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Issue 11

Editor:

Trinity

Petersen

Newsletter on CHOICES

Believing in Yourself by Jesse Panoski

Twas a time ago when I was a passive participant in my recovery. I was in and out of treatment centers and behavioral health centers. I had never heard the word “recovery.” Eventually I began questioning my role in my treatment and the decisions that were made for me about my life. During this time I

had no perceived control over anything in my life. This lent itself to a feeling of apathy. I was depressed and non-responsive to medications and treatment, until I began questioning my role in my life and the decisions that were made for me and about me. This lack of self-control had a peripheral/ephemeral effect

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Thoughts from Leigh...

I am a firm believer in self-help and in the possibility of recovery for anyone and everyone. A long time ago at the start of my journey of recovery I had no hope that my life could change for the

better. I was told to “act as if” and I did as I thought: “What do I have to lose?” It worked and I began to hope.

I felt that my weight and my health were the next major areas

of my life that needed cleaning up. My doctor had me promise I would find a 12-step program similar to AA in order to get at the root of my eating problem. I began one in mid-April at 222.2 pounds.

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“I am a firm believer in self-help and in the possibility of recovery for anyone and everyone.”

Leigh



“The purpose of life is to believe, to hope, and to survive”
Indira Gandhi



“Recovery meant for me taking back control over my life...I am in the driver’s seat.”

Believing in Yourself by Jesse Panoski

effect on sustaining gainful employment, lack of involvement with family and friends, and later, legal troubles.

A few years ago I gained employment at the Wellness and Advocacy Center as an Assistant Manager, and that is where I first learned about recovery. What did recovery look like in my life? Recovery meant for me taking back control over my life, in general terms. I had to learn self-accountability and self-responsibility. I

had to learn to be an active participant in my treatment and care. My AHA! moment was when I was in a program in L.A. whereby I learned that I have control over my thoughts, behaviors, and decisions that were made for and about me. What an enlightening and empowering feeling. I returned to work with much enthusiasm and respect for the recovery community. All this combined empowered me to make my own decisions and my treatment and

care. I also took a holistic approach to this, realizing how important spirituality was to me. No longer are decisions about my life made by others. I am in the driver’s seat, well, most of the time. It has been a long road to recovery and wellness, and sometimes I am more symptomatic than others, but I am still responsible for how I take care of myself, and how others take care of me.

Recovery is possible!

By
Jesse Panoski

"The most important thing I have learned in my recovery is that I am like a bird with two wings"

Dual Diagnosis Recovery

Anonymous

I live with a dual diagnosis. I am an alcoholic/addict, and have been clean and sober for nearly 25 years. I also live with Complex Post traumatic Stress Disorder, a chronic disability that greatly impacts my daily life. Like so many of us, it took four long years after my initial crash to be diagnosed accurately, so I could not really begin to recover until that happened. Thus, the early years of my dual diagnosis, even though I'd already been clean and sober nine years by then, were terribly difficult, often life-threatening. Some of us suffer from a psychiatric disability long before we get sober, and some of us "run into" our other diagnosis long after we've already been sober. Either way, we must learn to deal well with both of our no-fault diseases if we want to live long or happily in this world.

The most important thing I have learned in my journey of healing and recovery is *that I am like a bird with two wings*. Metaphorically speaking, in one wing, I am a regular, garden-variety drunk and drug addict, just the same as any other, while in my other wing, I live with a very impactful psych disability. My hard-won experience is that, if I want to survive, and further, actually recover, *I must attend equally to both these wings*.

While this may sound obvious, it is not known nor taught in the 12 step culture in which I live my clean and sober life. In fact, there is still a pervasive myth much of the 12 step fellowship that their own dogma is all that is needed to live and recover ("All the answers are in the Bigbook!"). I have not found this to be true, but, as someone with long term sobriety, breaking out of that false idea was extremely difficult.

Equally ponderous for us is the paradigm of the mental health system, and even much of the therapeutic community, where sobriety is seldom triaged to the top of a dually diagnosed person's list of crucial priorities. In the mental health system, we are often subject to the principles of harm reduction, at the expense of a clear focus on being clean and sober as a first priority.

