

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

**Modeling the Way: Managing Personal Wellness While Supporting
Others 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 surrounding their Wellness Initiative. Our show today is called "Modeling the Way: Managing Personal Wellness While Supporting Others." Again, my name is Gabe Howard and I am the Director of Development and Marketing for the Peer Center. I'm also a person living with severe bipolar and anxiety disorders. I'm the recipient of the 2014 Norman Gutry Award, given by Mental Health America of Franklin County to a person that shows exceptional leadership in promoting mental illness awareness and prevention in the community. I'm also an award-winning writer and speaker, and after today, I will be able to add Podcast Host to my list of accomplishments.

All of our guests today, myself included, live in central Ohio and work for the Peer Center. Today's show is about the challenges of being a Peer Support Specialist and maintaining one's personal wellness and recovery while helping others do the same. The format of today's podcast is very straightforward. I'm going to interview four Peer Support Specialists from the Peer Center about techniques that they use to achieve this important goal. The Peer Center is a drop-in wellness, recovery, and support center for people living with mental illness, addiction, and/or trauma. We are a true consumer-operated service; 100 percent of our staff, from the Executive Director on down, are living in recovery. The "peer" in Peer Center stands for "**Peers Enriching Each others' Recovery.**" And we model that by empowering individuals to take control of their own recovery through education and peer support. We provide a safe place, where individuals receive respect, encouragement, and hope that support and strengthens their recovery in mental health, addiction, and trauma. Every day, over 100 people walk through our doors. We call the people using our services "associates." And these associates use a wide variety of services, including one-on-one support with staff or each other, group peer support, recreational activities, or utilize our media center or computer lab. The power of the Peer 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 that again at the end of the show.

Please be aware that the guests are answering from their own experiences and perspectives. We have assembled a diverse group of individuals, and they are encouraged to keep it real and answer truthfully, and without a filter. There are no wrong answers, and we are looking forward to an honest and lively conversation. Our guests today are Juliet, who is our Executive Director, Robin, who is our Administrative Office Manager, DeShawn, who is the head of security and facilities, and Deidre, who is our Assistant Director. Each person will be introduced and speak with me one at a time, and I will list their bios, as well as ask them the same three questions.

Question #1: When it comes to maintaining your recovery, what is the single biggest challenge, both while working at the Peer Center and in your personal life?

Question #2: When you are in the workplace and you are triggered, how do you handle this? Do you have any suggestions or advice for our listeners?

Question #3: What is the biggest benefit to peer support?

Ladies and gentlemen, let's go ahead and welcome our first guest, Juliet Doris Williams. Juliet Doris Williams is the Executive Director of the Peer Center. She oversees the operations of peer support, wellness, and recovery efforts that operate daily within our walls. We have a staff of over 29. Like each of the staff members and a majority of the Board of Directors here at the Peer Center, she is a person walking the recovery journey. She has been honored by Mental Health America of Franklin County twice, once with the Larry Burkett Peer Support Award in 2007, and in 2011, she received the Norman Gutry Award for demonstration of exceptional leadership and the promotion of mental health and wellness. Prior to her work with us, Juliet provided administrative oversight for the social services program for Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio. She has spent more than 22 years working in state government, providing coordination and oversight for HIV/STD prevention, minority health, and alcohol and other drug abuse prevention programs. She's also served as AIDS Director for the State of Ohio. Juliet was elected to serve on the Executive Committee of the National Association for State and Territorial AIDS Directors, and was honored as the Nicholas Rango Leadership Award recipient. Juliet formally served as a Board of Director -- on the Board of Directors and as the Board President of the Ohio Empowerment Coalition. She has a Bachelor's of Science in Psychology from Indiana State University, a Master's of Social Work from the Indiana University School of Social Work, and is an independently Licensed Social Worker, as well as a Peer Support Specialist. And finally, she is also all of our bosses. Juliet, welcome to the show. How are you?

Williams: Morning, how are you?

Howard: Fantastic. We're glad to have you here. Is there anything that you'd like to add about the Peer Center?

