

# Taking Flight

A Briefing from Project GREAT

Georgia Recovery-Based Educational Approach to Treatment

## A RECOVERY STORY

### **Working as a Certified Peer Specialist Saved My Life**

*By Gerald Griffin*

Life before becoming a CPS was rocky at best.

Being a middle school math teacher in Houston was trying and stressful. When I moved to Atlanta in 2008, I applied for another teaching position. My thoughts were like a tornado in my brain—a potent mix of anxiety, fear, and ghosts of the past. By the third morning of school, my anxiety level was so high I couldn't even get out of bed, resulting in a month's hospital stay for acute anxiety and severe depression.

What appeared to be a terrible situation evolved into both a blessing and the first in a series of serendipitous events. At a support meeting, I heard about the Certified Peer Support program. Within two weeks, I had applied to the program, been accepted, and completed the training.

Serendipity winked at me again when I visited the Peer Support & Wellness Center in Decatur, GA. The next week, Director Jayme Lynch asked if I was interested in applying for a position. *Hmmm... did I want to work at a center that contributes to my wellness AND allows me to do something I love?? Let me **think!!***

I was offered a position and started the following day.

Working at the Center is something I love and a major part of my recovery. I feel peaceful, happy, and serene when I am there. It is exactly where I belong.

**This job literally and figuratively saves my life!**

## LEARNING POINTS

Gerald's recovery story could certainly be viewed as an attractive appeal to those experiencing the challenges of mental illness to consider becoming certified peer specialist. In fact, many certified peer specialists have found great satisfaction in their work not only because it gives them an opportunity to help others but also because they find that such work helps in their own recovery. But there is another side to this story that provides a valuable learning point: "what appeared to be terrible situation evolved into both a blessing and the first in a series of serendipitous events." Testimonies of recovery as well as ongoing research point out that there is no uniform picture of the experience of mental illness – no predictable steady declines or guaranteed improvements. More commonly the lived experience of mental illness has its ups and downs – sometimes predictable but sometimes not. Gerald reminds us, however, no one's future is already written – there are always choices and opportunities to find meaning and purpose to find one's own way even in the difficult times of life.