

David Frederking

Mental Health Case Management: HUMAN-1141

Bruce Sewick, LCPC, CADAC

7/11/23

Virtual Quad: Online Peer Support Program

I had my first manic episode two months into my freshman year of undergrad. I was a few hundred miles away from home and my support structure was only available by phone. I had no idea what help I could find on campus, but I was aware that the counseling center was quite limited. I had nowhere to turn, and it only got worse. I had inadequate care and little to no understanding among my peers or professors. When I finally withdrew from school a few weeks before my class was to graduate, I was in dire straits. If I had been given access to some kind of peer support program where I would have been less alone, and who could connect me to the care I needed, I believe that so many things would have gone differently. If I could create a peer support program, it would focus on all the things that weren't addressed in my first 4 years of college.

Although I had that manic episode at eighteen, I wasn't diagnosed for another ten years. I didn't really know what bipolar disorder was. I had only seen it in movies and those were terrifying and misleading. It wasn't until I discovered support groups in my late twenties that I realized what all I had experienced really was. I immediately felt less alone, and the community I found helped me in my recovery. I would like to facilitate something like this within the college community. My program would be virtual as that not only provides a degree of confidentiality but allows for a greater diversity of thought and experience.

This peer support program would be virtual. I believe that this format would allow for the greatest diversity of thought and experience while also providing a higher degree of confidentiality than could be achieved in an in-person format.

It would be important for the program to be adequately demonstrated to residence directors, faculty advisors, campus first responders, campus healthcare staff, and other individuals who interact with students and could identify those who were at risk. This advocacy wing would be very important.

Quad: Four components.

1: Community- Create a community online of like-minded peers who understand the plight of mental illness and who can connect where classmates or roommates might not be able.

2: Organizational- This is where an organizational board would come into play. They would be able to advocate for outreach from within the campus community and into the virtual one. Referring to students at risk.

3: Family- Helps students communicate with their families about their mental illness issues. Family can be very important in the best and worst ways.

4: Future- Provide life skills for college and beyond. Communication with people of all ages outside of the college community. Helping to transition out of school and into a career.

My peer support program would address mental illness on college campuses. Unlike advocacy groups that help raise awareness of warning signs and how to get someone help, this would get them that help. There are too many barriers to getting help which exist on a college campus, and peer support is what I believe could address those barriers.