



RECOVERY AND PEER SUPPORT AS SUICIDE PREVENTION



**A FIRST HAND ACCOUNT OF RECOVERY AND WELLNESS AFTER SUICIDAL THINKING
INCLUDING SUPPORTIVE PEER SUPPORT RESOURCES**

WRITTEN BY: AMEY DETTMER



I went through a certified peer specialist training. I went to it with the thought that this would be an opportunity to build a career around helping other people, not quite realizing that this training was also the first real opportunity I had to begin exploring recovery in my own life.

September is recognized as both National Recovery Month and National Suicide Prevention Month. Both of these topics are very important to me as I am a person that identifies as living in mental health recovery for the last 13 years. I am also a person who has struggled deeply with persistent thoughts of suicide particularly following my postpartum experience after childbirth. I write this article today to shine light and spread hope that through challenging mental health experiences, including thoughts of suicide, people can, do, and will find wellness even after some of the most difficult times within the human experience.

Recovery for me meant finding and seeking employment that truly brought meaning to my life, which luckily I was able to do with a peer support certification. Recovery meant taking a hard look at the things that troubled me and taking action towards wellness when those troubles arose. It meant taking the time to define what wellness meant to me and exploring my own self-directed pathways to being well. My recovery journey has been full of ups and downs, messing up and learning from mistakes, and constantly seeking personal growth through it all.

It was 2011 when I had my first glimpse into the possibilities of mental health recovery. Prior to this I was told that I would struggle for the rest of my life and that the diagnosis and trauma that I encountered as a teenager would forever get in the way of my dreams and what I wanted to accomplish with my life. In 2011,



From 2011 to 2018, I embraced every step of my journey, all of The good, the bad and the ugly. I learned that recovery didn't mean every day would be a great day, it meant that new challenges would arise that I never experienced before. Things like flashbacks, difficult relationship breakups, and toxic workplace environments. My recovery is about navigating through whatever difficulties show up, old or new, and pivoting towards wellness whenever I can take a step in that direction. For me this is living a life asking myself at any given moment "What do I need to do for my wellness right now?"

In 2019, a totally new experience showed up in my life. I was a new mom after just giving birth to my first child. The first year of my child's life was a very hard adjustment for me. I didn't realize how much my life would change and how little time I had to prioritize my own wellness. Like many other moms going through the postpartum experience my thoughts quickly turned to thinking about not wanting to be alive anymore. It was a time where everyone expected me to be happy and joyous for the new life I brought into the world. I WAS happy and joyous and deeply in love with my newborn but I was also sad and grieving the person I was before I was a mom. This grief along with the



changes occurring in my body after childbirth brought me to experiencing thoughts of suicide in a way and frequency I never had before.

When I think about what helped me find my way back to wellness during this time, it was through the practice of peer support and connection with others that have also struggled with suicidal thinking, that helped me to find wellness again. It was having safe people to go to that I wasn't afraid would try to send me to a hospital. Although I wish I was able to turn to my friends and family, they didn't know how to help, and I knew it scared them if I tried to talk about it. It was only in my peer support community where people were not afraid of conversations regarding these deeply personal experiences. My peers who supported me during this time did what peers do; they held hope for me, they listened free from judgment, free

from advice giving, and were able to offer relatability of the experience with glimmers of hope. They let me just air out all of the heavy feelings and to be honest about the thoughts I was battling in my head. I didn't want to die, but the thoughts of how I could die and what would happen if I did were near constant in my head. I always felt better and relieved after talking to a peer supporter. After getting this opportunity to safely share and release some of the pressure building in my head surrounding these thoughts, I was able to start taking steps towards wellness again rather than just being at battle with the thoughts in my own head. Lucky for me, the suicidal thinking stopped about a year after it started and today that's not a battle I have to go through anymore. Should I ever experience it again I at least have my own self-directed suicide prevention plan which includes a first step of seeking support from a peer supporter and a second step of getting myself to a peer-run respite house if I feel like I'd be closer to wanting to act on my thoughts.

When I think about suicide prevention and I think about people I know who lost their life to suicide and my friends that have lost loved ones to suicide I am reminded of how important suicide prevention efforts are. I have witnessed how suicide impacts communities, families, and loved ones. I am saddened that we live in a world where so many have no idea where to turn to or what steps to take when it feels like there's no hope in sight. I write this article today to call attention to the idea that suicide prevention is not just hotlines, textlines and suicide prevention campaigns but it's creating many more spaces in our communities where those of us struggling with these thoughts have a safe place to go that doesn't negatively disrupt our whole lives such as what often happens when people experience involuntary commitments within psychiatric hospitals. Suicide prevention is also addressing the social change that is needed to build our communities to be more accepting about where the depths of the human experience can take a person and to shine hope for wellness and recovery.