Williams: Just that, I guess, that I might have said, rather than, “Juliet is a person living, or all of our staff are people living in recovery, from the Executive Director on *down...*” – I probably would have said that, “we’re all people living in recovery, walking the journey, including the Executive Director.” I kind of chafe a little bit with that top-down language, so, but, thanks! [chuckling] It was true; it’s all true. So, just me, my preference.

Howard: And your preference is extremely valid. There are great things about the Peer Center; there really are – I shouldn’t say there are no wrong answers, because this is the Internet, and somebody will jump on that, but we value each other’s opinion and experiences, even if we disagree with them. Is that a fair statement?

Williams: [slang for ‘agreed] That is absolutely a fair and correct statement.

Howard: Fantastic. You ready to jump into the questions?

Williams: Let’s do it.

Howard: Alright. Question #1. And remember, everybody is going to get the same questions and they’re answering from their own experience, so this is answering from Juliet’s perspective. The first question is: When it comes to maintaining your recovery, what is the single biggest challenge while working inside the Peer Center’s walls, as well as in your personal life?

Williams: Well, the answer to that question is just – it’s very clear to me in that I have a difficult time asking for help and so, so my challenge always, whether it be work or whether it be personal, is to allow other people, allow that support to come into my space. And, to challenge myself to say hey, I’m not having a good day today or I’m needing a little bit more support. And that comes from being...wearing all of the hats that I wear in my life, you know, wife, mother, boss, as you so politely say. It’s wearing all of those hats and having... and taking all of those roles very seriously. And they’re important. They’re important to me, and so I think, and I’m speaking for a lot of women who wear those same hats – we have a lot of people that we lend support to – a lot of people that we’re taking care of and often times we put ourselves last in that scenario and so the challenge is always self-care, or prioritizing self-care, which it’s...that’s a challenge – just prioritizing self-care. So, that’s my personal challenge; that’s my professional challenge; that’s just a challenge. It just is, in a big way, so...

Howard: Now as we’ve kind of mentioned, as you’ve pointed out, you know, we’ve talked a lot about you being the Executive Director. With everything that comes along with being Executive Director, you know, the...you’re kind of at the top. Do you find it more difficult to reach out and ask for help or – I’m going to use the word “vulnerable” – be vulnerable in admitting that you, you know, aren’t perfect, considering that so many people do look up to you.

Williams: I don’t know that I...I don’t know that I find it difficult; I think I surprise people, actually, because I am so forthcoming with...with my challenges, for example, when we have

our monthly associates' round table, I lead those conversations when we – as, you know, we shut down – everything else is going on in the Center and we ask all of our associates to come together, eat some snacks, and, you know, celebrate birthdays for the month, and then just talk about what's working well at the Peer Center, what are the things that we – what are the suggestions that our associates have for us to help us grow, to help us improve – but I always have to lead that conversation with, “Hi, my name is Juliet, and I'm a person who's walking in recovery. I'm a person who lives with depression, and I'm a trauma survivor” – and that's my opening script for that conversation because our associates, I think, they see us every day. They see us in a work role, but they forget sometimes because we do what we do so well, they forget that we are also folks like them, living with these sorts of issues, living with these challenges. And so I lead with that, putting that out there, and making myself vulnerable in that respect. The other thing that we do or have done in the past is have, periodically, particularly when we have new staff joining us, we have “staff story sharing,” where we make a...we have a...give that out to staff as assignments so that we share our stories with each other. So, we're always putting it out there, that we're people living in recovery; we're always acknowledging this – that, you know, “this is my diagnosis, and this is what I'm living with and I have good days, I have bad days.” For the most part, I'm having mostly good days, but we don't get too far away from that to recognize when things are not going so well.

Howard: Sure. What a lot of our listeners don't know is – they do know that the name of this podcast is “Modeling the Way” – that's the subtitle, and that name was come up by Juliet. You model the way from, again, including the Executive Director, all the way down. It's a really important trait here at the Peer Center, where nobody's better, nobody's worse or different, and we have to model recovery so that other people can follow.

