

## **WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program**

### *Community Advisory Board Interview*

**Peg Wright** (she/her) is the Founder and CEO of the [Center for Great Expectations](#). In addition, Peg is an active Community Advisory Board member for the Center of Alcohol and Substance Use Studies [WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Fellowship Program](#) (WinR), where she shares her valuable perspective and expertise with the research community. We connected with Peg to learn more about her wealth of experience and her incredible work in mental health and wellness.

**Q. Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me! I'd love to hear more about your journey and the inspiration behind the incredible work you do as the Founder and CEO of the Center for Great Expectations.**

A. Long before the Center, I started out volunteering at a modest maternity home in Somerville [NJ] for women in recovery. Women—particularly expecting mothers—would seek shelter and have a place to be, but had to leave right after delivery, which can be such a critical time period. It was here that I began to realize the need for holistic services that centered safe housing and supportive services for women with substance use and mental health challenges.

This led to the origin of the Center for Great Expectations (CGE) in 1998 as a small two-bedroom residential house, built on the foundation of our mission statement: safe place, safe presence, and safe path. It became clear very quickly that we had to build something different, community-based, and trauma focused. We were trauma-informed right from the start—before it was a popular notion in the field!

Now, CGE has grown to two residential facilities serving both adults and their children, as well as pregnant and parenting adolescents. We offer a wide range of wrap around services and unique programs to create a continuum of care.

**Q. You're clearly doing phenomenal work and have been a pioneer for the communities you're serving. What inspired you to pursue this work in the mental health field?**

A. I wasn't always in this field and actually came from a corporate background, but my own experience of long-term recovery has deeply informed my work. At the time, there was considerable stigma around talking about these topics, so I'd often offer up stock answers [to this question] but none of that was real. As I grew and changed in my journey, I became much more open to learning what I don't know and understanding the different perspectives on recovery. Knowing how unique my own path has been, I am quick to recognize that recovery isn't a one size-fits-all model.

In the early 2000s, I connected with Dr. Debbie Ruisard who had been treating trauma and substance use concurrently and brought a shift in perspective to CGE towards harm reduction and client choice. My whole thinking evolved and became richer as I came to see "trauma-informed" as a philosophy, an environment, the relationship between

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individual and community. We worked on developing programs around this framework, and have continued to work on this today. Most recently, we have developed an Integrated Early Relational Health program targeting infant mental health as the ultimate form of early prevention.

**Q. Switching gears a bit, you and CGE are also heavily involved in research! How would you describe your role on the Community Advisory Board for the WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program, and how do you think your experiences have shaped how you approach the role?**

A. I've always been interested in research and, in particular, have been connected to researchers across various departments (Social Work, Psychology, etc.) at Rutgers. I was drawn to what the WinR program is doing, and strongly believe in community, and a community supported approach—that's why I'm in it. In fact, some of my own upcoming initiatives will center and emphasize community mental health.

**Q. Finally in balancing the various roles you hold, how do you conceptualize self-care and wellness in your own life and the work that you do?**



A. A very good question! I make significant efforts to prioritize my own wellness—I walk my Husky-poo every single day as much as possible. In addition, another thing I practice daily is twenty minutes of meditation. Either by myself or with a group once a week, I find meditation to be crucial to my health and mental wellbeing. Finally, we have the cutest babies in our child development center and just being around kids and babies is a wonderful chance for self-care right at work.

*[Tanya Lalwani](#) conducted this interview.*