

To Whom It May Concern,

I have a 21 year old son who has schizophrenia. He started showing signs about 3 years ago. He had been in Warm Springs and returned home, but like many, he thought that since he was doing better on his medication that he didn't really need it anymore, so stopped taking it. His symptoms came back and he got paranoid and was resisting going to his appointments for medication and therapy. He had isolated himself and had not been able to keep a job.

Michelle Jermunson from MT Peer Network found out about our situation in May 2015 and reached out to us. She even came and picked up my son and took him out to a coffee shop and helped him go over his goals for what he wanted to do to get back on track. He was very excited to work on his G.E.D. and try to get treatment going. It was so good to see him excited about something again. She was able to give him hope when he was so discouraged by the other programs and coming to terms with his illness.

The amazing thing is that even though the grant money that they had for their program had just run out, Michelle was willing to meet with him on her own time. (They have since, gotten some more funding and were able to keep going.) Michelle and Jim Hajny really care about people living with mental illness and want to help facilitate the recovery journey. I feel like this program is a missing link that is vital to our community (and many others) because it is Peers in recovery reaching out to other Peers who are struggling and need a "friend" and a "coach" to be with them to help guide them and give them hope along the way. They are able to make a difference in a way that a therapist or social worker isn't able to, because they have a lived experience and can say, "I was where you are! There is hope!"

It is good to know that MT Peer Network can go to Warm Springs and meet with the people there so that when the patients get out they'll have a contact person they feel safe with to call on in their home-town to help them maneuver the mental health system and being "out in the world" again.

MT Peer Network has an ability to train others who are interested in this mentoring program. I hope they are able to receive the funding they need in order to keep this going full force. Evidence based studies show that people living with mental illness do better when they are able to stay in their communities and have the support and resources to do so. It behooves our community to focus funding in this area to prevent relapse and expensive hospital stays, or even worse, jail time spent by those suffering from mental illness.