'll be working in, and their description of the truly live-saving work I'll be doing. When I told my husband, I couldn't say the words without crying through my widest smiles. I cannot express the pure joy, gratitude, and sense of fulfillment all effervescent inside me right now. It's been 167 days since I entered the Karaya Peer Respite as a guest. Five months and two weeks, to the day. And because of what they gave me, because of the way they taught me how to give to myself? I now have the honor and privilege to return as staff—equal to every guest I'll come to know, but on the other side of crisis, in the place I was always meant to be

**TO LEARN MORE  
ABOUT JUNIPER,  
CLICK HERE.**

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE KIVA  
CENTERS AND THE WORK THEY DO,  
CLICK HERE**

# THE ART OF FACILITATION

The great thing about being a trainer/group facilitator for Creating Increased Connections and the Copeland Center is that I find myself working with a team that strives for excellence; people who follow through with commitments without excuses. It is easy to do your best when you're surrounded by people who do their best. This is what makes our team exciting and different from traditional facilitators and trainers.

We embrace the quote from Thomas Jefferson, 3rd president of the United States, who stated: "Who then can so softly bind up the wounds of another except those who have been afflicted by the same wounds." We come from lived experience. Training and facilitating is a huge undertaking. I believe the first thing for any group facilitator or trainer to realize is: this position is one of privilege, which must be taken seriously, while always embracing the values and ethics discussed by the Copeland Center. The goal of Creating Increased Connections is for individuals to walk away not only enlightened but able to say they experience a kinship where they knew they were talking to somebody who cares.

In training, I firmly stress there is no perfect facilitating style. If we all provide the learning experience the same way, it would be extremely boring! We all bring unique life experiences to the table. But any time someone allows us the privilege of walking beside them in their learning process, we handle that opportunity with care and respect. The highlight for me as a trainer is when I literally see the light bulb moment; when someone gets it and realizes, "Yes, I just encountered a new idea." The other thing that is so rewarding as a trainer is coming into a training room as a painter walking upon a blank canvas. Everyone with their brush painting their story, their ideas, theories, perspectives and learning one from another; looking at this room fully painted with beautiful pastel colors with some pinks and rich blues and strong reds and radiant purples and dark blacks, and I take my moment of pause and reflection and I say, "learning happened here!"

Can you see it and your mind's eye? I see cans of paint everywhere, and I encourage you to grab your brush and paint your wall.

***Article written by: Michael Nelson***



**MICHAEL NELSON IS A PEER SPECIALIST AND TRAINER WHO RECENTLY RECEIVED AN AWARD FOR HIS INSPIRING WORK!**

**TO READ MORE ON MICHAEL AND HIS AWARD, [CLICK HERE.](#)**

# RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG ADULT PEER SUPPORTERS



The Mental Health Services Research Lab at Temple University is conducting a nationwide study that aims to understand the workplace experiences of young adult peer supporters, including challenges they experience on the job and how they can best be supported as they work with their peers. We are currently reaching out to young adult peer support workers to complete a brief online survey. For the purpose of this research, young adult peer supporters include young persons ages 18-30, currently working for pay full-time or part-time in a peer support role, who are able to provide informed consent and understand English.

For completion of the online survey, participants may be entered into a raffle for the opportunity to win an electronic gift card. There will be one \$100 gift card and two \$50 gift cards prizes.



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For any questions or concerns, you can contact [elizabeth.thomas@temple.edu](mailto:elizabeth.thomas@temple.edu) or [haley.payne097@gmail.com](mailto:haley.payne097@gmail.com).



*Doors to To Wellbeing is a Program of  
the Copeland Center*

**LOOK FORWARD  
TO OUR NEXT  
NEWSLETTER!  
...JULY 2023**



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