

GLENN KOONS CERTIFIED PEER SPECIALIST SCHOLARSHIP

WINNER: 2016



The Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association and the Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania are pleased to announce **Diane F. White** as the recipient of the *2016 Glenn Koons Scholarship*. The funds associated with this scholarship will cover the registration cost for her Certified Peer Specialist training this fall.

Diane F. White, Glenn Koons Scholarship Recipient, Fights the Good Fight

A social worker by calling, Diane F. White, has spent much of her life working in and outside of the behavioral health system to challenge practices that perpetuate racism, sexism, gender and sexuality discrimination, and segregation. A community activist by passion, she aims to always speak truth to power in her community, a disinvested area of the city, where her neighbors live with the realities of poverty and disenfranchisement.

But the one person Diane has not always supported is herself. As an adult, she was diagnosed with extreme anxiety and depression, as well as PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] related to childhood and adult

traumas. Through the diagnosis process, she realized that to help others, she has to take care of herself first. Today, peer support plays a major role in Diane's mental health recovery. With financial assistance from the 2016 Glenn Koons Scholarship, she recently completed a training to become a Certified Peer Specialist (CPS).

We asked Diane to share her story. Here it is in her words.

My Story

I've been thinking about where to start and want to start here... I've been abused all my life. My stepfather abused my mother and me. I fought back and tried to protect her and my stepbrothers and stepsisters. When I was 14, I left home.

My grandmother always told me I was "blessed". As a black girl growing up in the 60s, I was affected by her words. They made me want to excel in everything. My mother and my teachers always told me I was intelligent, but being blessed let me know I had my higher power on my side. I knew education would be my way out of the abuse. I worked hard and went to college on a scholarship. I did whatever I needed to do to get that degree.

I've worked in social work for most of my career, helping to make change and promote diversity and inclusion. I've witnessed and experienced oppression and abuse of power both in and outside of the system and have always fought against it. I stopped working after experiencing burnout and

traumatizing police brutality at my home and in my neighborhood, which led to periods of institutionalization for me.

MY RECOVERY

While institutionalized, I was diagnosed with different illnesses at different times but never felt they were accurate. I now know I live with extreme anxiety and depression, and also PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder].

During my treatment, I realized I always looked out for everyone in my life, my family, my community, my colleagues and clients, but I didn't always look out for myself. It made me vulnerable to brutality and abuse.

Understanding that I need to care for me was an important step forward.

WHY PEER SUPPORT

While institutionalized, I learned about peer support through a case manager who told me I was strong and that sharing my story would help others and me. She was right.

She connected me to CSG [Community Services Group], where I lived after transitioning out of institutionalization. After going home, I participated in a day program at Keystone Human Services Rose Garden, a social psych rehab center in Harrisburg, where I was peer to others in the program and they to me.

During this time, I decided I wanted my work to be in peer support. I am particularly interested in Trauma Informed Care and dealing with trauma related to mental illness. The Rose Garden's director informed me about the Glenn Koons Scholarship. I applied and won.

I went through the CPS training at Philhaven in June. It was therapeutic, and I met a lot of good people. We helped each other. As peers we can relate to each other. I also learned through peers and being hospitalized that pain and trauma happen to all of us, whatever our race. As much discrimination and abuse and oppression I went through as a black woman, one of the things I found out in treatment and being institutionalized is that white people have just as much hardship and trauma as we do. That surprised me to a certain degree; I knew it intellectually but this really drove it home. Oppression and trauma is nondiscriminatory, and we all have to work together to stop and overcome it.

MY TODAY...AND TOMORROW

CPS training motivated me to not let life events in my past defeat me; that it's not who I used to be but who I am now.

And I know that I have other people helping me now. Fears are always going to be there, but I'm going to continue to grow. I know my higher power has put me here for a reason, and I believe peer support is what I'm supposed to do.