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## What I Take With Me

During my 14 year tenure in a DMHAS leadership role, I have met some truly extraordinary people. This final message will focus on the words of six such people with mental illness or substance use disorders. They are probably representative of many 100's more. I have learned much from such people.

"I have a job that makes my heart sing; I work with people who love and support me and my recovery; I too, can use my energy and talent to help others along in their recovery. I experienced the benefit of great models of recovery."

"I came to Connecticut with little hope for the future through the years of being told I was not valuable. I felt disenfranchised as a person...I had no personal life, just a life that was broken. I still believed that I could have a life again that I could help my community and I could achieve my goals but I did not know how this would occur...I have met many supportive individuals on my journey back from oblivion...have renewed my sense of hope and competence..."

"I was once lost in the despair of major depression and the loss of my job-who would hire a 54 year old woman who...was a loser...because of beliefs and passion for recovery, I am now a recovery educator."

"...thank you for life enriching opportunities, which has caused me to go from self-isolation to being a familiar face to my peers...Doors are opening, paths are widening and I am embracing the future..."

"Yesterday holds my memories and my mistakes. Today I live for the moment to preserve who I am and what I stand for. Tomorrow keeps my dreams alive and my belief in a better day. Tomorrow was never easy, for that matter, tomorrow doesn't exist yet. Yes, indeed because of tomorrow I stand here today and because of today, I can change my sights for the future."

"There once was a time when I believed a drink or a drug was the answer to all my troubles.  
There once was a time when I blamed everyone else for the misery of my own making.  
There once was a time when I was ashamed to face my family and friends, ashamed of what had become of my life, ashamed of my disease, ashamed of my behavior, ashamed of how I treated the people who loved me...  
There once was a time almost 17 years ago that while drowning in a sea of sickness and shame that I reached out desperately for a flimsy reed that turned out to be the loving and powerful hand of God...  
Today I am not ashamed of who I am.  
Today I am not ashamed to stand before my family and say I love you.  
Today I am not ashamed to stand before you and declare my recovery.  
Today I am not ashamed to share the message of hope that recovery brings.  
I am not ashamed. I AM NOT ASHAMED. I AM NOT ASHAMED."

I will forever remember and be in awe of those I have met along the way these past 14 years. They have met the challenge of their mental illness and/or substance use through their strong will and resilience and thus continue to regain control of their lives. I also know that none of these success stories would be possible without the dedication of DMHAS staff, the private provider community, families and advocates. Many thanks to all the individuals who have helped thousands people and families in Connecticut recover their lives.

"It must be borne in mind that the tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream. ..It is not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim is a sin."  
Benjamin E. Mays, former President, Morehouse College.