Williams: Yes.

Howard: Alright. Yay! Ok, let's move on to Question 2. Question #2 is: “When you are in the workplace and you are triggered, how do you handle that? Do you have any, you know, any suggestions or advice for anybody that might be, you know, triggered in the work place?”

Williams: Well, fortunately for me, (yay!), I have an office with a door, and so when I'm feeling overwhelmed – or, and that has nothing to do with the staff or our associates, it mostly has to do with I have a ton of tasks that need to be done, and I have a lot of work that needs to be done and so, and being a pretty strong introvert I absolutely need that dedicated space where I can think through a task and just get that done. And particularly if I'm facing a deadline. So, I can close my door; that's one way to deal with my own...again, back to that self-care stuff. The other thing, when I'm – you know, triggers happen in community I think, so if I'm being triggered by a staff person – which rarely ever happens – but I'm fairly upfront about, okay, so help me, let's have a conversation about this because this is how I'm feeling, and maybe I'm misunderstanding, so let's get some clarity around that. If the triggering happens because I'm encountering an associate, and again, that's what we call our participants, and that has happened, people – they, because I don't separate myself from the program side of things, and so I have encounters and conversations with our associates, and when I am triggered, my job is

to one, recognize that I'm triggered, and the second thing is to back away from the situation; take a step back, take a few breaths. And, in some cases, allow... oftentimes, I get confronted because I'm an authority figure here at the Peer Center, and so, and people don't.... sometimes want to push back against that power, that authority, and, but, I don't necessarily have to be the one to deliver the message, as it were, and sometimes we found, we have found that other staff might have more of a rapport with that particular associate. And so, so my job is just to recognize that, and to let that happen. The message is going to be the same, because we have rules, we have policies, we have procedures, that kind of thing. The policy is the same. I'm not, I don't necessarily have to be the one to deliver the message.

Howard: That makes perfect sense, and it works fantastic. [*some garbled overspeak with Gabe and Juliet*] Juliet, we only have about 30 seconds left, but I, in the interest of being fair, I want to hit everybody with the same three questions so, in about 30 seconds, what would you say the biggest benefit to peer support is?

Williams: The biggest benefit is...wow, that's a...the biggest benefit is that it works. And that the magic of peer support is that you...there's someone else who's walked the journey, been through your same experiences, or having your same experiences, and that mutuality of experience is the power and the magic of it. Is that we learn from each other – it's like, *iron sharpens iron*. We learn from each other, we get stronger together, and it magnifies the power of what can happen when two people, two or more people are walking the same path. We help each other. We help each other.

Howard: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Juliet, for being on the show. Next we're going to introduce Robin. Robin is the Administrative Office Manager and Assistant HR Officer here at the Peer Center. Robin has raised five children by herself after a divorce. One of her children is mentally challenged, one has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and three of her children have been diagnosed with bipolar and have had issues with drugs and alcohol. Robin is one of the original staff members here at the Peer Center, and has gone from a part-time employee to a full-time employee. Being a person in recovery herself, Robin has been diagnosed with bipolar, trauma, and currently has 11 years and 2 months in recovery from drugs and alcohol. Robin has a clerical degree from West Virginia College, I'm sorry, West Virginia Career College. Robin, how are you?

Robin: I'm fine; how are you doing Gabe? It's great to be here with you.

Howard: We are very, very excited to have you. Are you ready to get to the questions?

Robin: Yes, I am.

Howard: Excellent. Question #1. Remember, it's the same three questions, and Robin is answering from her own personal experience, so of course, there's no wrong answers. We want to hear what you have to say. When it comes to maintaining your recovery, what is the single biggest challenge, both while working at the Peer Center, and in your personal life?

Robin: Well, the one in my personal life is family. That's the biggest challenge, as you said in my bio, there is users and everything that I've had to take myself away from certain family members, disconnect with certain people in my [life]...my nieces, nephews have used, because my recovery comes first. And at the Center, the challenge is sometimes going face-to-face with someone that's challenging you with the same thing. There's...sometimes for myself here, there are certain people I know that will get in my face about something, so I just direct them to someone else, and I go to my coworkers to help keep those triggers away. I have to be very careful on certain things. When, you know, that they're there.

