

## Matthew Blankers' Video Transcript

Hi. My name is Matthew Blankers and I received my MSW from the University of Kansas in Lawrence, KS in 2011. I have been a client of mental health services for a little over 20 years. I've been on some kind of psychiatric medication for about 17 years; been given all kinds of diagnoses; interacted with countless mental health professionals. Some of those interactions have been great and some have been horrible.

I am transgender. I was born biologically female, socialized as a girl. And I would say that most of the truly terrible interactions that I've ever had with mental health workers have been centered around my queer identity. I decided to go into social work because I wanted to try to improve the experiences that queer folks often have with mental health workers.

I was first introduced to the term "recovery" applied to mental health services during my practicum placement interview for my MSW program. I was placed at Johnson County Mental Health Center in Shawnee, KS which is actually where I'm working now full-time as a case manager. I love it. During that interview, I remember my field instructor kept using the term recovery. Kept talking about recovery. I was feeling really confused and asked for clarification at one point. I was kind of like, you know, "Hey when you're talking about recovery, do you mean like recovery from mental illness?" And he's like, "You know, I'm glad that you asked that." And really used it as an opportunity to engage me in a conversation about recovery.

I remember at the time my initial reaction was this does not make any sense. I mean, people don't recover from mental illness. I'm horrified by that thought now, you know, by that reaction. At the time I was actually finishing my BSW program at KU and had spent two years learning all about the strengths perspective, that is literally built on a belief that people can recover, reclaim and transform their lives. It's a little bit mindboggling to me that with as much experience that I had within the mental health system, that it was hard for me to apply that term to mental health. I think it's a product of years spent in a mental health system that, you know, really told me that I was incapable of achieving real success in life because I have all these things wrong with me, you know?

The introduction to recovery has changed my life. It's changed the way that I think about my own recovery. It's changed the way that I think about, you know, working with the folks that I work with. During that year, during that practicum placement, I was introduced to Pat Deegan. I actually met her and I read some of her materials. She became a total role model for me. She was the first person I had ever seen who was recovering from a serious mental illness, or at least a diagnosis of serious mental illness, and was successful. And for the first time in my life I thought maybe this could be more than just a job, maybe it could be more than a way to sustain myself. Maybe I could actually...be successful. And I think that that's the case, you know, I've been doing good work and I love my job. I love social work. And I absolutely love recovery. Thanks.