

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Wellness Initiative**

**Getting Well Through Recovery:
Why Wellness Matters and How Your Peers Can Support You
Podcast**

Narrator: The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or SAMHSA, created the Wellness Initiative because people with mental and/or substance use disorders tend to die years earlier than the general population. Studies show this is mostly due to preventable and treatable conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer, which can be improved by healthy eating, increased physical activity and smoking cessation. Focusing on health and wellness is particularly important for people with/or at risk for mental and/or substance use disorders so they can live long and healthy lives. SAMHSA's goal is to help individuals, families, providers, and communities improve whole health outcomes. Keep listening to learn more about wellness and tips you can apply in your life.

Howard: Welcome to our show, everyone. My name is Gabe Howard, and I'll be your host for today's SAMHSA podcast. Our show today is called "Getting Well through Recovery: Why Wellness Matters and How Your Peers Can Support You."

I am the director of development and marketing for the P.E.E.R Center. I am also a person living with bipolar and anxiety disorders. I'm the recipient of the 2014 Norman Guthrie award, given by Mental Health America, to the person who shows exceptional leadership in promoting mental illness awareness and prevention in the community. I'm a legal help finalist and placed second in the national Live Bold competition. In addition to my advocacy work, I'm also an award-winning writer and speaker.

On behalf of everyone at SAMHSA and the P.E.E.R. Center, welcome to our show. All of our guests today, myself included, live in central Ohio and are in recovery for mental illness, addiction, and/or trauma. Today I have with me DeShawn, who is the head of security at the P.E.E.R. Center, and Deidra, who is the assistant director at the P.E.E.R. Center. The P.E.E.R. Center is a drop-in wellness and recovery and support center for people living with mental illness, addiction, and/or trauma. We are a consumer-operated service and proudly say that 100 percent of our staff are people living in recovery.

The 'peer' in 'P.E.E.R. Center' stands for Peers Enriching Each Other's Recovery, and we model that by empowering individuals to take control of their recovery through education and peer support. We provide a safe place where individuals receive respect, encouragement, and hope that supports and strengthens their recovery from mental health issues, addiction, and trauma. Every day, over 100 people walk through our doors. We call the people using our services associates. They utilize a wide variety of services, included one-on-one support with staff or each other, group supports, recreational activities, or they utilize our media and computer center.

The power of the P.E.E.R. Center is our dedication to the motto that everyone is welcome and everyone matters. You can find us online at www.thepeercenter.org, or 'like' us on Facebook at facebook.com/thepeercenter. I'll mention all this again at the end of our show. Today's show focuses on why overall health and wellness is so important for people in recovery, and ways to practice wellness on a daily basis, both in your work and in your personal life.

Focusing on health and wellness is particularly important for people with or at risk for mental health conditions. Maintaining our mental health is a critical aspect of maintaining physical health and wellness. We know that wellness, the presence of purpose in life, active involvement in satisfying work and play, a healthy body and living environment, joyful relationships, and happiness is integral to our mental health. However, too many Americans who experience mental and/or substance abuse disorders are in poor health, mostly due to preventable medical conditions. Practicing wellness has become an essential part of good mental health, and therefore good overall health. It's time we stop separating mental health and physical health, and instead focused on health.

Please be aware that our guests are answering from their own experience and perspective. The discussion we are going to have today has one rule: Keep it real. All of our guests will answer truthfully and without a filter. There are no wrong answers, and we are looking forward to an honest and lively discussion.

First, we're going to bring on Deidra [James]. Deidra is the assistant director here at the P.E.E.R. Center. As one of the original staff members, Deidra played an instrumental role in the development of what would later become the P.E.E.R. Center. Then and now, she oversees the programming of the center, and continues to strive to ensure that the center meets the needs of those who come through our doors. Being a person in recovery herself, Deidra is passionate about her work and believes it has meaning and purpose. Deidra also has a bachelor's in arts and psychology from the Ohio State University, and is an Ohio peer supporter. Deidra, welcome to the show. How are you?

James: Hi Gabe, I'm great. How are you?

Howard: I am fantastic. Did you have a good weekend?

James: I had a fabulous weekend.