Howard: And that's actually a good segue into our second question, which is "When you're in the workplace and you are triggered, how do you handle that? Do you have any advice for our listeners? Now, you've covered one of them – our staff, is, you know, we do a lot of teamwork, we work well together, and it sounds like you go to staff, so can you elaborate on that and maybe provide any other additional tips to handling triggers in the workplace?"

Robin: Yes, some...I let my staff, other staff, know certain things that trigger me, or a motion I'll make – like, a face that they can, you know, give me a clue that I'm being triggered, because not all the time I know I'm being triggered. I found new triggers through associates and I just try to keep informed with my coworkers, you know, *Okay, that was a trigger; I didn't realize; it's a new trigger for me.* So, you know, I try to work with everybody and I let certain associates that I talk to, that they come to me for questions, you know, that I do have triggers like everybody else, so, you know, if you see something, you think it's a trigger, please talk to me about it, you know, if I'm reacting. And my main thing is you've got to have a team that, you know, be there to support you. It can be an associate or a staff.

Howard: What's great about what I'm hearing in your answers, and again, please correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like two main things really help you. It's one, you don't give up. You don't say, you know, this is too hard. You take a moment, you take a beat, and you come back every day you work, even in your personal life, you know, you work with family and you know when to say when; and at work, you work with all of us and the associates and you know when to say when. And in addition to that, you do this by keeping the lines of communication open. You let people know what you need, and you're very receptive to hearing what they need, and having that open dialogue.

Robin: Yes, in the past, I was, I had a mask so big that nobody could break it, and since I have started work at the Peer Center, I've learned...my mask has come down, and I've learned with certain triggers that I do feel emotions that I've never felt before. So, it does happen, you know, that my emotions come out and I'm not ready for them, and that's why I try. I've learned to communicate with people. They keep me safe with my recovery, keep going for that.

Howard: That is fantastic. Of course, I wanted to touch on – this isn't one of the questions, but it said in your bio that you have been sober from drugs and alcohol for 11 years and 2 months! That's correct, right?

Robin: Yes.

Howard: Congratulations! That is fantastic. I know you can't see me, but I'm standing up and I'm clapping, and I'm sure other people are. It's a real...that's a real success story right there and I think you should be very – as a matter of fact, I know you are very proud, and I'm very proud on your behalf.

Robin: Yes, that took me many years...I've been in rehab and everything; it took me moving away from my hometown to Columbus, and a couple of my children followed. And I started volunteering at another place and that's how I got into recovery...was them helping me also, and I finally decided I can't do this. And on my youngest son's 29th birthday, I did celebrate with him quite a bit, and then next day I quit. It was...his birthday made my...me realize that, you know, I have to go for my recovery and it's now or never, so I took it upon myself to celebrate his birthday and start my recovery the day after so I could remember the date.

Howard: And you did it, congratulations. Well, we only have another minute or so, but the last question that we always ask, and it's very important to all of us here at the Peer Center: What do you believe, in your opinion, is the biggest benefit to peer support?

Robin: The biggest benefit for me is finally being able to find people to talk with that have similar situations as I did, being able to take advice from associates, and giving advice that, you know, some things may work for you, but it might not work for you, so you have to try something else. And if it wasn't for this support and everything here, I don't think...I probably...getting into my recovery and everything, from everything, I wouldn't be here today. I'd probably be dead, so it's, you know, it's great to have the Peer Center.

Howard: We are glad that you're here. Thank you so much, Robin. We really appreciate Robin being on this show. Thank you again. Now we're going to go ahead and introduce our next guest. His name is DeShawn. And DeShawn is the Facilities Manager and head of security for us here at the Peer Center. As one of the original staff members, he has always worked to maintain the overall operation of the physical center, in addition to ensuring the safety and well-being of all the people who attend. Through his own experiences, he has developed ability and a passion for helping individuals with mental illness, as well as those with alcohol and substance abuse issues and takes pride in his work at the Center, providing support to those who need it. DeShawn has a degree in computer electronic engineering technologies. And with that, we'd like to welcome DeShawn to the show. Hello, how are you?

