

Compassion a Must-Have for Mental Health Workers

By Helen Silvis
Of *The Skanner News*

Jay Auslander is director of emergency services at Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare and has worked for the mental health nonprofit for close to 12 years. Auslander talked to *The Skanner News* about careers in mental health crisis intervention.

services and start that journey. It's a rewarding career.

TS: What kinds of qualifications do you need to work in mental health?

JA: Typically clinicians have a bachelor's or master's degree in social work or a psychological field. Some carry licenses and certifications in specialized areas, including Licensed Clinical Social



PHOTO BY HELEN SILVIS

The Portland Police Bureau Crisis Team is comprised of sworn officers as well as mental health professionals.

'The people I work with are some of the brightest, most compassionate, most caring people with good hearts'

The Skanner News: How did you start out in mental health?

Jay Auslander: I was working on a crisis line in college and have been involved in this field since 1994.

TS: What attracted you to working with people dealing with mental health problems and people in crisis?

JA: The opportunity to help people—especially at times when they really need the help. If you are able to help someone at the right time, they can embrace recovery and begin to heal. It's hard work, but you feel good when you can help someone get into

Workers, Licensed Professional Counselors, and Licensed Medical Providers. Clinicians generally have significant experience working with a wide range of individuals with varying needs. They understand and attend to the impacts of trauma, and are proficient in providing crisis intervention. People who are successful in crisis work tend to have a genuine compassion for others.

TS: Does your undergraduate degree matter?

JA: Graduates with a bachelor's in social work, psychology or public health can work in various positions. Getting a master's

degree or a doctoral degree (MA/MSc./Ph.D./Psy.D./MD) can lead the way to increasing one's responsibilities and scope. The system is moving towards integrating more nurses and other medical professionals, to bring in their medical expertise and to help in healing the whole person.

We also are integrating certified peer wellness specialists into our treatment teams. Those are people whose experience includes having participated in mental health serv-

ices. Peers are more likely to bring and share their own experiences, which is less of an expectation for other team members. Peer wellness specialists know what it's like to take those steps toward healing, and they can help people walk that walk of recovery.

TS: What kind of personal qualities does a mental health crisis counselor need?

JA: The people I work with are some of the brightest, most com-

passionate, most caring people with good hearts. They are people who work very hard. And they work as a team.

TS: Is there a downside?

JA: Well I wouldn't call it a downside, but to do this requires self-care. You really need to take care and have insight into yourself, including attending to your own mental and physical health.

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