

POSITIVE PEER ~ Holly Stockinger

Holly Stockinger-Smith worked for years in healthcare administration, but what inspired her to go out into the field and work in behavioral health directly was the tragedy of her friend's suicide. That life-changing event helped her discover her passion for peer support and allowed her to turn the trauma of her friend's death into a positive mission for helping others.

After being certified as a peer in both Arizona and New Mexico and working for several years as a Certified Peer Support Worker in Albuquerque, Holly now lives in Las Vegas. She connects daily with OPRE's audience on Facebook managing the page while also looking for other opportunities to help.

"I want to start a recovery movement in San Miguel County," says Holly. "This town is ready for peer support." With the New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute as well as the Detention Center located in Las Vegas, along with the Richards Drop in Center, Holly believes there are many opportunities for CPSWs in the area.

"I'm trying to figure out where I can take the biggest bite out of the apple," she says. "There's just so much to chew on."

And she knows there's always more work than she can do on her own. For CPSW's who are just getting started, or those who are considering training, she advises that you pick an area that you are passionate about and then study up and educate yourself on that area. "That's the easiest way to make a difference," says Holly.

As someone who has felt overwhelmed herself in the past by the amount of work and support that is needed, Holly also advises that CPSWs don't forget about their own self-care. At a particularly low point in her life when she was recovering from surgery, a friend introduced her to quilting.

"It empowered me beyond belief because I created something from nothing," says Holly. "I took perfectly good fabric, cut it up into little pieces and then made something else. I made one piece, then another and another, and it kept getting bigger. When I was done I ran around my house with it, I was so excited. It made me feel like I can do anything."

Holly would like to use her quilting skills and equipment to help others in her work as a peer as well.

"My life was in pieces, and putting that quilt together made me realize I could put my life back together too," she says. "I think quilting could empower a lot of people, it's more than just a blanket. It's warming in more ways than one."