Dual Diagnosis Recovery (cont.)

On a practical level, this means:

For my substance abuse wing, I need to recognize that without sobriety, I cannot long survive *or recover*. Any hope I have for overall recovery *starts* with sobriety, *period*. I therefore need to do all of the simple things that are suggested to me in my 12 step program, which, in my case, is Alcoholics Anonymous. I need to *go to meetings regularly*, and I've had to learn to find meetings that are safe and gentle for someone like me; someone with maybe more vulnerability and more challenges in daily living than a more psych-typical AA member. I need to work the 12 steps—in any program, it does not really matter which one, *as long as I work them all, and in order*. For example, I have worked the steps in AA before, but have recently discovered, and really like, the 12 steps of Dual Recovery Anonymous (DRA). So now I'm working the 12 steps again out of the DRA book. I must also work my 12 steps with a safe person, *not alone*: a sponsor or even a trusted therapist. I must develop, over time, my own spiritual relationship with something bigger than myself—it does not matter what flavor, as long as I feel safe and comfortable with it. This spirituality can even be with my own higher self: it just needs to be something I can ask for the help I need to live. And I must do service, passing along to others the kindness, encouragement and insights that are so freely given to me.

And for my psych disability wing, I need to do all the stuff my therapeutic team teaches me to do. I must also have proper medication, if needed, and I must take my meds *as directed*—no matter what random moods I get into about them. If I need to change meds, I must do so only with the help of my doctor. I need to not make that decision in isolation. I also need to attend my therapy and my groups, so I can continue to learn how to be a healthy, safe, happy person, and work on the hurts and deep emotional breaks and bruises that compose my disability. I need to take care of my body, my brain and my feelings: I am slowly improving my eating and exercise habits (I have particular challenges with these, because I'm kind of agoraphobic: it is part of PTSD). I'm also fine-tuning my body care, learning how to drink enough water and not let my sleep get upside-down (up at night; sleeping all day). And, I need to *practice* the things that my therapists teach

Dual Diagnosis Recovery (cont.)

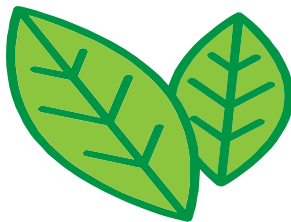
me, as best I can. Some examples are: breathing and praying before I speak; learning that it is OK and important to stand up for myself; letting myself feel feelings when they arise, instead of immediately running or distracting from them.

Finally, over many years of dual diagnosis recovery, I have also found it vitally important to *keep myself in the presence of beauty*, both artistic and natural; to continue to practice my own creativity in as many ways as I can, and also to nurture friendships with people I can be real with, have fun with, and reach out to for support when things are hard. *That is, I must nourish both my spirit and my heart.*

As we say in some of my favorite rooms, this is a journey of *progress not perfection*. I do all these things imperfectly, but as best I can—again, *just one day at a time*. I am always looking forward to the outcomes of this kind of daily practice: more peace, better relationships, better health on all levels, higher functioning, but *even the process itself* makes life so much richer and more hopeful, in both good times and hard times.



Peer Self
Advocacy Of-
fice Santa Rosa
707-565-7822.



Advocacy Corner

Disability Rights California

Peer Self Advocacy Wishing All A Happy New Year!

The Peer Self Advocacy Groups are back at The Wellness and Advocacy Center! The groups meet on Mondays at 12:30 pm and Thursdays at 10:30 am. You can also catch Leo Alfaro and Cindy Cohan on Wednesdays after 12:00 pm for a drop in. Cindy will also be available on Fridays at the Wellness and Advocacy Center. Come learn about Peer Self Advocacy and what you can do for yourself, stand up for your rights. Topics to include, but not limited to: Conservatorship, Social Security Administration, Medication Rights, Budgeting Goals, Housing, Nutrition and Supplements, and more...