Howard: Thank you for being on the show, and we're going to have a group discussion today, so we're also going to bring out DeShawn [Davis]. Deshawn is the facilities manager and head of security for us here at the P.E.E.R. Center. As one of the original staff members as well, he has always worked to maintain the overall operation of the physical center, in addition to ensuring the safety and well-being of the people who attend. Through his own experiences, he has developed an ability and a passion for helping individuals with mental illness, as well as those with alcohol and substance abuse issues. He takes pride in his work here at the center providing support to those who need it. DeShawn has a degree in computer electronic engineering technologies. DeShawn, welcome to the show.

Davis: Hello, Gabe.

Howard: Well, welcome to the show to both of you. Thank you so much for agreeing to come on, and of course speak to your own personal experiences.

Before we get started, we're going to go ahead and cover what SAMHSA and we call the eight dimensions of wellness. Keep in mind, what wellness means, and what we focus on, varies from person to person. Yet it is useful to think about practical ways we can improve our wellness in each dimension. We have broken this down into eight specific categories of wellness. The first one is emotional: coping effectively with life's challenges. The next one is spiritual: expanding your sense of purpose and meaning in life enhances your sense of connection to self, nature, and others. Intellectual: being creative and expanding knowledge and skills. Physical: exercising, eating, and sleeping well, and preventing disease. Environmental: finding a pleasant, stimulating environment that supports our wellbeing. Financial: finding satisfaction in your current and future financial situation. Occupational: getting personal satisfaction and enrichment through work and school. Social: connecting with others and developing a support system.

For our listeners, you can get a more in-depth definition by visiting [SAMHSA.gov/wellness](https://www.samhsa.gov/wellness). To my listeners Deidra and DeShawn, do you have anything to add about the eight dimensions of wellness or any questions?

Davis: No.

James: I don't think so.

Davis: Yeah, me neither.

Howard: Awesome. Well thank you both so much. Now let's get started with the discussion questions. Remember, there are no wrong answers. Just be yourself, be honest, and have fun. We want to have fun with this. So, the first question, I'm going to go ahead and give it to DeShawn. We introduced Deidra first so it's only fair that we let DeShawn answer the first question. Why is overall health and wellness so important for people in recovery?

Davis: I believe it's all connected. You just went through the eight dimensions of wellness; it's all connected: your physical health, your mental health, and your spiritual health. One affects the other. I've seen at the P.E.E.R. Center that when a person isn't doing too well, they're struggling, whether it be with their addiction or their mental illness, it always has a direct connection to their physical health. You can almost see it on people's faces, maybe in their posture, how they're carrying themselves, even the tone of their voice. So I think it's all connected.

Howard: Excellent, thank you so much. Deidra, the exact same question. Why is overall health and wellness so important for people in recovery?

James: I really agree with DeShawn in that it's all connected. I know that, just from my own experiences, if I am physically not feeling well or not eating well and not getting any kind of

physical health in a positive way, then I'm not going to feel as well emotionally and vice versa. And that's just something I've experienced. If I have a backache or something, I may not feel well and if I don't feel well, I may get a backache. I've noticed that in my own life that it's really important to kind of focus on the whole aspect, the whole big picture of wellness and not just to focus on one aspect of it versus another, because they seem to all connect together.

Howard: I think, to echo both of your points, when we write these questions, we think about this in our own little bubble, why is overall health and wellness so important for people in recovery. And of course, I think what we neglect to do when we think about this is, you know, I'm in recovery, you're in recovery, but, for example, my grandmother is not. But I want her to have health and wellness as well. I think that it is equally important for her. Is that kind of an agreeable sentiment?

Davis: Definitely.

James: I would say so, yes.

Howard: You're all thinking about it, you're like 'I don't know, we don't know your grandma Gabe. We're not sure.'

Davis: Well, one thing I tell people when they first come to the center is that if you've lived on this planet a certain any number of years, you have to have had some kind of recovery or another. You may not have the label or the title that people put on a lot of issues, but being human, you deal with recovery. You know, bad things happen, things get bad, and then you get better. And I think we all can kind of relate to that.

