

Focus 2.0

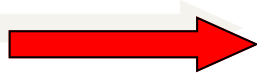
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What is the Focus 2.0?

The *Focus 2.0* newsletter highlights important issues in mental health, providing timely information on recovery, peer support, and the value of including people with lived experience in the mental health system of care.

Have a suggestion for a topic? Let us know!



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Mental Health: Is It “Me” or Is It “We”?

A recent column from former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, “We need to talk about the United States’ mental health crisis – and its larger causes” (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/11/united-states-suicide-rates-mental-health-crisis-causes>), shares some concerning facts about the state of mental health in the US, and urges readers to consider the broader context in which the nation’s well-documented mental health crisis is occurring. He notes that the suicide rate is at its highest level since the beginning of WWII; points out that medical experts are now recommending screening for anxiety for all patients under 65; and references reporting that an estimated 2% of Americans experienced what is being termed “persistent depressive disorder” in the past year.

These types of observations are common in reporting about mental health, and are often followed by the admonition that we need to “do more.” But what would that “more” look like? More screening? More treatment? Or is there something larger at play, that requires a broader perspective?

That’s the angle that Reich takes in observing that “Maybe the widespread anxiety and depression, along with the near record rate of suicide, should not be seen as personal disorders. Maybe they should be seen – in many cases – as rational responses to a society that’s becoming ever more disordered.” He goes on to list a number of stressors, including housing and financial insecurity, gun violence, climate instability, threats to democracy, and economic inequality as causes for anxiety, asserting that the context in which people live is what



needs to be addressed, as opposed to trying to treat “disorders” on an individual level.

While this type of thinking about the ongoing mental health crisis stands out as unusual in the news media, for people in the peer support and recovery world, considering individual mental health in terms of the whole person and the context in which they live is not only familiar, but foundational. Peer supporters know that you can’t separate the individual from the day-to-day reality of their life, and think of recovery as something that happens not in isolation, but in relationship to the world an individual inhabits.

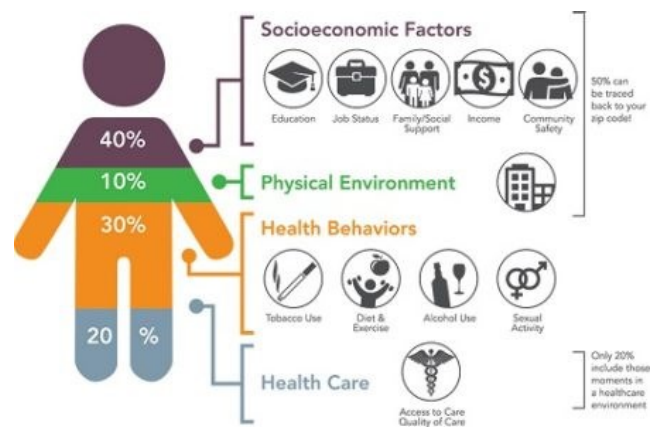
The term researchers use for this type of understanding is “Social Determinants of Health,” which the Centers for Disease Control defines as “the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes,” including “economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies, racism, climate change, and political systems” (<https://www.cdc.gov/about/sdoh/index.html>).

Just how much of a difference do social determinants make? The answers are surprising. According to the National Academy of Medicine (<https://nam.edu/social-determinants-of-health-101-for-health-care-five-plus-five/>), what people typically think of as health care only accounts for 20% of health outcomes. The largest factors, at 40%, are social, including things like education, employment, income, safety, and family and social support. Behavioral factors like tobacco, alcohol, and drug use, exercise, and diet account for another 30%, with physical environmental factors like air and water quality, housing, and transit accounting for the final 10%.

These numbers have profound implications for the way we, as a society, think about and react to our ongoing mental health crisis, and may provide an opportunity for the whole-person view of recovery to gain traction.

There’s little doubt that we need more and better treatment in mental health. There is a well-documented shortage of providers in the US, and a lack of access to care in many communities. What’s too often forgotten in that observation, however, is that even if clinical care was widely available and easily accessible, that would only be addressing 20% of what’s at the root of the crisis, with the other 80% left untouched!

