



Margaret Martinez

PEER SPECIALIST SUPERVISOR
BRONX CRISIS RESPITE CENTER
BPHC Member

Margaret Martinez is a Peer Specialist Supervisor at Bronx Crisis Respite Center (CRC), which is operated by the Riverdale Mental Health Association. The Bronx CRC is a safe, home-like setting where people experiencing psychiatric crisis can stay as an alternative to hospitalization. Guests learn use new recovery and relapse prevention skills, working closely with Peer Specialists who have the lived experience of mental illness. Bronx CRC plays an important role in BPHC's ED Triage project.

Margaret Martinez is a Peer Specialist Supervisor at Bronx Crisis Respite Center (CRC), which is operated by the Riverdale Mental Health Association. Ms. Martinez understands firsthand what her guests are going through; she herself has struggled with mental health, and even turned to the Emergency Department for help in times of crisis.

"I was really sad, and having a lot of anxiety, but I wasn't a danger to myself or anyone else," she recalls. "I didn't like being a patient - I just didn't have any other option."

Ms. Martinez was one of many people for whom the hospital offered a bed and a break, but did not help her avoid falling back into crisis. "When somebody keeps going to the hospital and it's not working," she realized, "maybe it's time for a different approach."

Bronx CRC is that different approach: it empowers guests to own their mental health and their recovery. "You have your own room but you're not locked in, you're not told when to get up, eat or shower," Ms. Martinez says. "It's all about making your own decisions, having a choice in your own treatment, being your own advocate."

During their week-long stay at Bronx CRC, guests are supported by Peer Specialists like Ms. Martinez, who are available 24/7. "Every Peer has a mental health diagnosis that we've learned how to live with, and we try to model that," she explains. This close relationship with Peers, she says, is at the heart of every guest's recovery.

When a guests needs to talk, Peers provide a unique counseling technique called Intentional Peer Support, "which is based on understanding a guest's worldview." Ms. Martinez says. "We're always there to help any guest who's feeling manic or needs someone to talk to. It's very organic, very natural, the bonds we build here."

If outside services like psychiatric care or housing assistance are needed, Ms. Martinez says, "we can connect them to what they need." But, she emphasizes, guests are responsible for setting up their own appointments. "When you make your own appointment, you're more likely to go," she says.

Guests work with Peers to create a wellness plan outlining their specific triggers and how to cope, which they take with them when they leave. "This is what helps keep them out of crisis long-term," Ms. Martinez says. "They're motivated to take control of their lives and move on."

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