

When Robert was eight years old, he witnessed his mother attempting to overdose and take her life. By 16, he began experimenting with drugs. At the age of 18, he found his mother underneath his basement steps shortly after she had committed suicide.

"It was a hard thing to experience," Robert shares. "I remember going into the military and having somewhat of a breakdown after experiencing a trigger. I left the military, and started seeing a psychiatrist and was diagnosed with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Unfortunately, at this time, I was using drugs to self-medicate."

Robert battled with PTSD, homelessness, and drug addiction for the next several years. He explains that he reached a point in his life where he realized he had to separate himself from the lifestyle he had been living and stopped using drugs as a way to cope.

With determination, Robert has learned to manage his behavioral health challenges and life's struggles. He has an innate drive not only to help himself, but others less fortunate. Robert has turned the challenges he has faced into assets that he draws upon to help others through their recovery process by reducing isolation and helping to facilitate connections in the community.

This drive led to his work as a peer specialist at FHR (Fellowship Health Resources, Inc.). Today, as the Northeast Director of Peer Recovery Services and a Certified Peer Specialist (CPS), Robert has assisted many individuals in stabilizing their lives, returning to school, and securing employment. He continues to use his personal experiences to connect with and inspire individuals working towards recovery.

"Sharing my lived experience with peers shows the commonality, it shows that we're mutual. It shows that my past and what I've overcome isn't so far from what they are experiencing," Robert added. "I am so grateful for this award and recognition, and look forward to continuing to be an advocate for individuals in FHR's care."

As part of the award, Robert and FHR have received \$10,000 in funding, which will be utilized to continue to support Robert and FHR's important work in the community.

"FHR congratulates Robert Ortiz for this tremendous achievement," said FHR President & CEO Debra M. Paul. "With his help, FHR will continue to stay actively engaged in the recruiting and hiring of individuals with lived experience, and are resolute that partnerships in wellness and recovery, built upon shared experiences, improve the quality of life of the individuals we serve."

The National Council for Behavioral Health is the unifying voice of America's mental health and addictions treatment organizations. Together with 2,800 member organizations, serving 10 million adults, children, and families living with mental illnesses and addictions, The National Council is committed to all Americans having access to comprehensive, high-quality care that affords every opportunity for recovery. As the country continues a national conversation on mental illness, organizations like The National Council and FHR play a role that is more crucial than ever.

Headquartered in Lincoln, Rhode Island, FHR is a nonprofit behavioral healthcare organization that improves the quality of life for individuals living with mental illness and addictions. FHR serves over 7,000 individuals through a person-centered approach across eight states, Delaware, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

Ortiz will be awarded at the 2017 National Council Awards of Excellence Conference on April 4, 2017 in Seattle, Washington.

To learn more about the programs and community initiatives of FHR, visit www.fhr.net.

About Fellowship Health Resources, Inc.

FHR (Fellowship Health Resources, Inc.) fosters hope and recovery. We provide behavioral health services to improve the quality of life for individuals living with mental illness and addictions. FHR serves over 7,000 individuals through a person-centered approach across 8 states – Delaware, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia.

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