This is where the knowledge and perspective of people with lived experience, peer support specialists,



Source: Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement, Going Beyond Clinical Walls, Solving Complex Problems (October 2014)

peer-run organizations, and the full recovery community is sorely needed. People that understand that fostering recovery and wellness requires supporting the whole person truly appreciate the day-to-day reality of social determinants, the role of trauma in mental health, and most importantly, the fact that “mental health” is not something that occurs in a vacuum. In truth, there’s a complex interplay between the clinical area, where diagnosis and treatment occur, and the real world, where mental health and wellness is influenced and altered by a host of non-medical, human factors.

This understanding presents an opportunity for the recovery community and peer-run organizations to raise their voices for change, and to join in unison with people and organizations whose mission is to address social determinants of health, such as those working in housing and homelessness, gun violence

prevention, anti-racism, food insecurity, and other areas of social justice and equity. By advocating for a better understanding of the social context of mental health, and joining forces with those with a mission to create positive change in those areas, the recovery and peer support community can provide a meaningful answer to the question of what it would look like practically to “do more” about mental health.

As we move into the New Year, here’s hoping that more people will come to understand that truly addressing our mental health crisis requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes the whole person and the circumstances in which they exist, and that the recovery and peer support community leads the way in bringing that change about.

New Workplace Wellness Resources

For people with lived experience of mental health conditions to thrive in the workplace and enjoy the financial, social, and wellness benefits of meaningful employment, both employers and employees need to know how to facilitate success.

To address that need, CAFÉ TAC has supported people with mental health conditions in their job-seeking and workplace success with our twelve-part series *So You’re Ready to Work, Now What?* This webinar series and set of resources, which can be found at cafetacenter.net/cafetac-presents-so-youre-ready-to-work-now-what/, cover the whole process, from writing a resume and cover letter, to workplace wellness, to leaving a job that’s not the right fit.

We’ve also created content to help employers better understand mental health and create a wellness-friendly workplace, with two tip sheets ([here](#) and [here](#)) and a series of scenarios for employers ([here](#) and [here](#)).

To that set of resources, we would like to add what’s available in Mental Health America’s revised Workplace Wellness Resource Center at www.mhanational.org/workplace. It includes resources for both employees and employers, as well as an interesting case study based on a partnership between MHA and retailer Hot Topic.

Stay tuned for additional employment resources from CAFÉ TAC in the New Year!

NAPS Seeks New Executive Director

The National Association of Peer Supporters, one of the leading organizations promoting the growth of peer support and inclusion of lived experience in the mental health system of care, is currently searching for a new Executive Director.

Whoever takes this position will have an opportunity to play a leading role in making recovery and peer support available across the nation. Could it be you?

Learn more at www.peersupportworks.org/n-a-p-s-opens-search-for-executive-director/.

Advancing Recovery in Your Community Series

CAFÉ TAC's ongoing series conversations about innovative peer-centered, recovery-focused practices in mental health recently featured a conversation about alternative approaches to suicide and self-harm in a webinar entitled *Alternatives to Suicide: A Harm Reduction Approach*. As with every webinar in the series, it was facilitated by national peer leader, CEO of Promise Resource Network, and 2022 Bazelon Center Innovator of the Year Cherene Caraco, and included a panel of people with lived experience that are taking innovative approaches to address mental health in their communities.

In addition to suicide and self-harm, the series has addressed recovery models like peer respite, recovery cafés, and recovery high schools, as well as essential issues like 988 and crisis lines, peer support for justice system-involved people, and mental health as a human rights issue.

Find recordings of every session in the Advancing Recovery in Your Community Series at cafetacenter.net/tac-trainings/, and be sure to join us for more engaging conversations in the coming year!



Capacity Corner: A Column about Capacity-Building for Your Peer-Run Organization

CAFÉ TAC is pleased to share this feature, a column from CAFÉ TAC Training Coordinator John Ferrone on leadership challenges within peer-run organizations, where many advocates with lived experience direct their efforts to promote recovery and inspire change.

This column's topic is **Fostering Collaboration with Other Organizations**.

It's difficult for a nonprofit to achieve sustainability. A Peer-Run Organization has additional unique challenges as you well know. And, if your organization is operating alone in the community, it is that much more at a disadvantage.

The good news is that you're not alone! Collaborating with other organizations that believe in your mission and know what it takes to maintain a successful nonprofit can make a tremendous difference. Let's explore some reasons to collaborate with other organizations in the community, and a few strategies to do so.