Wellness and Recovery is possible for all people, regardless of what struggles we are facing as part of the human experience. Peer support is available for us, and I first hand know how it changes and saves lives.



PEER SUPPORT RESOURCES

FOR IMMEDIATE ACCESS TO PEER SUPPORT DURING EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Peer-Run Warmlines

A call line staffed by people with lived experiences with mental health challenges, who offer connection during times of emotional distress and maintain professional relationships with crisis and suicide talk/text lines.

[Click here for a directory of state-by-state and National Warmline Phone Numbers](#)

Trans Lifeline

Peer support line for trans people.

<https://translifeline.org/>

877-565-8860

Vets 4 Warriors

Veteran Peer Support Call Line

<https://vets4warriors.com/connect/>

855-838-8255

Call BlackLine

Peer support line that prioritizes BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)

<https://www.callblackline.com/>

800-604-5841

Teen Talk App

Support for teens, by teens. Connection space for teenagers ages 13-19 to connect with teenagers trained in peer support. App is downloadable on the App Store or Google Play.

<https://www.teentalkapp.org/>



Alternatives to Suicide Online Peer Support Groups

Available 4 days a week, offered by the Wildflower Alliance


<https://wildfloweralliance.org/online-support-groups/>

The Alternatives to Suicide approach, which is led by people who have experienced suicidal thoughts themselves, is about openly exploring the meaning behind thoughts and feelings of suicide, as well as what might be worth living for. These groups find strength in coming together to support one another in times of greatest distress. The collective wisdom and individual stories demonstrate that making space for this topic can be powerful and healing.

It is my belief after working in the field of peer support for the past 13 years that peer support and making space for these difficult topics certainly does support people finding connection and healing, even through significant challenges like suicidal thinking. A systematic scoping review was published in The International Journal of Mental Health Systems in 2020 that attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of peer support as suicide prevention. This review included the evaluation of the Alternatives to Suicide model in its study. It mentioned that there is not enough peer support programs out there specifically focused on suicide prevention, nor is there enough evaluation being done by existing programs. This demonstrated that more evaluation of various peer support programs is needed to conclusively support the evidence of suicide prevention through peer run peer support programs. [Click here to view the review](#)

I hope this article leaves you with a stronger belief in recovery, and a desire for creating social change as a means for suicide prevention; creating safe and supportive communities that offer non-fear based support. Additionally, I call an action for more research and evaluation to be done on authentic peer support programs to capture the significance of how peer support changes and saves lives through suicide prevention.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

 **National Maternal Mental Health Hotline** **833-852-6262**
<https://mchb.hrsa.gov/national-maternal-mental-health-hotline>

 **The Trevor Project** **Text START to 678 678**
Call and text line which offers support to LGBTQIA youth and young adults
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/>

 **Veterans Crisis Line** **Dial 988 then press 1**
<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

 **National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** **Call 9-8-8**
<https://988lifeline.org/>

* Please note that some people have reported troublesome experiences with hotlines, as it has been mentioned that police and crisis teams have been contacted, sometimes resulting in unhelpful involuntary commitments. This information and the resources provided throughout this document are being provided to support individuals in making informed choices about the support that is available and best fitted to serve each persons individual needs.



#SPM23

#BeThere

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amey Dettmer has worked as a Certified Peer Specialist in community based settings, residential settings, and as a peer support supervisor. In 2016, she started working with the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery providing peer support, wellness and recovery education nationally. At the Copeland Center she is currently the Program Manager of the SAMHSA-funded National Consumer Technical Assistance Center; Doors to Wellbeing. Amey's work focuses specifically on peer specialists, youth leadership development, peer-led recovery education, and Psychiatric Advance Directives. In December 2018, her devoted efforts resulted in recognition by the National Association of Peer Supporters (N.A.P.S.) as she received the "Disruptive Innovator Award" highlighting her work in youth peer leadership and honoring her as a young adult who has made a significant transformative contribution to the field of Peer Support through leadership, programming, and activism. Amey previously served as a N.A.P.S. Board Member supporting a mission of growing access to peer support.

