

Transformation = A drag queen drill team {8-}

Peers for Recovery

For decades the mental health consumer/survivor civil rights movement has been advocating recovery. I have been honored to work in this movement since 1985 and finally witness recovery as a psychosocial transformation goal.

Once labeled co-morbid, dually diagnosed and double troubled, I am now a co-occurring person living with bipolar II, in recovery from drug and alcohol addictions and living well since diagnosed HIV-positive in September 1988. This affords the label of being a person who is multiply occurring, dynamic, creative and gifted. I am still learning how to live a recovering life.

For years I couldn't be gay in mental health treatment, advocacy or peer groups nor could I be out about mental illness in gay society. It was a painful duality where peer support helped bridge this divide.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) are sexual identities while Transgender (T) are gender identities, two very distinct cultural considerations. Questioning (Q) refers to coming to terms with our sexual or gender identity. Suicide is rampant in our culture. Addictions and mental illnesses are related to low self-esteem, coming out issues, family rejection and unhealthy social structures of being an LGBTQ person. Suicide attempts in my 20's were directly related to my shame and fear of being gay and triggered my mental illness and addictions.

Homosexuality was a mental illness until removed from the DSM in 1973 when I was in high school. Yet, LGBTQ people are not mentioned in the President's New Freedom Report, Co-Occurring Report to Congress, Surgeon General's Mental Health/Cultural Competency Reports and National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. The governmental system follows a conservative moral political agenda disregarding research, funding, programs, policies and competencies for sexual and gender minority health

My passion is to share the value of peer support as a vital link to live in recovery within our cultural roots. Modeling pioneer peer-run groups scattered across the country for sexual and gender minorities, the Pink & Blues was founded in 2003. Pink represents gay culture, blue depression and the colors assigned to our perceived birth gender. We built a safe, confidential space one step at a time.

Perks of peer support are great friends who understand, sharing recovery stories, social connections and the stark reality of our shared experiences. I have someone to call in a time of crisis or celebration. Peer support validates past traumas, hurts and abuse to become a survivor rather than a victim. Peers are my heroes.

A peer support group is a place to meet people from other sexual, gender, racial, religious and disability roots. We are socially connected and politically enlightened. We are coming out within a coming out movement. We openly march in pride parades and table at educational events. We have a sense of humor as 'fruits and nuts' and proclaim 'we're here, we're queer and we're crazy, too.'

Can I help you start Pink & Blue peer support in your community? It works for my recovery.

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