

WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program

Community Advisory Board Interview

We had the opportunity to connect with Robin Shorter, LCADC, about what it's like to be a peer support provider. Robin is a member of the Community Advisory Board for the [WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program](#), offering valuable guidance, expertise, and support to our WinR interns and fellows. Robin is currently the Senior Director of Community Engagement at [Integrity House](#), helping with people with addictions treatment, mental health treatment, and recovery support throughout Essex County, NJ. She recently transitioned to this role in 2019, after working for 13 years at Integrity House and working as a peer support provider. Robin connected with us about this experience, and the value of peer support services.



Q. Robin, you currently work in the community, building relationships with individuals and organizations to make sure people experiencing behavioral health conditions get the support they need. Before taking on this responsibility, you were working in the field and offering direct services as a counselor. Can you share with us what inspired you to become a peer support provider?

A. I became a peer support provider because I have a passion for helping people. I am LCADC (Licensed Clinical Alcohol and Drug Counselor). HOWEVER, when an individual is struggling with a substance use disorder, they do not always need a clinician. They need an individual who has walked in their shoes. Someone extended a hand to me 20 years ago, and I can do the same for others as a peer provider, helping instill hope in people's lives.

Q. You point out that people sometimes need someone who has walked in their shoes. Can you talk more about this? How would you say your lived experiences contribute the support you offer others?

A. My lived experiences with addiction led me to some very dark places in my life! I spent 20 years in active addiction. There is something about escaping from hell that compels me each day to show others the way out. I have been clean for 18 years and sometimes it seems like yesterday! The desperation I see in the eyes of others with similar struggles contributes to my motivation to help and support others.

Q. You mentioned that you can instill hope in people's lives as a peer support provider. Inspiring hope is a key component of peer support. What does this mean to you?

A. Inspiring hope to me simply means extending a gentle hand, being a role model, and providing living proof to others that recovery is within reach. Peer support helps eliminate barriers to treatment and minimize stigma around substance use and behavioral health conditions. This helps bring hope into people's lives.

Q. Hope is certainly a component of being a peer supporter, and something you value in your work. What do you think are some of the other key components of this work?

A. Treating others with respect and dignity...no matter what, whether someone is actively using, has poor hygiene, or is experiencing homelessness (or is an RWA, which is language I use – Resident Without Address). In my experience, other key components of peer support include engaging in advocacy; creating a pathway to eliminate barriers; offering support,

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encouragement, empowerment; and identifying personal strengths (Recovery Capital) and building on them. Of course, a key component of peer support is LOVE.

Q. Thank you so much, Robin. These are powerful contributions that peer support providers offer to individuals and communities being served. Peer support providers are an essential part of the recovery process for service users. If someone was thinking about becoming a peer support provider, what would you say to them? Do you have any words of advice?

A. Absolutely. I would share three key points:

- You can only keep what you have by giving it away to others.
- Service to others is the rent you pay for being here on this earth.
- The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

Q. What you've shared so far really speaks to the joys you experience doing this work, as well as the benefits of peer support and being of service to others. While providing peer support is fulfilling, it also can be stressful. How do you take care of your own self-care and wellness in this role?

A. Personally, I exercise daily, take care of lots of plants, listen to music, and read books. I attend 12-step meetings, travel, and spend time with positive people and family. And, I make it a point to laugh a lot.

Q. You're covering most of the Eight Dimensions of Wellness with your self-care routines! Thank you for sharing that, Robin. Before we close, is there anything else that's important to share about peer support that I haven't asked about?

A. There's something about seeing a person filled with desperation one minute and hope in the next moment. Peer support providers have the chance to see that transformation in people, and help bring about that transformation. Thank you for asking, and thank you for this opportunity.

Robin Shorter is the Senior Director of Community Engagement at Integrity House. Integrity House is committed to helping individuals and families through an effective and measurable system of comprehensive Therapeutic Community addictions treatment, mental health treatment, and recovery support in a way that brings about positive, long-term, lifestyle change. <https://integrityhouse.org/>

This interview was conducted by Crystal L. Brandow.

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