

# GLENN KOONS CERTIFIED PEER SPECIALIST SCHOLARSHIP

**WINNER: 2015**

**And the Winner is ...**



The Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association and the Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania are pleased to announce **Kellyanne Strouse** of Souderton, Pennsylvania as the recipient of the *2015 Glenn Koons Scholarship*. The funds associated with this scholarship will cover the registration cost for her Certified Peer Specialist training this fall.

Thank you, Kellyanne, for your openness in telling your powerful story.

## **KELLYANNE'S STORY - IN HER OWN WORDS**

MHAPA spoke with Kellyanne, who learned about the scholarship through a peer support program at Muncy Prison, where she was incarcerated for a 2008 car accident in which three of her best friends died.

The Bucks County native's soft-spoken eloquence about her road to recovery belies a steely determination to help people, especially young women, overcome seemingly insurmountable circumstances to live a life filled with hope, possibility, and connection to others.

Today, the budding horticulturalist - Lamb's Ear is a current favorite perennial - works as a waitress in Souderton where she lives with her mother and step-father. Enjoy our conversation with this remarkable young woman.

**Congratulations on being awarded the third annual Glenn Koons Scholarship. Tell us a little bit about yourself.**

Thank you! I grew up in the country, surrounded by nature, so that's really where my heart is. I try to live as holistically as possible, recognizing the interconnection between mind and body. After many years of being abusive to my body, when I got clean I began to understand that I needed to nourish every part of me - so I'm pretty much a "health nut." [laughs] I do yoga, love music, and find joy in helping other people.

**What are your experiences with peer support? How has it figured into your recovery journey?**

When I was at Muncy, I was a peer assistant facilitator for the reentry program and worked one-on-one with other women. And the peer support I received enabled me to heal for the first time in my life.

I'd been in and out of substance abuse programs and institutions for most of my life. By the time I got to Muncy, everyone had given up on me. No one wanted to try to understand. But I was lucky to have a mentor who never walked away, instead I got support I never had and the space to face and share my secrets, not be ashamed, and be my true self.

Peer support keeps me from being complacent and reminds me where I come from.

I've been complacent in the past. Before my accident, I was doing really well but got complacent. Because I didn't understand my depression, I was self-medicating and not getting real help. I ended up in a DUI accident that killed three people. Today, I know so much more about mental health. I know I can't get complacent but need to be vigilant about taking care of my mental, physical, and emotional health. Peer support is part of that. Getting and giving it.

## **Why do you want to give back?**

Growing up, I never saw a model of a healthy, stable life. My brother sexually abused me, my father was abusive, and my mother suffered from PTSD. My Muncy mentor created that model for me - giving me space to be myself, confront the demons behind my addiction, eating disorder, and depression.

When everyone else in my world had given up on me, my mentor walked right by my side. This person encouraged me, helped me to not be ashamed of my past and to take responsibility for my mental health. My mentor not only understood me but also helped me understand myself.

To be able to give someone else what my mentor gave me is beautiful. I don't take for granted that I'm alive and able to give back.

## **What does winning this scholarship mean to you?**

It's so hard to put into words. It's one of those things that you never think you'll win but say: "What can I lose by trying?" But to have someone read my story and give me this opportunity . . . it's just very hard to put into words.

When I was sentenced to prison, the father of Matt, my best friend who I'd killed in the accident, came up to me. He forgave me and said the greatest way I could honor his son's life was to help others avoid having to endure what his son and I did with our addictions. Being a peer specialist is my way of living up to that. It's my way of doing it - for him, for Matt, for me.