

Peer Mentoring in Correctional Facilities: An Interview with Michelle Raysor



July 19, 2017 by Theresa KnorrCategory: [News](#)

[Connecting for Purpose](#), that's the name of the organization founded by this month's featured Recovery Coach, Michelle Raysor, CARC, MA, CRC, CASAC, LMHC. Connecting, for purpose, is what Recovery Coaching is all about! It was a pleasure connecting with Ms. Raysor, about her life and her life's calling, which is to work with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.

EXPERIENCE AS PREPARATION

Originally from Westchester County and living on Long Island's East End since 1985, Michelle is a woman in sustained Recovery. We spoke briefly about her past, which included adverse childhood experiences, addiction and incarceration, both as a child, at [New York State Training School for Girls](#), and as a young adult. Ms. Raysor says that her experiences in the New York State Training School for Girls and the county jail and prison prepared her to be effective in her career today. As such, it is her personal, and professional passion to help people transition back to the community successfully.

EDUCATION AS SOLIDIFICATION

Michelle's life experience prepared her but her education solidified her place in the "helping" professions. Having earned an Associate's Degree in Science & Human Behavior she originally thought she was going to be a nurse's aide. Instead, she returned to school for her Bachelor's degree from [Empire State College](#) after her son's passing. She now has a Master's Degree in Education from Hofstra University and has completed doctoral course work in Leadership and Curriculum Development. She is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC), a Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC) and a Certified Addiction Recovery Coach (CARC) and trainer!

In 2015, Michelle took the [CCAR](#) Recovery Coach Academy train the trainer training, because she wanted to be able to give people access to this rich curriculum and empower

them to be helpers. She says that until today, she hadn't done a lot with it, as there did not seem to be a clear career path; but with the new peer initiatives, including the advent of funding for Certified Recovery Peer Advocate (CRPA) training, that's changing!

WORK WITH PURPOSE

Michelle realized early on that another level of support, beyond what treatment agencies provide, is needed. Because she experienced "the system" on a personal level, and was easy to talk to, she started her vocation by doing outreach as a volunteer, with members of her family and her church. Subsequently, she has worked as a substance abuse counselor, clinical supervisor, and clinical director.

She founded *Connecting for Purpose*, as a community-based organization, staffed by volunteers, with mentoring at its heart. Today, it's a "nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization with a mission to assist individuals with personal recovery, substance abuse, mental health, crisis intervention, training, employment, legal, and housing challenges that block or prevent them from acquiring the resources to become self-sufficient." (Sounds a lot like Recovery Coaching!)

THE RECOVERY COACH ACADEMY (RCA) TRAINING AT CFP

More than half of the volunteers at *Connecting for Purpose*, who work with veterans and re-entry programs, have taken the Recovery Coach Academy training. Michelle happily reports that they now have a separate building to do this and other training. When asked what she likes most about the curriculum, Michelle tells us that it's "the imparting of wisdom" and seeing people tap into their authentic self that is most impressive to her. The "Who Am I" exercise on day one and the Power Walk on day three, and exploring cultural differences, are her favorite teaching vehicles from that training.

BRINGING THE RCA TO THE INCARCERATED

Working as a consultant/counselor in the Sherriff's Addiction Treatment program at the Riverhead County Jail, Michelle had the idea to bring the RCA to the inmates there because she felt that it would fulfill a need. So often people leave incarceration without a real way of connecting to a meaningful future. Having a foundation to start a career as a Peer Professional gives people hope and also gives them a structured way to "give back."

"People in jails don't think they can accomplish anything while being in jail," said Raysor. Having a certificate-bearing program gives them a sense of accomplishment and helps them to believe in themselves. They benefit by turning their own experience into a way of helping others. They are also guided in making intentional connections and encouraged to plug into volunteer opportunities before they leave the facility.

WORDS OF WISDOM

When asked what she would tell those taking the RCA, Michelle talked about how important it is for people to be solid in their own recovery program before becoming a Recovery Coach or CRPA. "Self-care needs to be primary. Each person who leaves a correctional facility should be assigned a coach." She said that people can do more harm

than good if they are not ready. She suggests volunteering to get experience and to “be committed, but patient; and to trust the process. Put what you are learning into effect and turn the outcome over to your higher power.”

You can find more information for Connecting for Purpose at their [website](#) and on [Facebook](#).

Michelle can also be by [email](#) or phone (631-394-1805)

To find a Recovery Coach Academy training in your area visit our [website](#).

We want to thank Michelle for her time and talent and wish her all the best in her new endeavor. Watch for her new book “Dancing with My Destiny;” coming soon.