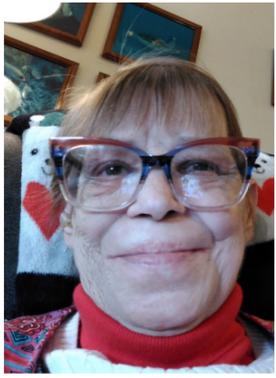


A Helping of Hope Peer Support Group Helps Knoxville Woman "Bloom"

Recovery is an ongoing personal journey toward an improved life. Adopting practical coping techniques can be vital in situations when we feel out of control. Participants of Peninsula's Peer Support Academies learn to identify and deal with negative thoughts, feelings, beliefs and other triggers to better manage them in the moment.



Cindy Jeffers enjoys life again after peer support group counseling.

In peer support groups, members share about recovering from and coping with mental and behavioral issues including substance dependency, addiction, mood disorders and co-dependency. Peers can use their own experiences to share hope with others.

Healing Through Sharing

Not long ago, Cindy Jeffers of Knoxville was in a deep depression. When

her twin sister tragically passed away from cancer in January of last year, Jeffers was overcome with intense grief and found herself "in a dark place." A peer support group was recommended and Jeffers says she would not be where she is today without the support, encouragement and camaraderie of her group members.

"The group helped me get better," Jeffers says. "They noticed I was important enough to be on earth. And it changed me to see that, yes, I am important enough, to somebody and to myself, to see that I'm not alone -- and that really helps."

Jeffers has learned about boundaries, trigger points and identifying an action plan. She has learned to replace negative thoughts with positive ones. "When I first started the group, I was so negative. There was no positive in me at all," she says. "Now I read and write down affirmations -- I have them all over my door and my wall. I read them if I get discouraged and it really does help. It represses the negative thoughts."

A Helping Hand

Cathy Jerrolds was the senior program counselor who facilitated Jeffers' group and says she is touched by the growth that

Jeffers has shown during her recovery. Jerrolds recently retired after more than 20 years of counseling others through Peninsula's recovery programs, and says she loved every moment.

"When others listen and offer support, and even share similar experiences, it can be as though a burden has been lifted," Jerrolds says. "That is what we see in support groups - feeling validated and people encouraging each other."

A Christmas to Remember

As Thanksgiving and Christmas approached, Jeffers dreaded facing the holidays without her sister. Her support group encouraged her to make a plan for what she could do instead. That's when she decided to honor her beloved sister by cooking a meal for those



Cathy Jerrolds, retired program counselor



who didn't have somewhere to go on Christmas Day.

Jeffers and two neighbors invited others in her apartment building to come by and fill up a plate. "We fed 13 people and oh, it was so much fun," she says, beaming. "They were so appreciative and they are still talking about it."

Jeffers served ham, turkey, sweet potatoes, deviled eggs and macaroni salad. "I called a few people and asked if they needed something to eat, and told them to come on down.

"It was so much better to do something that helps

other people out. It took the sadness away. It melts your heart and you feel good about yourself because you make them feel better."

Jerrolds explains, "I believe that when we step outside of ourselves and get out of our own head that it can help with recovery. When we minister to others, we see outside of ourselves."

Bloom Where You're Planted

Jeffers says her late sister was a gifted artist and she still enjoys looking at her artwork. "I have a few

of my sister's paintings that I look at, and I like to keep fresh roses or flowers close by because it makes me think of her."

When the two were children, Jeffers acquired a keepsake poster that read, "Bloom where you're planted." She never fully understood the meaning of the quote until recently.

"Someone in the support group made a piece of art for me with that quote on it, and it dawned on me -- I'm blooming!" she exclaims with joy. "I'm 68 years old and I'm blooming!"

Peer Support Academies

Peninsula, a division of Parkwest Medical Center, offers inpatient and outpatient services for children, adolescents and adults facing mental health challenges.

Peer Support Academies provide socialization opportunities, education and support groups to enhance wellness for adults ages 18 and older who struggle with addiction, dependency and other mental and behavior-

al issues. The academies are staffed by peer support specialists, certified by the State of Tennessee, who have completed an 80-hour training program.

Mary Nelle Osborne, MA, EdD, ATR, manager of recovery services, reports that participation in virtual Peer Support Groups has doubled since the pandemic began.

"We have learned that we can connect people

together and create community over Zoom. Counselors, who have similar life experiences as group members,

create a safe place for peer support and skill building," she says.

"Group members can

practice the tools they are learning in recovery, such as coping with negative thoughts, managing anxiety and making a plan. Programs like this can help achieve long-term recovery."

Osborne adds, "Our goal is to integrate those

with a mental illness or disorder into their community and to remove the social stigma of having mental issues." Her message to the community is one of hope: Whatever you are struggling with, recovery is possible.



Participation in this program is free of charge. Visit PeninsulaBehavioralHealth.org/peersupportacademies/ for more information.

COPING WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

During 2020 the coronavirus pandemic brought increased stress, which can increase cortisol levels and cause immune dysfunction. The mental health challenges of the past year have also exacerbated epidemics of opioid and alcohol abuse, and use of

other illicit drugs to cope.

If someone you know is struggling with substance use, offer support and encouragement to seek help with a mental health provider. Recovery groups such as Peninsula's Peer Support Academy can be accessed remotely and

can be essential in the recovery process.

COVID-19 has caused loss, but not just from illness. Many have also suffered loss of an idealized way of living, loss of a job or a sense of purpose, loss of loved ones or loss of normalcy. If a loved one

is displaying anger outbursts, is constantly tearful or feeling that he or she is to blame, that person may be experiencing grief. You can support the expression of those feelings and be a listening ear, or encourage the person to seek professional help.



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 age 5 to adult with 24-hour physician/nursing care. Services are for those who are a threat to themselves or others and/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.

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