DeShawn: How're you doing, Gabe?

Howard: I am doing fantastic. Are you ready to get going?

DeShawn: Sure.

Howard: Alright, let's go ahead and start with the first question. Now remember, we ask all four of our guests the same questions and DeShawn is going to answer based on his own personal experience, how he sees it. And of course, as you know, DeShawn, there are no wrong answers; these are your opinions and your lived experience as you see it. The first question is, "When it comes to maintaining your recovery, what is the single biggest challenge, both while working at the Peer Center, and in your personal life?"

DeShawn: I would say the biggest challenge would be I guess finding...at work, it's not a problem because work is pretty fast-paced and when you're focused on helping other people it kind of helps to take your mind off of your own issues. But outside of work, it's just what to do with the free time, trying to fill up your time with positive things, things that, you know, allow you to move forward and focus on growth and building.

Howard: Excellent. Now there's two things, and we've talked about this earlier, that I'm going to ask you about. First, DeShawn taught himself how to knit via YouTube, and started the knitting club here at the Peer Center, correct?

DeShawn: That is correct [chuckling].

Howard: Alright, can you elaborate on that? Tell us, what made you decide that you wanted to take up knitting, and why did you...decide to start a knitting club here at the Peer Center?

DeShawn: Well, like I was saying, it's about kind of keeping busy, you know, filling up your time, and I'm big on keeping my hands busy as well as my mind. I was just kind of looking through YouTube and...my mother used to knit, so I grew up watching her, you know, she never taught me, but just going through videos and I saw this young lady put a video on the Internet, and so I just ran out and got some yarn and some needles and tried it and found out that I liked it, and before I knew it, I had knit everybody in my close family a scarf for Christmas [chuckling].

Howard: That's fantastic. Now, what a lot of people don't realize is that, you know, the Peer Center, we have groups that take place every day, and the knitting group, I'm sorry the Knitting Club, is one of the more popular groups that we offer here at the Peer Center. I mean, you get a pretty good attendance every week, correct?

DeShawn: Oh yeah, yeah, it's a pretty good turnout, and I find that when you get people together on anything, I mean, when it comes to the Center, we play cards, we play board games; we come together on a lot of different things like...but when you get a group of people together and everybody's just kind of enjoying themselves, the conversations that come out of those groups I guess is the important part. A lot of people when they first come in the Center, they don't like to...they're not as quick to open up and talk to people, and you have to get them into a comfortable environment, and a lot of the activities we do allow them to do that, be comfortable enough to have a conversation, even if it's just with one other person or with the group. So, it helps.

Howard: See, that's the, that's the magic of, you know, you said, cards or as, as your Knitting Club, you say to somebody, *hey, you want to talk about your issues in a room full of strangers?* That sounds very difficult; that sounds like something very challenging, and frankly, it doesn't sound fun. *So you want to play a game of cards, do you want to come to the Knitting Club?* You think of course you're going to play cards or to knit, but like you said, you get enough people together, conversations are just going to start, and before you know it, you have the difficult conversation, but when you remember it lately, you kind of psych yourself out and what did you do today? *Oh, I played cards.* But you got that support that you needed.

DeShawn: Definitely.

Howard: Great. Well let's...and I applaud you for that, DeShawn. I think frankly, for me that's one of the coolest things that I've ever heard; I just thought it was a...it was a very neat thing, and nobody can deny that it works and whenever you can get enough people to attend any sort of support group or even a support group that's masking as the Knitting Club, and you get some pretty inexpensive gifts out of it. It's a pretty good thing. I'm still waiting on my scarf. That's all I'm saying.

DeShawn: [laughing] You give me the colors, and I'll get you your scarf. [laughter]

Howard: Hey, scarlet and gray – we're in Ohio! We're in Ohio. Or, purple and green: recovery colors.

