

Peer Experience National Technical Assistance Center



HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEUR?

You might have heard that being an entrepreneur can increase anxiety or lead to depression, but how often do you hear about a person living with a serious mental illness becoming an entrepreneur and thriving?

The stigma of a person's diagnosis limiting his or her professional career is common. Many individuals who identify as peers go into behavioral health settings to work as peer specialists. However, there are individuals with lived experience who work in many other professions. Studies have examined the connection between mental health conditions and entrepreneurship.

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In 2015, Michael A. Freeman, M.D., along with other researchers from the University of California, San Francisco, published a study that shows a person's mental health diagnosis can be **beneficial**. For example, living with depression was linked to empathy and creativity, which can be useful for serving the needs of a company or organization's target audience.

One of PENTAC's goals is to shine light on entrepreneurship for peers and to advance it in all communities. In this volume are topics on budgeting and protecting your mental health while using social media as a marketing tool. PENTAC spoke with peers who started a peer-run nonprofit organization.

Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/innovations/wp/2015/04/29/crazy-good-how-mental-illnesses-help-entrepreneurs-thrive/>

Entrepreneur Spotlight: Peer Hopes Mental Health

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COURTESY: LESLEY HOOPER

Tell us about Peer Hopes. What do you do?

Peer Hopes is a soon-to-be nonprofit. We provide peer support for peers who don't get services in traditional settings. We also provide education to the private sector about peer support.

You mentioned, "The hardest thing is getting the word out and explaining what peer support is and how it can help to have someone who has been there." Is that a problem you see within your local community or peer support in general?

Peer support in general. A lot of times, people don't see peer support as a profession; they may see it as a hired friend, but that's not it at all. The goal is to be a change agent by being supportive of peers and showing them how to move forward in recovery by providing hope through education.

How do you believe your organization can help with that?

Peer Hopes provides statistics to different organizations that provide behavioral health services. Through research, we show them that peer support is vital. It can be the thing that keeps someone from being admitted to the hospital or going over the edge.

How do you believe being an entrepreneur correlates with identifying as a peer?

I believe all of us are an entrepreneur in some way, we just don't know it yet. As peers, we're creative on how we're going to live life. We have goals and we meet them. As an entrepreneur, you use that creativeness you have as a peer to produce that business or nonprofit.

I once heard of a story of a gentleman who wanted to live in a mansion. He used his creativity to become a house sitter for people who own mansions. He's living his dream, but it doesn't look the way people thought it would.

Do you have any words of encouragement for peers wanting to become an entrepreneur?

My dad used to say to live life to every drop. To me, that means to live life and fulfill my dreams. If I don't try, I don't fulfill my dreams. Even if you fail, you tried. You're not wondering "what if?" And failure doesn't mean you are [a failure], it means that particular approach didn't work. There are many roads you can take to become an entrepreneur.

I would also say surround yourself with a support system that is positive. One that will support you and tell you like it is. It might not be what you want to hear, but they will be supportive of you.

It's All in the Budget

By: Emilis Lamboy, PSCFL Finance & HR Director

Budgeting is an important and effective tool that helps manage the financial performance of an individual, business or organization. The budget provides an economic projection of the expenses to be paid versus the income needed to cover those expenses. In other words, it gives the financial position and ensures that the plans are reasonable.

A budget can cover any length of time, but generally it is prepared annually for businesses. Individuals usually prepare their budgets based on how they receive their income. A finished budget should have all the income and expenses projected for that year. The budget should be reviewed and adjusted as needed throughout the year.



SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

By: Teanna Lahens, PSCFL Peer Network Project Coordinator & Social Media Content Creator

Social media has become a huge part of how we communicate, network, and engage with one another. Business owners benefit from social media because it gives them the opportunity to showcase their services. As an entrepreneur, it is important to have a strategic social media presence, but one must be aware of the challenges.

Social media can impact someone's mental health in a negative way; it can trigger different emotions and feelings, so there should be a balance on how much time is spent online.

I identify as a peer living with depression and anxiety. I create posts on a consistent schedule for posting original content to engage followers. To maintain my mental wellbeing, I give myself short breaks from social media because it can become draining. Sometimes I put my phone down and step away from the computer to take care of myself by getting fresh air.

Social media can be a great tool for making connections. Finding a balance between dedicating time to social media and being present to what is going on around you can lessen the risk of the negative impacts it has on one's mental wellbeing.



Entrepreneur Spotlight: Shining Light Peer Services

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COURTESY: DIANE SCOTT

Tell us about Shining Light Peer Services. What do you do? How did you get started?

I was in my hometown and two years into my recovery when I noticed a lot of friends struggling with substance use and mental health issues. I was already a peer specialist and people started to reach out to me through social media for support.

Soon after, I started a nonprofit. I went to community meetings and got the word out. I had no idea what I was doing, but I kept doing the next thing in front of me. Someone donated a building. I got connected with Peer Support Coalition of Florida and received more guidance. From there, things took off!

Now, Shining Light is in its third year of funding as an RCO (recovery community organization). We offer recovery support services, mental health services, various support groups, education, stigma reduction, NARCAN and much more. We started Putnam Peers (<https://putnampeers.com/>) as another way to promote peer support in our area. Also, we just signed a contract for homeless outreach services.

How do you believe being an entrepreneur correlates with identifying as a peer?

I never in a million years would have considered myself an entrepreneur. It wasn't until I realized the opportunities were endless that I saw the connection between being an entrepreneur and a peer. I always saw myself as a peer, but hearing someone call me an entrepreneur is encouraging. I saw a need and I worked toward filling that need; if that makes me an entrepreneur, that's great!

Being an entrepreneur helps me realize that I can keep going. I'm growing every single day. As I continue to grow, different passions spark in my heart.

There are some downsides. Sometimes I feel like I have to be perfect because all eyes are on me. Everyone is watching. If I make a mistake, everyone will see. That's the scary part. But I've learned to embrace my imperfections. It allows those who are watching to be real about their struggles.

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Do you have any words of encouragement?

I definitely would not be here without my faith. I would say don't sit on it [whatever *it* is] because the possibilities are endless. I had no idea what I was doing.

Open yourself up to receive support. I wouldn't be here without the support of individuals who helped me. It took me four years to be where I'm at today. It's a great, beautiful process. Don't give up hope and continue on the journey. It's not worth it without the struggle to get there. It's all about persevering. Stick with one thing, do it well and move on to the next.



COURTESY: DIANE SCOTT

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!



Do you identify as a peer and have your own business or organization?

Do you aspire to be an entrepreneur?

We would appreciate the opportunity to connect with you and even feature your organization in our newsletter!

Give us a call at (877) 280-7337 or email us at pentac@peersupportfl.org

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SPEAKING WITH YOU!

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