Howard: I think that's an excellent point. You know there's so much to talk about when it comes to how physical health and mental health tie into each other, and I think we could spend a lot of time on it but let's explore it a little more. I know that a lot of people that live in recovery or have issues with mental illness or addiction and trauma issues, we tend to be smokers. We tend to overeat, or eat poorly. For myself, I know that when I was very, very depressed, I wasn't cooking vegetables. You know, I was eating Twinkies. I was ordering pizza. So, it's very easy that you can put those two things together. Anybody want to expand on that?

Davis: Well, I heard a statistic a while back. I don't want to misquote it, but I know the life expectancy is significantly shorter for those suffering from mental illness. It's a direct correlation. There's also statistics on smoking and poor diets, and I've noticed [among] people that attend the center, a lot of them are in and out of the hospital, they have personal nurses who have to watch them, so it definitely has a direct effect physically on your health.

Howard: I can see that. I believe the study that you're quoting again, we'll put the asterisks on it that you should read more on your own to our listeners, but it's that the average person with a mental illness dies 25 years younger due to a variety of factors, whether it be poor health care, poor exercise and hygiene, or of course, substance abuse or smoking, etc. So that is obviously of a concern to us because, you know, I want to live 25 years longer than the average person, not 25 years less.

Davis: Right.

James: I think that also part of it to consider is that sometimes the things that some people may do for their mental health, like maybe medications, sometimes can cause weight gain. Different ones obviously are going to do different things to different people, but you know there's a lot of people I've encountered who have maybe gained a lot of weight from the medication that's helping them in one regard, but then they kind of have to work extra hard on the physical health side of it to kind of keep that balance, to not develop more conditions that can be harmful—if that makes sense.

Howard: It makes absolute sense. What a lot of folks who don't have mental illness or you know aren't experiencing the treatment for it, you know the fact of the matter is, let's look at, I always use cancer for an example. A lot of folks think that cancer makes you lose your hair. But it doesn't. The treatment for cancer makes you lose your hair. So there's a side effect of the treatment.

Now, I'm certainly not saying that you should keep your hair and not get treatment for cancer, but it's that way in mental health too that the truth of the matter is that if you're being treated for mental illness, there is a side effect. And that side effect can have negative repercussions on your life, and you have to create that balance. Are the side effects better than what we're treating? That's a huge discussion in the mental health community.

Davis: I think that's what turns a lot of people off to the medications. But I gotta tell you I've met people who without the medications, some of them probably wouldn't leave their houses. It would be extremely difficult for them to have any type of social life, even to communicate like we're talking now. So it is a trade-off, you do have to balance it, but some people struggle with it.

Howard: That's very true. Again it has been somewhat of a controversial topic, so, we could probably dedicate a whole show to the pros and cons, but I think it's important to, you know, leave the message that it's a personal decision, and at the P.E.E.R. Center we believe in self-directed care. We don't believe that people should be coerced into doing anything, but, we also don't believe that all treatments are inherently bad or inherently good. I think that it's very individualized. And I think that's very important. Being told what to do isn't actually wellness, so you go from being a slave to your disease to being a slave to the treatment of the disease. And as I'm fond of saying, that still makes you a slave. The goal is to reach complete wellness. I mean it's to be able to enjoy life and do what you like. I think that might be a fair statement.

Davis: Definitely, and I've met people who might not necessarily need a medication. I've known a handful of people who treat their mental illness just by maybe seeing a therapist or going to some kind of group therapy. It doesn't always have to come in the form of a pill, but like you said, it's an individual thing. Whatever works best for you.

Howard: Exactly, and this is actually a good segue into talking about the eight dimensions of wellness. I mean this is, we've kind of touched on seeing a therapist. So we can argue that that's intellectual. You're thinking about your illness. Now I know that's kind of funny you're

curing it by thinking, but, you know to follow it along, you're gaining coping skills, which is also emotional. You're coping effectively with the things that your illness brings.

And of course, when people think about wellness they always think about diet and exercise, and that's of course physical. I'm not a doctor, but a lot of medications metabolize in your body, and the more that you weigh or the less that you weigh determines how much you may need in order to reach that therapeutic dose. So like you said, you know if you're paying attention to your emotional well-being, your intellectual well-being, and your physical well-being, by eating well, diet and exercise, you may not need the medication. And that's something that we need to examine very closely, because I think that many of us would rather, you know, talk a walk than take a pill. And I think that's a very valid thing to think. Your thoughts?