DeShawn: There you go.

Howard: We'll talk after.

DeShawn: OK [chuckling].

Howard: The next question we have for you DeShawn is, when you're in the workplace and you are triggered – and I know you said you're pretty busy and it doesn't happen very often, but if it's never happened, how do you handle it when other people are triggered? You know, one of the other parts of your job is of course, you're the head of security, and while we don't have many security concerns at the Peer Center, occasionally it does arise, and you're one of the people that helps de-escalate the situation, and frankly you're head of security for a reason – you're very good at de-escalating crisis situations. Can you speak to that at all? Do you have any suggestions or, you know, advice or tips from your experience or based on what you know?

DeShawn: Yes. When it comes to this type of environment, it's...the word "security" is kind of intimidating a little bit, but it's not a physical security at all. It's a...being able to talk to people and I guess getting them to the root cause of the problem. When people get triggered, when they act out, a lot of times what they're talking about and what they're saying that it's about...it's not really about that. It goes back farther than that, it goes a little deeper than that and helping to...talking to someone and helping them get to the root cause of the issue kind of

helps them deal with their recovery. It...I don't know, instead of...it's like, instead of putting a band-aid on a problem, it's actually getting to the root cause and attacking it at the root. So I guess that's what kind of security it is; it's about, I guess de-escalation and just forming some kind of common ground with a person so you can get...

Howard: At the Peer Center we very much believe in having the difficult conversations, talking out our problems and getting the root to it, and we advocate this in the larger community because all too often the first tool that people have, you know, may be their fist or violence, and we really advocate to, as much as I hate to say it this way, to use your words, you know, what's wrong? Calm down, let's speak to each other, let's sit down and, you know, considering that we have, you know, over 100 people a day across two centers, you know, we don't have many problems, especially given the number of problems that people perceive that we must have with such a diverse group of people. You know, we do have the occasional issue here and there, but as you said, it often works itself out with a conversation or setting clear boundaries and enforcement of the rules, not by, you know, like you said, getting physical. And that has a lot of value.

DeShawn: It does, and I've learned working here that as human beings, one of the easiest emotions to go to is anger. And it seems to...the easiest ones to go to are like, anger or straight fear, and there's a lot of gray area in between there. And when you get someone actually talking about it, it's a lot easier when you can get a person to open up and express their feelings instead of just reacting to a situation, actually sitting down and talking it through.

Howard: I can't say it better than that, DeShawn. That's a very powerful statement and one that we should definitely remember. We have a few minutes left - we'll go ahead and hit up question #3. Again, you've worked here since 2006 – you're one of the first people that have been...that were hired, so you've really been here for all of the Peer Center, so you've seen first-hand many peer supporters, peer support in action, and of course you yourself are a peer supporter. Utilizing all that knowledge, what do you feel is the biggest benefit to peer support?

DeShawn: Like I said, I guess, just getting everybody talking, and getting them on the same page; and like you said, we've all been, all the people you've talked to today, most of us, all of us have been there almost since day 1, and it kind of helps because it...it wasn't just us, but it was the members that come, the associates. We...together, we all came up with all the policies, all the rules, all the signs, the color schemes, everything you see when you come into the Center. It's a collective; it's a collaborative kind of thing. We all just came together, and I guess that's one thing I love about working here is that it's like, as a member you can take pride in taking part in what's going on all around you.

Howard: That's fantastic. DeShawn, thank you so very much for being on the show. I appreciate it very much. We're going to go ahead and welcome our last and our final guest. We always save the best for last, and that's Deidre. Deidre is the Assistant Director here at the Peer Center. She's one of the original staff members, and Deidre played an instrumental role in the development of what would later become the Peer 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, Deidre is passionate about her work and she believes in its meaning and purpose. Deidre has a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from The Ohio State University, and she is also an Ohio Peer Supporter. Deidre, welcome, how are you?

Deidre: I'm great Gabe, how are you?

Howard: Fantastic. Are you ready to get into it?

Deidre: Sure!