Let's first discuss why a Peer-Run Organization (PRO) would benefit from collaborating with other organizations in the community. Consider the following points:

1. Being a PRO comes with unique challenges, and going it alone makes it that much more difficult. Having a collaborative rapport with organizations results in leadership support and capacity-related wisdom that other orgs can share with your PRO.
2. Funding sources like to see collaborations among organizations that complement each other. Have you figured out how your PRO fits with other organizations, and how you can pursue funding together?
3. When you're collaborating with other organizations, your PRO's name gets out to the community more often because you mention the other organizations and they mention your PRO.
4. Collaborations mean that competition is mitigated to a certain extent.
5. Key stakeholders, such as State Agencies, really like to see collaborative approaches because it means a "better bang for the tax dollar."

Any one of the above reasons is reason enough to find other organizations to collaborate with. Let's imagine some of the situations in which a collaborative effort might make sense. Consider the following situations:

1. As a PRO, the people you serve also receive complementary services from other organizations—so it makes sense to think of the "life supply chain" of services among organizations. Your PRO is one link in the chain. Form the chain via collaboration. Create effective handoffs. Share marketing strategies. Go after funding together.
2. The State Agency that is your key funding partner would really like to see your PRO grow, expand, and connect with other organizations because it helps with overall sustainability. By being part of a broader solution (see #1, for example), there is greater justification to continue providing funding and possibly to increase it. So, form a collaboration with a few organizations to discuss how best to meet the needs of the people you serve and to do so in a way that fits with the State Agency's strategic goals.
3. The local Community Foundation has too many grant requests, so it is really looking to get the most out of its grant funding; therefore, it will look favorably upon a proposal that shows how multiple organizations in the community have put their heads together to create a seamless set of services that benefit the community.

Now you have the reasons and the scenarios or situations to pursue a collaborative endeavor. How do you do it? Glad you asked . . . here are some basic steps to follow:

1. First, make sure you know exactly what it is that you do as a PRO. What services will you represent when you say, "Hey, we're this PRO, and we do XYZ for Peers"? Be very concrete in your explanation.
2. Think about which organizations in the community also touch the lives of the people you serve. Is it housing? Healthcare? Education? Workforce? Obviously, it's all of these, and then some. So, your challenge is to figure out how your services will help Peers to be more effective in the context of the other organizations and their services. For example, if you provide Peer Support, maybe a Peer receiving Peer Support will be better able to navigate the task of searching for a job, therefore a collaboration with Workforce Development in your community might be exactly what is needed.

3. Once you have an organization or agency (or several) that might be a good fit for having a conversation with about collaborative opportunities, it's time to prepare. Be sure to think through the context and situation for the Peers you serve . . . maybe even create a focus group of the Peers you serve and ask about the situation that pertains to the organization that you think is a good fit. (By the way, this is also a good way to identify potential organizations to approach regarding a possible collaboration.) Once you have the story of collaboration in mind, you can make an appointment to visit with the target organization. What are you going to ask for? Shared funding? Referrals both ways? Shared staff? Access to their processes? Shared fundraising efforts? Other ideas?
4. Make your appointment. Send a cover letter/email that explains who you are and all about your PRO. Keep it brief. And simply say, "I think that we may have some interesting opportunities to collaborate and assist each other so as to create great benefits to the people we both serve. Would you be interested to make an appointment to discuss these ideas?"
5. Be on time to the appointment. Dress appropriately (professionally is usually safe). Have a handout with your bullet points that you want to share (maybe deliver a PowerPoint if you're comfortable with that format). Be sure to have an explanation of the situation, how your PRO complements what this other organization or agency offers (and vice versa), and then share some new ideas and the related downstream benefits. Get into a discussion about the possibilities, and you'll be pleasantly surprised to see how things take off from there.
6. Sometimes they say "No thanks," and that's okay. By trying, you've already expanded how you think holistically about the situations your Peers are in, and it will make you a better PRO for your Peers. So, there's nothing holding you back!

If you want to talk about your specific situation and how to approach collaborative opportunities, don't hesitate to get in touch with CAFÉ TAC. Until then, go forth and collaborate!

Is there a leadership challenge you're facing in your peer-run organization or advocacy efforts? We want to hear about it! Reach out to us at cafetacenter@gmail.com with your question or comment. We will be happy to help, and your challenge might just be the subject of our next Capacity Corner column! (Anonymously and with your consent, of course!)

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