Davis: Yes, definitely. For me personally, the physical part has a direct relationship with the mental part. I just feel a lot better, so much better, and you know none of us are getting any younger, but it helps to stay physically strong. Staying physically strong helps me to stay mentally strong, and I just feel more prepared for the day, whether good or bad. Whatever comes, I just feel a lot more prepared for it.

Howard: That's fantastic, Deidra, you want to touch on that?

James: Yeah, I know that I definitely feel a lot better when I get more physical activity. I'm not like the most [fit], if I'm going to the gym or anything like that, but when I just do what I do, sometimes it dawns on me, I'm like wow, like I feel really good or I slept really good that night. Or I just feel better and feel more rested, just feel better, more relaxed, you know what I mean? So I think that, and regardless of whatever kind of [exercise] it is that you do, you know, if it's working, it's working.

Howard: Yes, one of the interesting things when people talk about their overall physical health, I think the thing that gets missed the most is sleep. You know, when we say physical health people are like, "Oh yeah, exercise." And we've even gotten better when we talk about physical health to talk about our diet, the things that we put in our body, you know Twinkie versus carrots. But sleep is so very vital, and we talk about sleep hygiene a lot with mental health because, you know, if you stay up for three days straight, you're not healthy. The body needs sleep. So not getting good sleep. Yeah, go, go, go, DeShawn.

Davis: The body heals itself when you sleep, and I remember having a conversation with my mother. A lot of people complain about not sleeping well or bad sleeping habits, and some things you can only help with medication. But one thing she always said was that our bodies are meant to work, and she always brags about how she sleeps like a baby, but it's because she works so hard during the day. I noticed that when I work out or I get a good physical workout during the day, I sleep and my dreams are positive. I actually wake up in a better mood. You know those sleeps where you go to sleep and next thing you know you're waking up in the morning. You know, it just helps. It helps a lot.

Howard: I love those types of sleeps. I love the way you put it too, you know those sleeps where even your dreams are positive. But it's true, you know sleep hygiene is something that,

to kind of cover it a little, sleep hygiene is the idea of going to bed at the same time every day and waking up at the same time. You know just really paying attention to, you know, how you sleep. I mean I think too many of us are like, "Oh, I can stay up an extra hour," "I can get up an extra hour," "I can stay out all night." You know when I was younger I would work all day, stay out all night, and then work all day again. And obviously this took a toll. I mean it had to have.

James: Yeah, I think for me sleep is like, definitely one of like, one of my major things that I try to be pretty diligent about. Like I will go to bed, like, it doesn't matter if I'm like "Oh, it's like nine o'clock, I'm going to bed." I don't mess with it, because I know that if I don't get a good night's sleep, if I don't get enough sleep ... I know like exactly how many hours I need to have to function well. It's really important to me that I maintain that, because if I don't, my mental health can severely be affected and I'm not usually feeling well at all. That is definitely one thing that's really important for me personally is making sure I get the sleep that I really need to get and that it's a good sleep, because, like you said, the restless kind when you're up all night or you're half-awake and half-asleep, doesn't leave me feeling good afterwards.

Howard: It makes you feel very sluggish in the morning.

James: Yeah, and kind of irritable. It actually kind of winds me up, like I usually get more wound up if I don't sleep. It's kind of backwards but it's not a good thing. It's not a good feeling for me and probably not good for people around me.

Howard: As my grandmother used to always say to me, "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." Now the wealthy and wise, I haven't yet seen, but with healthy she was spot on. Spot on. Yeah, granny's a genius.

Let's segue into our next question. And these are more, these are very personal too, to the two of you. How do you (and the you in this is Deidra and DeShawn), how do you practice wellness on a daily basis, both at work and in your personal life? And what we're really looking for is a couple of examples, you know, one or two examples. And we're going to fire this at Deidra first.

James: Okay, I would say, like I mentioned earlier, I don't really like go to the gym or anything like that, but I have a dog and I love to take my dog for walks. He's really well-trained. And so it's like a joy to walk with this dog. So, I really enjoy doing that and it does give me some physical, you know kind of activity. So that's one thing I just really enjoy doing, physically, and also it just makes me feel really positive, you know what I mean?