Howard: Alright, let's go ahead and jump with Question 1. Question 1: When it comes to maintaining your recovery, what is the single biggest challenge, both while working at the Peer Center and in your personal life?

Deidre: I think for me the biggest challenge is just kind of keeping the focus on my recovery kind of at the forefront. I think that it's easy to kind of think that you've gotten to a certain place and things are okay now and to just kind of drop the ball I guess [laughter], so I think it's important to kind of keep that focus, you know, on the recovery, whether it be like, through work or my personal life, just so that I don't let it slip away, you know, because then if, you know, like, if you're...if you're not focused on recovery, something could happen, if you're not taking care of yourself, it's not good for you, or...my own health and well-being and then it's not really good for, you know, other people around me either.

Howard: Right. It's...one of the things that of course we say a lot around here is that self-advocacy is advocacy, that caring for yourself helps, of course, to care for others. Fair statement?

Deidre: Right. Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely.

Howard: I love that. Now, what...I've worked with Deidre for a couple of years and of course what our listeners don't know is that Deidre is one of the most positive and optimistic people that I personally have ever met and that of course rubs off on a lot of people. Do you find that it's...I mean, I know that's your personality, but, I mean, do you...Why are you so happy? That's a really fair question that people want to know.

Deidre: [laughter]

Howard: I know that came out wrong: *why are you so happy?*

Deidre: No, I understand.

Howard: But you really do have an optimistic personality.

Deidre: Yeah, I just think it's incredibly important, I think that if you think positively, I think positive things can happen. If you, you know, if you're dwelling on the negative and you're thinking about all the things that can go wrong, you miss out on opportunities. I think there's...I guess it's hard for me to answer because that's just how I am, but, you know, if you look at someone and you see the positive, you see the potential, you see the good that can come, the good that's within any kind of either person or situation, and then you can kind of help, that kind of comes through by focusing on that, versus not focusing on that.

Howard: Yeah, and I can tell you first-hand – it is incredibly infectious. I've seen it in myself and I've seen it in, you know, staff and associates. I mean, you really do help us think to the positive, and again that's all part of modeling the way. I mean, you are right. It's...when you're happy, it gives other people the opportunity to be happy too, and that has just such a tremendous amount of value. Well that's fantastic. Question #2, we'll move right along. Question #2: When you are in the workplace and you are triggered, how do you handle that? Like specifically, do you have any suggestions or advice for listeners that may be triggered in the workplace or in public as well?

Deidre: Yeah, I mean, first let me say that it happens. Like, I can tell you that yes, I've been at work or out in public like you said and have been triggered and know that, you know, my reaction may not be the best reaction, so I think it's important to take that moment, take that breath, step away, you know what I mean? Just kind of find out what, kind of, what that trigger, what it was, because sometimes it's hard to know, like, you can kind of feel the reaction within yourself, but not really know or be able to pinpoint where it's coming from, and so I think just to kind of acknowledge it...I think that's an important piece, if you can take that moment, figure out what it is, and then acknowledge it, I think that kind of, can help take away some of the power, and so I think that – that is a very important step and to just kind of rely on this person that's around you, whether it be, you know, my coworkers, like my teammates – I know I can count on them, you know, if stuff's going on, I can pull someone aside and have someone to talk to...kind of bounce some ideas or kind of vent a little or, you know, whatever it needs to be, you know, any kind of support system, just to kind of rely on them, you know.

Howard: Right, and one of the things that a lot of us talk about off the call or, you know, off the show and of course on the show is, you know, modeling the way doesn't mean that we're perfect examples of recovery. It doesn't mean that, you know, we never have depression or that we never have a bad day, or that we never have insomnia, or that we're never triggered in public. It means that in spite of that potential, we get up and move forward every day and show other people that they can get up and move forward every day as well.

Deidre: Absolutely. I think that's...it showing that vulnerability and that it = does happen is a crucial piece, you know, of it as well, you know, it doesn't mean that we're perfect. It means, you know, we're working on it.