A couple workshops on deck for 2011 ~ Patients Rights Advocacy. Be informed about your rights and find your voice!

In Memory of Cameron Coleman

"Hi, I am Cameron Coleman and I like the Wellness Center because it helps me with my disability and the people are nice."

Cameron Coleman, our dear peer member at the Wellness Center, passed away November 12th, 2010. Cam had gentle smile

with a stoic attitude for his difficulties. He came to the Center regularly with his artificial legs, taking the Para-Transit bus. He liked to color. He said he could put things out of his mind while he is coloring. We tried coloring with water color since he was having difficulties grabbing

things with no finger tips. He really liked using a brush instead of a pencil to color. His art, to me, was really like "being Cam with his new legs here at the center." The Center was his sanctuary. We will all miss him very much.

- Naomi Murakami
/ Art Director

"Hi, my name is Cameron Coleman and I like the Wellness Center because it helps me with my disability and the people are nice."

Check out our Art Store...Original note cards, archival prints, and more!

For more information, call

Naomi Murakami at
(707) 565-7820



Artwork © Kenneth Dagostino

Advocacy Corner (cont.)

Join us for the Social Security Administration seminar. One focus will be how much you can earn and not be penalized while on SSI/SSDI. Are you interested in learning for yourself, a loved one, or a peer? ***New Year thought:*** If you could change one thing in your life, what would that be? Go for it!

Peer Self Advocacy Office Santa Rosa 707-565-7822.

Be informed!

Sign up for the new Disability Rights California E-newsletter

www.disabilityrightsca.org.

Tambien disponible en Espanol.

CHOICES

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Trinity Petersen
(707) 565-7807

Oatmeal Cookie Recipe by Kris Texeira

Ingredients

2 cups uncooked oats	1 cup sifted flour
1 cup raisins	3/4 tsp. baking soda
1 1/3 cups brown sugar	1/2 tsp. salt
2 eggs	1 tsp. cinnamon
3/4 cup shortening	1/4 tsp. nutmeg
1 tsp. vanilla	

Directions

1. Sift flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon and nutmeg together in a bowl.
2. Add shortening, sugar, eggs and vanilla. Beat until smooth.
3. Stir in oats and raisins. Mix well.
4. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto greased cookie sheet. Bake 12-15 minutes at 350°.

Thoughts from Leigh (Cont from page 1)

My highest was 236-7 pounds. My first meeting I saw people who had lost hundreds of pounds and maintained their losses for many years in the program. I saw that this would have to be a permanent change for me, but I had lost hope in

making this change for myself. I learned many things, such as I am a food addict who is allergic to flours, sugar and quantities; I am learning to get help and support from the fellowship; how to maintain my food program; how to

discipline myself; and how to develop spirituality.

Today I am much healthier after eight months and a weight loss of 65 pounds and I'm on much fewer medications. I no longer have high blood pressure, my cholesterol is



Thoughts from Leigh (cont.)

is normal and my diabetes is much improved with a hemoglobin ac of 5.5 down from 6.8. My doctor said he felt humbled that my new food program could help me more than he was able to. He asked that this information be put on a memorial board in the clinic along with my picture. I am happier, feel better, have more energy, and have the potential for many new friendships.

CHOICES

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Thank You! From the Wellness and Advocacy Center

Our gratitude to all the individuals and businesses that have offered their support, products, gifts of time and volunteering, and financial assistance. With your generosity, our Center members' lives are enriched! In addition, thank you to all who have supported the Artists and Arts Program at the Center (too many here to name). You make a difference!

Amy's Kitchen, Big River Coffee Company, Costco, Goodwill Industries, Oliver's Market, Safeway, Sonoma Compost and Trader Joes. First Presbyterian Church.

And all the individuals too many to name..



I came across these last stanzas, from a poem of May Sarton called, "The Invocation to Kali". I think it provides a depth of reference and hope in our recovery process-a journey of light and dark.

"Help us to be the always hopeful
Gardeners of the spirit
Who know that without darkness
Nothing comes to birth
As without light
Nothing flowers."

Happy Holidays!!!