And then, of course I know I already mentioned the sleep as being really important. So those are a couple of things. I mean I like to just get out with my kids and sometimes, like, even just going outside to play, and watching them play, kind of being out there with them. My kids usually kind of tease me when I try to throw the ball with them or try to do what they're doing, they usually kind of make fun of me, in a loving way of course. But you know, I like to do that with them. And I think getting that fresh air, having some movement, so that's like physical but then it's also kind of social and kind of environmental I think kind of ties in there too. It's just, you know, getting out there and doing some positive, fun stuff.

Howard: Dancing is big at the P.E.E.R. Center. I mean I know dancing can be big for all of us individually, but at the P.E.E.R. Center, we really like to dance. I mean I'm not making fun at all. We are dancing people.

James: True, we do the five-minute "move it." Yeah.

Davis: There are healing powers in music.

James: Definitely. Definitely. Love music, love dancing, I think those are really important parts for me.

Howard: You've covered many of the, for the folks who are paying attention, the eight dimensions of wellness. I mean you're right, you've hit on a lot of them. You're emotionally connected, you've got a good environment, it's intellectually stimulating, it's physical, walking like you said, the social. I mean, I'm sure if I thought hard enough I could make it financially sound and spiritual as well, but I mean it really is. It's that idea of getting outside of yourself, inviting others in, and sharing it.

And, to touch on the dancing and the music, there's nothing more powerful than being in a room full of people who just don't care what they look like, because everybody's doing the same thing. And, you know, not to toot the P.E.E.R. Center's horn or anything, but we have a recovery celebration every year. And I just remember when the music shot up and everybody stood up and we're watching everybody dance. And you know our executive director is not here to defend herself, but I looked over and she was dancing to the music. And we were all laughing and just thought "Wow, this is really the physical representation of how we should feel," because it was that kind of a moment.

James: Yeah.

Howard: Very cool. I don't know how you're going to top that, DeShawn, but the same question I'm going to fire to you. How do you practice wellness on a daily basis, both at work and in your personal life? Can you give us some examples? And Deidra, as soon as he's done, I'm going to fire back to you, I mean you gave us some great examples at home, but let's talk about work as well. You know as a peer supporter, you work with people, we all work with folks who are just like us that need help, so managing our wellness at work is of course equally important for that whole financial piece. So go ahead DeShawn, and then bounce it over to Deidra.

Davis: For me personally it's, I may be a little too detail-oriented, but I like order, I like to make lists for myself, maybe goals, short-term, long-term goals. I actually have a whiteboard that I hung up in my kitchen and I'll write anything up there, whether it's a list of to-do things, whether it's goals, even like affirmations I might hear during the day, I'll come home and I'll write it real big on the board. I like to keep, you know how they say your environment can be in direct relation with your mental state. Like if your environment is kind of cluttered and dirty, and you know, like sometimes it's a representation of what's going on in your head. So I like to keep my environment very clean, very much in order. It helps.

After a crazy day, just coming home and opening my door and seeing that I don't have to worry about anything, just sit on the couch and kind of decompress, it helps me personally. Physical activity also helps. I have a daughter myself, a 9-year-old, and she never stops. So that definitely helps to keep me moving, keep me going.

Howard: Kids are great for that. Now, before we pop over to Deidra, now at work, I mean what would you say, you know, what do you do at work to practice wellness?

Davis: Well, the thing about the P.E.E.R. Center is [that] it's a place of socialization. So, you know, we're always talking, we're always having sometimes deep discussions, sometimes funny discussions, or you know, we do a lot of activities. Like Deidra said, we do a lot of music, we throw a lot of good parties. And it seems like it's easier to get everybody involved in these parties. You usually don't see people sitting around, or we bring people in.

But, for me personally, sometimes it helps if I'll just take a walk outside. We have a smoking area in the back, and I don't smoke, but sometimes I'll even walk back to the smoking area just to get a change of scenery or just kind of mix it up. And we have spaces where...we have a serenity room. So even though you're in a room full of people, you can go be by yourself and you know, do your own thing.

Sometimes you just need to mix it up; sometimes you need to get away from the group, sometimes you need to be around people. You can do both at the P.E.E.R. Center. So that helps.

We help a lot of people with their recovery but it's countless times where you're talking to someone else and they have things to offer you for your recovery. So even though we're here for them, they're here for us too. You know, it's like helping each other, I guess.

