



PEER *connections*

A PUBLICATION OF THOMAS M. WERNERT CENTER | MAY 2021

Welcome to Peer Connections

We hope you like the changes we have made to the Thomas M. Wernert Center newsletter. We have rebranded our design with bright colors and a new name. Our goal is to better reflect our commitment to providing helpful information and telling good stories about our members to the community. We want our newsletter to be inviting, accessible, and enjoyable, with emphasis on recovery and wellness for those living with mental illness.

Train Up to Move Up Opportunity

Start a career in the behavioral health field with free training to become a Peer Support Specialist. A Peer Support Specialist is an individual with direct lived experience of a mental health or substance abuse disorder who is actively in recovery and uses their experience to support, guide, and encourage others in recovery. Training is scheduled from May 24 through June 17, from approximately 10:00 a.m to 3:00 p.m. Participants must have computer and internet access to attend classes on Zoom. To register, contact Patrick Boyer at 419-213-6385 or pboyer@zepfcenter.org. This opportunity is brought to you by the Zepf Center.

Finding Myself Again *Kenny's Journey toward Hope*

Kenny was a teenager when he instinctively knew that something was not right with him emotionally. He had no idea what the problem was, but by the time he turned 23 he was having psychiatric symptoms that left him confused and disoriented. Already married and raising children, Kenny was getting more and more anxious and less able to deal with some of the day-to-day challenges he was facing.

Kenny sought help from the community mental health system. He initially was diagnosed with depression. For the next 10 years, his medications were regularly adjusted and additional mental health conditions were added to his diagnoses.

"It took more than 10 years from my first diagnosis to adjust my medications," says Kenny. "I worked throughout that time and struggled a lot," he adds. He worked at various jobs including factory work for a car parts supplier and driving a taxi. Things were still not going well in Kenny's life and his anxiety heightened. "At one point, I spent some time in jail. My situation took me to a place where I couldn't function. I went into an even deeper depression



and eventually admitted myself into the hospital for several weeks."

Eventually, with the help of his medications and caregivers, Kenny's symptoms improved and he began to rebuild his life. He started working at a less stressful job in security and decided to add more self-care to his life. He also began living on his own and learned to value having less drama in his life.

Kenny joined the Thomas M. Wernert Center where he attended several group classes on wellness. "The classes shed a lot of light on my illness and helped

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Kenny (continued from previous page)

me understand what was happening to me. As I participated in discussions, I met other people and realized I wasn't alone," says Kenny. In particular, Kenny enjoyed the learning coping skills, going on field trips, and how everyone made him feel welcome. Just when he was settling in, the pandemic hit, worsening his anxiety.

He has been surprised and grateful for the ongoing efforts by the staff of TMWC to stay engaged with members. "The staff call and check on me regularly and I really appreciate their support," he says. In addition, Kenny has participated in several virtual programs, including online art sessions.

"I'm not sure I would have tried the art classes if it wasn't for the pandemic," he says. TMWC delivers art supplies to members and they attend instruction online. "Art really helps channel my feelings and takes my mind off of what gives me stress."

Kenny also credits his God Jehovah and TMWC with helping him get to a much better place when dealing with his illness. His advice to others considering joining TMWC is to take advantage of what they have to offer.

"Do it for yourself," he advises. "Not for anybody else."

Thank you to Buckeye Broadband for their generous support.



Spring Celebration!

Thank you to everyone who came out to celebrate spring with the Thomas M. Wernert Center staff and board of trustees. We loved sharing a special lunch with our members. Below are photos that include members stopping by to pick up their lunch and staff who delivered meals to members. It was great to see folks and hear the many positive comments about the lunch and other goodies we distributed. We look forward to seeing everyone again soon.



1. Pictured working the table are (left to right) Lisa, Member Services Director, Kayla, Peer Supporter, and TMWC member John picking up his lunch.
2. Dorcas (left) and Amy, Wellness & Enrichment Director, greet each other at the spring celebration.
3. PEP Specialist Sarah delivers lunch to James at this home.
4. TMWC Board of Trustees President Lisa (left) greets members Susan (center) and Nancy as they pick up their lunch at TMWC.
5. TMWC staff prepare goodie bags for members as part of the spring celebration.
6. Staff members Debbie, Amy, Stacey, and Kayla are ready and waiting for TMWC members to arrive.
7. PEP Coordinator Katie delivers lunch to member Joe at his apartment complex.
8. President Lisa (left) poses with member Nate and PEP Coordinator Katie while delivering lunch.

Employee Spotlight: Meet Neil

Neil has held several positions at TMWC, and is currently member services coordinator. You also can find Neil providing assistance to the peer support team, leading Men's Peer Group, Safe Zone, Grief and Loss Support, and Creativity Counts.

