

# Blog #7: Finding Purpose as a Young Person in Recovery

By Joely Feder

*Here is the seventh installment of the blog. To protect the confidentiality of participants, names and some personal information have been altered.*

Conducting the Peer Voices Project showed me the resilience and wisdom present in other young people in recovery. Being able to hear peers' stories was inspiring, and I felt lucky to have had the privilege to do so.

After talking about their recovery journeys, I wanted to know what provided peers with a sense of purpose in their recovery. This question was motivated in part by a quote from Viktor Frankl's *A Man's Search for Meaning* that I had read early in 2026:

He wrote,

“Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose.”

This quote stayed with me after I read it. As someone who spends a lot of time and energy interrogating myself about my own purpose, I wanted to hear from peers about theirs. What kept them going on this journey of recovery? How did they find meaning in their lives? What gave them purpose?

Read on to hear what peers shared.

## **A Zest for Life**

Many peers shared that recovery had changed their attitude toward living in general. CC and UI both told me that beginning their recovery made them want to live again after addiction had made them both feel suicidal.

Others expressed a greater ability to take care of themselves. ZL said that “being able to take care of myself and treat myself the way I always wanted others to when growing up” gave him purpose in his recovery.

UI shared that “having goals that are aligned with [their] values” added a sense of meaning to life that they had recovery to thank.

SP said, “My purpose is you know to kind of really embody that like nothing is fixed. Like, things can be changed. We can [change]. I can change. I can be different. I'm not any one thing. I'm not defined by necessarily my past. I'm not defined by a set of circumstances. I'm not stuck anywhere, ever, unless I choose to be stuck, you know?”

## **The Future**

In addition to discussing a newfound sense of optimism in their lives, for many peers this also came with excitement about how much progress they'd made and what was to come in their future.

BA said, "I've been able to see my future start to [shape up]... I feel like I can see like a couple stepping stones that I can take. And I've never had that before. I've never had that kind of sense and hope for my future. I've never been able to think about it."

UI, too, shared a similar enthusiasm for what may come next. They said, "I have so many people in my life that I see doing amazing things and [I want to] see where they go, cause I know they're gonna do awesome things."

**How beautiful it is that many of the peers I interviewed had such profound motivation for living their lives. This was especially notable given the circumstances these peers shared they were in when they struggled with their substance use before recovery.**

### **Helping Others**

A high percentage of interviewees discussed that helping others or being of service in some capacity gave them the strongest sense of meaning in their lives.

LA said, "I think there were a lot of hard things I went through before I got sober...just like suffering that I endured that felt meaningless and just like painful. But after having some time in recovery, [I've] been able to use those experiences. When I see others that are going through something similar...I feel like I've finally been able to make meaning of some of these things."

He added, "I went through [those things] so I could understand what it was like to be able to help this person through it."

In a similar vein, MD said, "The first thing I can honestly say that gives me purpose in recovery is that I can...watch other people that are younger grow."

He added, "I also love to see people that are incarcerated actually get it when they get out and change their lives around."

DC shared that she often reflected on her story, and has asked herself, "Why am I here? Why did I go through what I went through?" She told me that what gave her a sense of meaning was using her lived experience to help other young adults struggling with addiction.

Miranda reflected on a similar concept. She said, "What fuels me in my recovery is knowing that I have a story to tell and that there are people who would benefit from hearing it. I get a sense of purpose from creatively reaching people who feel left behind or too far gone or out of place in their recovery."

## **A Renewed Sense of “Why?”**

I think one peer, WJ, put it perfectly. He said, “Life is not about being happy or avoiding sadness. It’s about having a purpose. And there’s no way for me to avoid sadness, so I just have to have a purpose.”

**Maybe it’s because of my obsession with making meaning in my own life that I feel so strongly about what WJ said. Or maybe that’s part of the reason why I pursued the Peer Voices Project to begin with; whichever is the truth, I see clearly now the following:**

***We cannot escape our emotions, at least not forever. We cannot change the past, even if we wish desperately for a different story. We can’t even control the future, though many of us think we can.***

***But, we can seek out meaning in what we do, and we can pursue things that help us feel purposeful in this life.***

One thing had been made crystal clear from these interviews: there is meaning out there waiting for everyone in recovery. Everyone I interviewed seemed to have found it somewhere. And so, this means that I can pursue a purpose, too—in fact each and every one of us can!