Howard: I love that; that's great. And with that, we'll move over to Deidra.

James: I think DeShawn just said a lot of good stuff. As far as practicing wellness at work, we do a lot of the fun, positive stuff. You're always kind of thinking, like I think, you know, you gotta be on your toes cause you never know who's gonna be here at what time, what someone's going through, how to handle different situations that may come up, so I think you really gotta think about just paying attention and thinking things through. I totally get a lot of social interaction. I mean I may work here, but that doesn't mean that I'm not getting benefits out of being here just like DeShawn just mentioned.

It's a supportive place. It's very mutual that everybody's here for the same kind of purpose, so we can definitely help each other out. I love to be around people, so when I'm here there are lots of people whom I can just talk to and get a different perspective, things like that. And I just think it makes me feel really good. I love to be here, I look forward to coming to work, to me sometimes it's almost like an outlet, sometimes I'm like, "Oh, I can't wait to go to work," and just kind of, you know, like, like I mentioned the kids and stuff. So sometimes it's like, "I can't wait to go home and play with my kids," and sometimes it's like, "I can't wait to go chill out at work and hang out with some adults for a little while," you know?

It's definitely helpful just to work, and as far as practicing wellness while I'm here, I think if something is bothering me, there's people to talk to. And I have things that I do... we have stress balls on hand, which I think are great. So I frequently have a stress ball or something to kind of just to be messing with, it helps me to relax and stuff. So, if I need to do anything like that to kind of stay focusing on my wellness, I have, you know, just little things around that I can do. You know, there's a lot of stuff here that people can do for their wellness. Not just for associates but for staff as well.

Howard: That's great. What I like about both of your answers, I can tell, when the question came up, you both kind of just thought about like 'What have I done in the last few days? If I need to maintain my wellness, if I'm stressed out, if I need a moment.' And what I liked most about your answers is you both just named stuff that worked at that moment.

The biggest thing that you do is you recognize you need a moment, and then find something to do that is appropriate. So if you're stressed out by people, you go take a walk. If you've been doing a lot of paperwork and you're stressed out, you go find a person to talk to. So I'd say the number one thing that I think all of us really need to focus on is that we need to recognize that moment in ourselves and do the appropriate thing.

James: Definitely.

Davis: Definitely. Another thing with me, we do a lot of outings, you know, things in the community, and I think it's great just getting out of the center with a group of associates and just kind of hanging out, even if we're just walking together as a group. And it's kind of funny but when you get people outside of the center, you know it's a drop-in center, so you can come and go as you please, but when you actually get them outside of the center, outside of those four walls, people tend to relax a lot. You know, there's no physical constraints. It's just you and a group of friends regardless of where we're at. It's weird, but it almost brings us closer together, you know.

Howard: It's focusing on the moment or focusing on the activity instead of focusing on the external circumstances that brought us together. So it's really living in the moment.

Davis: Right, exactly.

Howard: That's really cool. And you're right, and you're right. Well, very cool. We've got one more question before we wrap up. And I think it's one of the cooler questions, and we kind of touched on it all throughout this, but it's how can our peers help support any or all of the eight dimensions of wellness? And you know the question is kind of broad, but when we say peers, I don't just mean staff and I don't just mean associates. I mean all of the people in our lives—how can they help support all of our eight dimensions? And just take that question however you hear it. So, the official question is how can one's peers help support any or all of the eight dimensions of wellness? And we'll pick on DeShawn first. Go!

Davis: I think it's all about being supportive, like you said. People are living in the moment, and [it means] just going outside yourself and kind of recognizing what a peer might need at that

moment in time. And I tend to look at things in black and white but I put it [this way]: Do more building than you do breaking down. Try to improve, try to move forward. If you know someone is starting a new diet or working out, just try to encourage that. Or if they have been going to the library and got a new book, sometimes people get excited about things, sometimes just allowing them to talk and just going off of whatever they're on at that moment, just being supportive to your peer.

Howard: That's fantastic. And Deidra? Do you want me to read the question again?

James: Yeah. Yes please.

Howard: Okay. How can one's peers help support any or all of the eight dimensions of wellness?