"My work at TMWC doesn't always feel like work," says Neil. "Although there is a lot involved in what we do as peers for our members, it often involves fun activities like cards, games, and other activities. I think this speaks to the spirit of what we do at the TMWC. We are here to listen, provide moral support, and in general be available to members," he adds.

Neil appreciates that TMWC provides him and his coworkers a safe place to practice their skills and be their true selves, free of judgment or stigma. "It is so beautiful to grow alongside our members and the other staff!"

"When I was struggling the most with my mental health as a transitional youth, I wish there had been a safe place for me to go and talk openly about my inner conflict," he continues. "TMWC has given me the vocabulary and management skills to own my experience and take it by the reins. I speak up for myself and do not hide behind a façade that everything is okay because it is okay to not be okay."

When Neil is not working, he is very involved in the community. He teaches First Aid/CPR to those who provide assistance to people with developmental disabilities, and he plays piano for services at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in downtown Toledo. You can also find Neil exploring one of our beauti-

ful Metroparks, cooking, dancing at Georgjz, or relaxing to a good Netflix binge.

Neil's long-term career goal is to combine his passion for the arts and social justice to become an Expressive Arts Therapist. "Theatre is my specialty but I have learned through experience how incorporating all of the arts with an ability to advocate for the rights of others can help make the world extraordinary," he says. "Working in mental health, we can use those same tools to discover more about ourselves, practice wellness, and inspire others to learn how to do the same."

Neil feels the peer support provided by TMWC encourages members to open up and be vulnerable in ways that might be intimidating in other settings, like in therapy or during a doctor's visit. "As peers, it's valuable to hear that others have similar challenges and that we aren't on this road to recovery alone," he says. "What I love is



when a member joins the center with minimal coping skills and a significant feeling of intimidation, only to become a leader – someone who truly models what recovery is about by participating regularly in groups and courses, getting involved in activities, and showing up to offer support to others."

Thank you, Neil. Your voice is needed in our community. Keep up the great work.

Join Us for Virtual Art Classes

Live Zoom Art Classes are scheduled on Tuesdays from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. and Wednesdays from noon to 1:00 p.m. You must register with Kimberlie in advance by emailing ktodd@wernertcenter.org or by calling 419-389-2304 to schedule a session. Registration for each class is due by noon on Tuesday, a week before the class. Once registered, you will receive a link to the class and all the materials you will need.

- May 4 or 5 – Letters + Numbers
- May 11 or 12 – Painted Story Quilt
- May 18 or 19 – Spiral Cut Chandeliers
- May 25 or 26 – Lichtenstein Pop-Art Resist





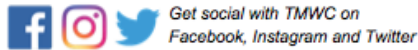
THOMAS M. WERNERT CENTER
FOR MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY & SUPPORT

208 W. Woodruff
Toledo, OH 43604
Phone: 419.242.3000
Fax: 419.242.0750

www.wernertcenter.org
info@wernertcenter.org

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MISSION

To improve the quality of life for persons living with mental illness by offering hope and peer-driven programs which address recovery through education, advocacy and peer support.

VISION

To be the most innovative peer-driven mental health recovery and support center.

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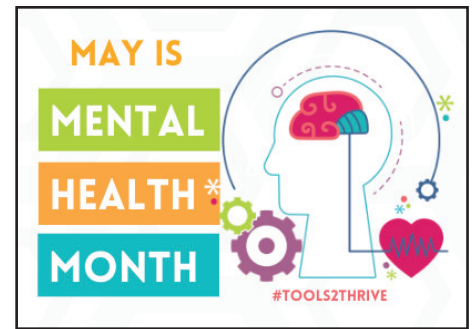
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May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental illness. That is why in May, hundreds of organizations across the country are raising awareness of mental health.

How can you help? You can inspire others by sharing your story. Tell your friends and family about the work you are doing as part of your recovery journey. As someone with lived experience, sharing your voice is at the heart of what we do at TMWC.



TMWC Reopening Update

As of this writing, Lucas County currently has the highest COVID-19 rate in Ohio. According to Governor Mike DeWine, “What we’re seeing in Ohio is a strong variant that is multiplying very quickly and is more contagious than the virus we’ve seen in the past, but we have hope, and hope is the vaccine. Vaccination is how we get out of this.” As of April 18, 37.40% of Ohioans have at least received their first COVID-19 shot. 26.20% are fully vaccinated.

With the current state of COVID-19, it is hard for us to establish a reopening date. In addition, we are still under construction from the ice damage caused to the building in February. As soon as repairs are complete - and the restrictions related to COVID-19 are lifted - we will have a reopening date to share. We thank you for your patience and hope you will continue to participate in our virtual support meetings and activities, social media events, and wellness calls. Please stay safe and healthy until we can all be together again.