

**What does it take to bring about meaningful change in a person's life?**

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In mental health, there are many schools of thought on how best to bring about such change in a supportive and nurturing environment. Just within the Peer Specialist profession alone, there is a broad spectrum of solutions. Many of these ideas we resonate with, while others we do not. Still, I'd like to encourage all of us to open our minds to a variety of ideas by actively listening to differing opinions, exchanging ideas, and practicing mutuality with not just the people we serve, but with our colleagues as well. It is important to recognize that the diversity of our beliefs put together is what makes us powerful and enables us to be that force for change to the people who need it most.

Unfortunately, a state of divisiveness has been the theme of 2017 so far. In particular, a heightened political polarity has made this year a difficult one for many of us. Though these are things that should be strengthening our communities, government activity, religious belief, and cultural background have all surfaced in a way that divides us further.

Despite the challenges, I've noticed that this divisiveness that has confronted our humanity has managed to be an unexpected catalyst to unity. A series of grassroots organizations across the country have been advocating for their ideas and gaining momentum, not only from our tireless efforts, but from the people's dissatisfaction with oppressive mental health regulations and unjust legislations.

I cannot help but to reflect back to the Certified Peer Specialist training I took a year ago. I learned through the CPS course that the Peer Recovery movement is rich in its history. There were many who devoted their entire lives to advocate for the rights of the people, and from them we have made great strides.

To honor lived-experience, respect its wisdom, and use them as a method of holistic and compassionate support is profound. This system creates mutual connection with peer support, being an agent to change ineffective regulations, and being "in" the mental health system, instead of "of" it. This course teaches a radical idea to many of us. It challenges many of our beliefs while simultaneously, it hits close to home. In a way, it is a revolutionary common sense. By that, I mean the course led many of us to use our innate respect, love, and compassion for one another. Through our own lived-experience, we learned that we can transform baseline and clinical approach to recovery and strength based approach. We have a choice not to identify with mental health diagnosis. Instead, we view symptoms and diagnosis as resiliency and resourcefulness. We view suicidal ideation and hallucinations as experiences.

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In a few moments, we will begin conversations regarding the future of our profession. There will be varying opinions, some of which we agree with, some of which we may not agree with. However, I would like to invite all of us to welcome all opinions. To support the future of the Peer Specialist profession, we need the best education not only for ourselves, but to better serve others. To bring about significant change, we must continue to unify. It is our passion that makes this line of work meaningful, the drive we all share to make a better community. For that, we must go beyond our comfort and challenge ourselves. So we can continue to do the great work we do, not only standing alongside with people we support, but with one another, and other colleagues with different roles in the mental health field.

As one of my personal heroes, Former Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy once said, "Healing happens when we are able to truly talk to and connect with each other. That means listening and understanding. It means assuming good, not the worst...When the world is locked in a struggle between love and fear. Choose Love, always...It is the world's oldest medicine..." I believe that love, compassion, and empathy are why we continue to do our work. It is my sincere hope that this CPS Summit will be a catalyst for rich conversations that will propel our profession to bright future.

Thank you.