James: I think that a lot of the aspects of the eight dimensions of wellness are things that can be supported. There are a lot of things that you can do, that people can do together, like and so, I'm trying to think of like a good example. Like at the center, I think we kind of touch on it but besides that we do have a walking group. So it's like we can all kind of support each other in being more physically healthy if we all go together on a walk. You know, and then it's a lot easier than maybe someone who doesn't want to go out by themselves, you know what I mean, like you can just do it together, you know. That's what peer support is all about, is doing it together and supporting each other.

I think any kind of thing that you can encourage someone else or they can encourage you to just do it, I think even just having conversations about these is a good way to support people. I mean, because sometimes people are, and then people may even realize that they're doing some of these things and maybe not even realizing that "Hey, I am really working on that." And that'll boost it up so that people will kind of want to do more, you know, to be working on their overall wellness. So I just think talking about it, offering to take on some of those steps together.

Howard: Sure. One of the things that, you know we all understand the concept of a diet buddy. You know everybody on the planet who has gone on a diet, they sucker in a friend. 'Will you go on a diet with me?' Or a gym buddy, we all understand a gym buddy. Like "Hey I just joined a gym, will you give them money and not go too?" We understand that it's the same thing, right? I mean whether it's recovery, or you're working on quitting smoking, or practicing coping skills or whatever, it's sort of to make a friend and support each other. Identical concepts.

Davis: Yeah, it's knowing that you're not alone. And I touched on this before, but a lot of times people just feel alone. They spend enough time in their own heads or you know by themselves in their own homes and you start to, I don't know, you start to get down on yourself. And at the P.E.E.R. Center, it's just all about just letting people know that they're not alone and if they need it, there is support here that they can have. And there's just a strong sense of community here. A lot of regulars, we get new people, but everyone is treated the same. You know, and anybody can join in on any conversation.

Howard: That's very true. I think it's very scary to do something that you believe nobody else has ever done. I remember when I was a kid my father wanted me to go down a water slide, and I was terrified of the water slide. And my dad was like, "Look, we'll walk up, and I'll go down first." And as soon as I saw him go down, I was like "Oh, well hey, he did it. So now I can do it." And I think that that's the scary part of being alone, you might be in a bad way or you need help, or you need to make a huge lifestyle change, and if you don't see that anyone else has ever done it, you think well then it must not be able to be done. And of course, that's all the more frustrating, because we see people do it all the time. So we want to show the people who are struggling that "Hey, it can be done. Look at all of these folks who have done it, and you can be one of them as well." And you're right, the power is huge in that. Nobody's giving me a round of applause?

Davis: We see it every day, like you said, you see a lot of different people at a lot of different levels, but I don't know, it's a lot of positive energy in this place. And sometimes that's all people need is that positive energy, positivity, to be around encouraging people.

James: Yeah.

Howard: Mental illness, addiction, and trauma bring their own negativity. I mean it's just the nature of the beast. So, it's up to us to provide, as you said, the counterbalance to that which is the positivity. And doing that can help people move forward, because if left to our own devices, you know when I was left to my own devices there was nothing but negative. And it's hard to sort of push against that alone.

Davis: Yeah, I think that's part of being a human being too. Nobody wants to be alone, and I'm kind of a loner in my personal life, but living as a loner, it's not healthy. Everybody needs some kind of socialization, some kind of support, some kind of sense of community. Like I said, I think it's part of being a human being.

Howard: I love that. Let's go ahead and end with a bonus question. Of the eight dimensions of wellness, I'm going to give this question to Deidra first, we've got the eight dimensions, we've got emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social and spiritual. For your own wellness, for your personal wellness, which one of these eight is most important to you and why?

James: Okay, which one is the most important to me and why? Okay, okay, I'm going to go with, I'm kind of torn, but I think I'm going to go with social. I kind of like having that connection with people, sense of belonging, support system, things like that. So for me, I think that's really important. I like to be around people and sometimes I like to be around people even if I kind of want to be left alone. I like to have that kind of connection, that sense of just not being alone, I guess. So, to me, that's one that's important. I'm gonna say what my tie one was, though, was emotional because that one's pretty important for me too. But I had to pick one.

Howard: There's no wrong answer, I mean the nice thing is of course that you don't have to pick one. You can have all eight.