Howard: Yeah, at the beginning of the show when Juliet was being interviewed, you know, she talked about that, that it's important. It's important not to – not to just only show your success, but it's important to show how you work through, I don't want to call them "bad times," but, you know, some of the more, you know, negative aspects of, you know, living with mental illness or addiction with trauma. The moments where we are vulnerable, but where we get through it anyway and we get through it with the help of our teammates or our loved ones or our friends or even, of course, because we are a community, our associates.

Deidre: [murmured agreement] Absolutely.

Howard: Great. Deidre, it's the last question. We have a few minutes so you can expound as much as you want...please take your time, because this is a really big question, and really that you are the last person that I will ask this question to, so absolutely no pressure. You're my anchor. But, you know, peer support. We talk a lot about peer support, and we know the value of peer support here at the Peer Center over, you know, the last 8 years, you know. So in your own words, what is the biggest benefit, what is the biggest value to peer support in our community, in our society?

Deidre: I think...I think my perspective on that, anyway (I can't speak for other people), but I think for me, the biggest benefit is just that feeling that...that you get like, that moment when you realize, like, when you're like, maybe like, in your darker areas, darker space, you know what I mean? It's negative. And then that moment when you realize, you know, that you're not there alone, or that other people have been there, so whether somebody's kind of going through at the same time and kind of hold your hand together to get through it. Or whether it's somebody who's, you know, maybe kind of working through the positive side of it and can help you – you know what I mean? And kind of see the light [laughter] you know what I mean?

Howard: Yes.

Deidre: So I think that that feeling of when you're feeling so isolated and then realizing, *wow, I am not so alone* and that there's so many people who all think that at the same time who can all be there to support each other. And kind of pull through that. You know? So I think...

Howard: One of the...one of the things that our associates say a lot is – and I have personally said, and I've heard from many people is: *I thought I was the only one. I thought that this was happening to me and that was it.* And the value of knowing that other people are out there, that other people are getting through it, and that other people are willing to support us through it, or somebody else through it, I think that that's tremendously valuable.

Deidre: Right, right. I'm willing to talk about both...right. And are willing to talk about both... the side...not wanting to discuss the parts that aren't so pleasant. You know what I mean? Like, you know, the...

Howard: Keeping it real!

Deidre: Yeah, exactly. Because that's important. It's nothing like, all recovery...you know, when you're focused on that positive, I mean, of course I think you should be focused on the positive, but, I mean you still need to acknowledge that not everything is always going to be like that. You know, and so I think it's important to know that, to plan, and to be prepared and to kind of plan and know what you can do, who you can talk to, to have those supports in place.

Gabe: I think that is a fantastic answer. Deidre, thank you so very much for being on the show. Those were great answers; again, sorry to put you on the spot. Thank you everyone 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 Peer Center want to thank SAMHSA for putting this together. And I personally want to thank our guests, Juliet, Robin, DeShawn, and Deidre for agreeing to be on the show. I know they can't see me, but I am literally standing up, applauding them for their honesty, and of course, for their general awesomeness.

Some key points we would like you, the listener, to take away:

1. Self-advocacy is advocacy. You can't care for others if you aren't caring for yourself. It is important that we remember our own self-care, so that we can be in the best position to help others.
2. Be yourself. Personal experience is the best asset a peer supporter has. It's our own lived experience that we can help others reach their full potential and help them in a way that they find meaningful.
3. Peer support is a valuable resource, because it provides an opportunity to connect with somebody who has "been there." It is what we have in common with people that allows us to make the most impact.
4. At the Peer Center, we are respectful of all people, and strongly believe in the concept that everyone matters, because everyone does matter.
5. Finally, celebrate recovery always. Society often sees people with mental health, 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.

The Peer Center can be found on line at www.thepeercenter.org. That's t-h-e-p-e-e-r-c-e-n-t-e-r (dot) org. And on Facebook, you can find us at facebook.com/thepeercenter. We hope that you will connect with us and give us "likes." We really like it when that number grows.

Finally, a special thank-you to all of you for listening in. You are all fantastic. On behalf of the Peer Center and SAMHSA, please, have an awesome day.