

# Speaking from experience - the gift of Peer Specialists

**W**hen facing life's difficulties, sometimes it

helps to have someone to lean on. Life is not always easy - just look around and you're sure to have witnessed or experienced the difficulty and complexity life presents: a fractured marriage, an immeasurably stressful job, the insecurities of parenting, an unshakable dependence upon drugs or alcohol, a painful sadness that never lifts, the demoralized outlook of unemployment - and so on. Sometimes we need a little help along the way.

Cheri Donovan remembers these challenges all too well, and today, she speaks with the gift of lived experience as a member of Ridgeview's Mobile Crisis Team. Cheri's story was once defined by trauma, unemployment, and a sixteen year history of periodic hospital care.

Today, her story is a rich tapestry of resilience and comfort to those in need of help. "The stigma of seeking mental health treatment is so strong," says Cheri, "I know what it's like - people in crisis need to know that they are important and that you can get better, one small step at a time."

As a Certified Peer Re-

covery Specialist (CPRS's), Cheri draws from her own journey of recovery to inspire hope and provide support to others who are facing similar situations.

For individuals hurting by life's challenges and living with mental illness, Peer Specialists like Cheri give the gift of having been there. They speak with vulnerable courage, and people listen. They are a living testimony that hope exists, that treatment works, and that recovery is possible.

Ridgeview's Peer Specialists have completed a rigorous specialized training recognized by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services on how to provide peer recovery services based on recovery and resiliency principles. Peer Specialists function as a role model to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis and they demonstrate competency in personal recovery and use of coping skills. Additionally, peers work closely with master's level mental health clinicians and psychiatrists to complement the care of the crisis team and can provide support for clients in outpatient and inpatient settings.

As members of Ridgeview's Mobile Crisis Team, CPRSs have a crucial role in offering hope and comfort to adults ex-

periencing an acute mental health crisis. Their ability to offer a compassionate voice and steady hand through the lens of lived experience is an innovative crisis response adaptation and a valuable complement to the crisis team. For individuals experiencing a mental health crisis, minutes feel like an eternity; delays in treatment feel like abandonment; and a fragmented system of care compounds feelings of hopelessness. Peer Support Specialists lend a soothing, encouraging, and regulating presence amidst a life in crisis.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, seek immediate help by contacting the Mobile Crisis Team at 1-800-870-5481, 24 hours a day. For non-crisis needs, our Walk-In Clinic is at 240 W. Tyrone Road in Oak Ridge, you don't have to have an appointment to access immediate help; regular clinic hours remain 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

Michael Yates is Director of Development for Ridgeview. Ridgeview is a private, not for profit community mental health center with locations in Anderson, Campbell, Morgan, Roane, and Scott counties.



Ridgeview's Walk-In Clinic is at 240 W. Tyrone Road in Oak Ridge.

Serving Anderson, Campbell, Morgan, Roane and Scott Counties since 1957.



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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Did you know** that Ridgeview has been helping families, adults and children find hope, recovery and wellness for over 57 years?

**Did you know** that Ridgeview's mental health professionals teach adults and children techniques for managing stress, depression and anxiety.



[www.ridgeview.com](http://www.ridgeview.com)

240 W. Tyrone Road  
Oak Ridge, TN 37830  
865-482-1076 or 800-834-4178

**Did you know** that Ridgeview has 24-hour Mobile Crisis services for psychiatric emergencies? (865-481-6175)

**We know** that taking the first step is often the most difficult, but help is available.