James: Oh, absolutely, in life. I meant for the question.

Howard: I was just making sure that the listeners aren't like "Man, all eight are good; it's too bad we can't have seven of them." But you can have all eight.

James: Yeah, all eight are very important.

Howard: Yeah, DeShawn, exact same question. Of the eight, which one is your favorite and why? Or which one is most important to you for your sense of wellness and why?

Davis: I would have to say spiritual. I guess it's what I've seen in the P.E.E.R. Center also and heard. Even if it's not, it doesn't have to be a specific religion, sometimes it is, sometimes it's not. I think it's just believing in something greater than yourself. I think a lot of people, when it comes to addiction and mental illness, they feel powerless like they have no control over what's going on in their life. And I think a lot of people find motivation, because even though we provide socialization, and when you come in there's a community and everything, there's going to be times in your life where it's just going to be you.

A lot of people turn towards a higher power or a higher cause, even if it's just believing in the rotation of the Earth, you know, it helps kind of taking it off of you and having faith in something and just asking for help. Like I said, regardless of what or who you believe in, just that sense of spirituality, I think, is extremely important in recovery.

Howard: That's wonderful, thank you so much. Did you have a tie as well? I want to be fair.

Davis: A tie?

Howard: Yeah did you have a tie one that you liked as well?

Davis: For me it's kind of, like you said, all of them. But intellectual, physical—the physical I have to do something to maintain my physical health because I get very down when I'm not working my body out or eating right, I get extremely down. But I also need a lot of intellectual stimulation. I love learning new things, so people will bring in books, just having conversations people talk about their experiences, and people know that about me. I just love to learn, and I just need that stimulation. It helps to keep me going, I guess.

Howard: That's fantastic, thank you. Do any one of you have any parting words? I can give you a minute and a half each if you want to say anything or if you just want to say goodbye and thank you. It's your time. Deidra, go ahead and go first.

James: Yeah, I'll just basically, like you just said, they're all so important. And I just think it's important to tie them all together for your overall, you know, health and wellness. And I think there's some that we don't always think about, like the financial or the occupational, you know what I mean, some of them, I don't always pay enough attention to all of them. But I think it's really important to do so, and so I'm just really glad we had this conversation today.

Howard: Thank you so much. And DeShawn, you have the final word from our guest, DeShawn.

Davis: I guess for me, you know everybody's different, everybody's their own person, and I think I've used this before but the executive director, my boss, one of the things she always says that really hits home is that you have to meet people where they're at. So regardless of what their need might be, when it comes to the eight dimensions of wellness, we try to just be there for them and offer whatever kind of support that they need in that moment in time. And trust me, everyone's different. Everybody's story is different. Everybody's recovery is different. So everybody needs different ways to cope with that.

Howard: That's fantastic. Thank you so much DeShawn for being on the show. We'll go ahead and wrap up here. Thank you to our listeners for tuning in to today's podcast. We covered quite a few important topics and we hope you enjoyed listening in.

All of us at the P.E.E.R. Center want to thank SAMHSA for putting this together, and I want to thank our guests DeShawn and Deidra for agreeing to be on the show. They were absolutely awesome potatoes.

Please remember that you can't care for others if you aren't caring for yourself. It is important we remember our own self-care so we are in the best position to help others. At the P.E.E.R. Center, we are respectful of all people and strongly believe the concept that everyone matters because everyone does matter. By paying attention to our own wellness, we can model the way for others to pay attention to theirs.

Lastly, celebrate recovery always. Society often sees people with mental illness, addiction, and trauma issues at their worst. It is up to all of us to show people that recovery is possible and that it is worth celebrating. Let's work together to change the way society sees people living in recovery. Let's be proud of how far we have come and show people struggling that they can reach recovery too.

The P.E.E.R. Center can be found online at www.ThePeerCenter.org, and on Facebook at facebook.com/ThePeerCenter, or you can follow us on Twitter @ThePeerCenter. We love likes and follows, and we hope that you will connect with us. SAMHSA can be found online at www.SAMHSA.gov. And much of what we have discussed today can be found online at www.SAMHSA.gov/wellness. Finally, a special thanks to all of you for listening in. You are all fantastic. On behalf of the P.E.E.R. Center and SAMHSA, have a fantastic day.