

Blog #5: Recovery in Daily Life

By Joely Feder

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

Recovery Brings Change

Recovery brings change into our lives. This may look like different relationship dynamics with friends and loved ones, a newfound interest in taking care of your health and wellness, or an easier time completing work or school tasks, amongst many other manifestations. As young people in recovery, the changes we experience may be even more momentous because this is already a time of transition and growth.

In conducting the Peer Voices Project, I wanted to know about many of the changes peers experienced in their lives because of recovery.

Here, we will dive into the changes in the everyday lives of the peers interviewed. Read below to learn more about how peers' day-to-day lives changed because of their recovery, and the amazing transformations these young people in recovery have experienced.

What We Struggled with Before Recovery

Routine was something that many peers identified as having a role in their lives, both before and during recovery. What were described by peers as positive routines in recovery, however, were commonly compared to harmful routines followed in active addiction.

DC said that before recovery, using substances was a big part of her daily routine. Other peers had similar experiences, and many shared that they didn't enjoy the events of the day as much as they tried to struggle through them. SP said that before recovery, he had the mindset of "let's just get through today" each morning before the day began. He said, "It really looked like rolling out of bed when my alarm was going off" and "zoning out at work to just get through the day so that I could get home and use [substances]." Similarly, LA said, "before, day-to-day was just focused on, I don't know, like getting through the day, honestly, and like using substances."

Many peers also reflected on an overall lack of wellness when they struggled with addiction. For SP, he felt "constantly tired," "constantly anxious," and "constantly sick to [his] stomach." Likewise, BK shared that she was an emotional wreck most of the time, feeling upset, angry, and experiencing a lack of self-love. BA shared that she struggled with motivation.

In addition to grappling with harmful routines and experiencing emotional distress, many peers also pointed out how they had a lack of self-care when they struggled with addiction.

There are many reasons people may struggle to take care of themselves, and addiction is certainly one that makes this challenging. As discussed in [this NAMI blog post by Britt Mahrer](#), another reason that people may struggle with self-care is because of a lack of education on the subject. Especially for young people who are still figuring out what their bodies and minds need, navigating wellness can be challenging, whether you're in recovery or not.

For ZL, this manifested in overworking himself. He shared that “for a while, I really did put quite literally every bit of energy and care into my work, but I wasn't putting any into myself.” This, he said, “eventually led to not being able to properly take care of my responsibilities at work or take care of myself.”

BA identified, too, with the lack of self-care. She shared a story detailing a health struggle worsened by her substance use. She said in active addiction, “I think I broke my finger. There was like a six-month period where my finger was just like purple and swollen and now it's crooked.”

What Our Daily Lives Look Like Now

Most peers that I interviewed identified new routines they now follow to support their wellness. For some peers, this meant structuring their day around recovery-supporting activities; WJ and BA both shared that they partake in daily recovery meetings, and if not a meeting, something recovery-related. SP said, “My recovery remains a part of my day, daily life. It remains something that I do take a look at daily in some way or another.”

Other peers identified that their spirituality was enriched in recovery. For example, WJ said, “I started going to church on Sundays,” while MD said, “I developed a strong spiritual connection which allows my day-to-day to stay solid.” LA also reflected on his enhanced spiritual wellness in recovery, noting that for him, this meant having faith that things would work out and staying present in the current moment.

Many peers discussed having a greater ability to practice reflection in recovery. MD said that recovery provided balance and added that “it gave [him] the opportunity to reflect more on [himself].” In a similar vein, Miranda said, “Recovery has allowed me the space to grow, ponder the world, myself, my values, and my boundaries.”

BK and Miranda shared more reflections about how far they had come. BK shared that she felt sad for the younger version of herself who struggled with substance use, but that she now felt proud of the strength and resilience she showed on her journey.

Likewise, Miranda said “It’s amazing to see how much I’ve grown and to reflect on the windy roads that have taken me here.”

Encouraging Wellness in Recovery

Hearing all the interviews about how peers’ daily lives have changed made it clear that caring for the self is a priority for these young people in recovery.

It is important to note that each person’s wellness was not the same. Many peers shared about going to recovery meetings; some shared about an increased connection to spirituality; others shared about an improved ability to reflect. Even outside of these common themes, there were specific practices that each person used to enhance their recovery, too.

Each person’s daily life was different, and not one person had the same routine they followed to support their recovery. This shows the importance of interacting with people in recovery as individuals with specific needs, wants, desires, skills, and struggles.

To ensure every person reaches optimal wellness, we must prioritize autonomy, choice, and ultimate decision-making power in treatment and recovery support. This is especially important for young people in recovery who may still be developing a sense of identity, which could include personal values, likes, dislikes, passions, desires, and more.

Additionally, these interviews showed me that education on caring for the self is important. Not only is it essential in terms of basic self-care, but also in the variety of options to support all the dimensions of wellness.

Conducting the Peer Voices Project has shown me that even under the umbrella of being a young person in recovery, wellness can look different for everyone. These interviews have enforced the idea that recovery is personal and unique, and that when individuals are given the opportunity to explore it in terms of what is important to them, they ultimately thrive.