

Families Together in New York State values the work and the contribution of youth & young adults within the peer workforce and Youth Power would like to acknowledge the passion, dedication, and perseverance of Doug Hahn, YPA of our Western Region. Doug is a 23 years old Youth Peer Advocate at The Mental Health Advocates of Western New York. He has lived experience in the mental health system starting at the age of 9 when receiving a diagnosis of Generalized Anxiety Disorder. From there on he would add more diagnoses including PTSD and Major Depressive Disorder. Unfortunately, Doug went on to have multiple suicide attempts, hospitalizations, many different counselors, schools and medications in what he described "felt like an endless cycle of repetition with no clear end goal". It was not till he was 14 when he first felt hope in his life after meeting a Youth Peer Advocate named Erin. Doug shared with Youth Power how his YPA talked to him in a way that made him feel like a "regular person" and spoke to him about the struggles that they went through which were similar to his. It was very helpful to Doug to see someone live a productive life, who had similar lived experiences as him which gave me hope that it was possible for him to live a better life as well. Dough shared "I would work with Erin for another year then work with another YPA who helped just as much named Caitlin." At the age of 18 after some turns in his life Doug was offered the same YPA job that Caitlin and Erin were working and happily accepted. Doug has been working on and off since then as a YPA and he says "it has been the most fulfilling job I could ever have. To be able to do the work that literally saved my life has been a blessing. I am proud of the things I have accomplished in this role and the progress of youth I work with." Some of these accomplishments include: receiving the Courage to Come back award from the MHA, being the YPA of a youth who is now a YPA, the letters of thanks from youth he has worked with and the awareness campaign he was a part of. Doug's biggest joy and pride of his life is his 3-year-old son who continues to inspire him to be the best YPA and dad he can be as well as doing everything in his power to make the world a better place for his son and all youth.