

Peer Support Enhances Emotional Wellness



We already know that it's easier to 'get by with a little help from our friends.' Stan Grubb is one of the five certified peer support specialists who work for Peninsula's Peer Support Academy. Stan is an educator, a counselor and a peer. As someone who has experienced addiction, Stan is a support to those seeking help. In his role as a senior program counselor for the Blount Peer Support Academy, he emphasizes that he is no different than the participants of the program. "There is no question that God called me to this. He made a way for me to help others through my lived experience."



Stan Grubb, Certified Peer Support Specialist

What is Peninsula?

Peninsula offers inpatient and outpatient services for children to adults living with symptoms of mental illness. A 155-bed inpatient behavioral health hospital is located in Blount County, with outpatient centers in Knox, Blount, Loudon and Sevier Counties. However, Peninsula is more than just buildings. The team of psychiatrists, support staff and peer counselors are committed to providing caring, quality programs and services for people who struggle with behavioral or mental health issues including addiction and dependency.

Moving Past the Dark Days

Having struggled with alcohol dependency himself, Grubb can recall the stress, anger and resentment feeding one another during his "dark days." He remembers feeling as if there was no hope, no future, and no possible way out. He says, "I remember walking through that valley and climbing out the other side. Everyone's story is different, but I do know what it's like to feel overpowered by darkness."

Grubb is passionate about embodying that hope and offering it freely to others. He is fueled by seeing program participants make just one step in their recovery – even just being open and trying to get better.

What is Peer Support Academy?

Recovery is an ongoing personal journey to improve one's life based on practical coping techniques. At Peninsula's Peer Support Academies, participants learn how to change the way they react to the people and situations over which they have no control. They learn to identify and manage negative thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that can lead to emotional distress and stress-related physical symptoms.

Peer support specialists are trained to use their own experiences with recovering and coping with a mental illness or behavioral issues so they may share hope and wellness with others.

The program exists to assist people who are learning to navigate their journey to recovery, and to improve the quality of their lives. The program is funded by a grant from the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and no insurance is required or charged for services. Participation in the Peer Support program is free of charge.

During COVID-19 the program has gone virtual, providing ZOOM or phone call support. The effects of the pandemic have created additional challenges in gathering. "We have had to learn a new way of connecting with folks," says Grubb. "Before, we had genuine, face-to-face interaction. It has evolved into video calls. We are trying our hardest to do what we can, and technology has helped."

Wellness Recovery Action Plan

Peer support teaches skills to support wellness. Peninsula's Wellness Action Recovery Plan (WRAP) is an evidence-based systematic approach to give people the tools they need during recovery. Grubb says, "WRAP is a step-by-step guide that helps you develop a wellness toolbox, with coping skills to recognize triggers and develop an action plan for that."

He explains, "It's good to have a plan and recognize when early warning signs

appear of an oncoming episode. Depending on the person, these signs may appear as an overwhelming sense of anxiety, depression, or episode related to a mood disorder. The WRAP program teaches you to think through how to manage a crisis. People can think ahead to, 'If I need help, do I have a list of the medications I'm taking and a list of doctors? Do I have coping mechanisms like breathing or movement?'" Grubb says having these safety nets in place make episodes less stressful.

Five Key Elements

The five key elements of the WRAP program are hope, education, personal responsibility, self-advocacy and support. Grubb reflects, "I think a lot of times, we cannot see because of our own blindness. Whatever you struggle with, whether it's a mental health disorder or substance dependence, this program is built so you can help someone going through a similar experience, and support them on their recovery journey."

The Peer Support Academy and WRAP equip people with tools to find wholeness, and a way to "get better and stay better." Grubb says, "We must learn to be patient with ourselves and learn to love ourselves, then we can love others."

Struggling with Depression? You're Not Alone.

Depression currently affects 18 million Americans and impacts the lives of many more. Like heart disease and diabetes, clinical depression is an illness. Depression may be the result of a chemical imbalance in the brain, heredity, a stressful life change or medication. It could be a combination of these. It may develop after a particular event or for no apparent reason. It can also be secondary to another underlying medical problem (for example, hypothyroidism) or a consequence of using drugs or alcohol.

Most cases of depression are treatable. Seeking treatment early in the course of a depressive episode may decrease the probability that the illness will become more severe or chronic, and the recurrence of depression.

Care providers at Peninsula encourage people to be mindful of the following symptoms in themselves and loved ones, as mental health issues may present them-

selves in the form of depression, anxiety and may lead to increased alcohol and drug use. Many people may also experience interrupted sleep patterns because they are exercising less frequently during the pandemic. Contact your doctor if you notice these feelings:

- Do you feel sad or hopeless but don't know why?
- Do you have lasting aches and pains that don't respond to treatment?
- Have you lost interest in activities you used to enjoy?
- Do you have trouble concentrating, remembering or making decisions?
- Do you frequently feel worthless or guilty?
- Do you have trouble sleeping at night?
- Do you worry that you sleep too much?

Take note of any unhealthy habits or thought patterns that have begun to take root in your family. Make a decision to address them before they get out of hand. Most of all, remember that you are not alone.

A Phone Call Away

Help is literally a phone call away. Peninsula has one phone number to access all services: (865) 970-9800. If an individual is facing a life-threatening mental health crisis, the Mobile Crisis Response Team can be reached by calling (865) 539-2409. If there is imminent danger of harm, call 911 immediately. Everything else can be accessed in a timely manner by calling the Peninsula number.

For more information on Peer Support Academy and Wellness Recovery Action Plan, call the center nearest you.

- **Peer Support Academy – Blount**
P.O. Box 2000
Louisville, TN 37777
(865) 374-8210
- **Peer Support Academy – Knox**
1451 Dowell Springs Blvd.
Knoxville, TN 37909
(865) 374-7103
- **Peer Support Academy – Sevier**
509 High Street
Sevierville, TN 37862
(865) 774-7559

When life seems hopeless or out of control, Peninsula can help.

Peninsula Hospital is a 155-bed psychiatric hospital in Louisville, Tennessee, which serves East Tennesseans ages 5 to adult with 24-hour physician/nursing care. Services are for those who are a threat to themselves or others, or who have significantly impaired ability to carry out day-to-day functions. Services include mental health crisis intervention, stabilization and regulation of prescription medication. Group, family and activity therapies are available.

Peninsula Outpatient Centers provide a complete range of mental health treatment programs. As East Tennessee's behavioral health leader, Peninsula Outpatient offers caring, confidential and convenient services for adults, adolescents and children experiencing psychiatric illness.

