

Community Citizenship Award

Each year, TR recognizes someone who has contributed significantly to advancing our mission with our Community Citizenship Award.

This year, it is a true pleasure to present this award to Dani Flanagan, who has been a volunteer and leader at TR for over 25 years. Here is Part 2 of her interview reflecting on TR's accomplishments and her hopes for the future.



What were your expectations when you first came to TR as a volunteer? What were some challenges?

Only had a textbook definition of schizophrenia and other mental illnesses and was admittedly a bit naïve to the realities of what living with these more serious forms of mental illness looked like. Then I got to TR and began working with the clients and learned so much. It helped me fully understand the truth that mental illness doesn't discriminate. I saw so many people from different backgrounds and experiences who were all trying to cope, and it really challenged my perceptions and understanding of what mental illness looks like and how it can affect different people.

I remember my biggest challenge at first was knowing how to be helpful. I learned what is most often needed is as simple as just being there and serving client's needs in that moment. Sometimes it was an activity like helping with meal preparation, or driving someone on a store trip, helping with medications and tasks like that, but other times it was just being someone who was willing to sit and listen, someone to laugh with or help through a difficult problem. I learned that the task or solution doesn't have to be grand, it can simply be a small act of kindness that really can build a relationship and help with a person's confidence in their recovery.

What new challenges do you think TR faces today?

The most obvious and immediate is COVID-19 and all of the strain and difficulties that has brought. I think we are only beginning to scratch the surface on what this will look like even in the immediate future, including the increased services and needs that will inevitably come from this situation further down the road. People's mental health around the country is in jeopardy, and I think people are truly seeing the importance of mental health as we all go through this experience. Social isolation and disruption to routine can be especially difficult for those with mental illness and may lead to setbacks with treatment, not to mention the larger systemic issues we are likely to face with housing and medicine. This has been complicated and ever-evolving, and we don't know how long this will last, which is why it's important to be acknowledging these issues now and considering how we are going to handle any potential obstacles going forward.

In the larger picture, I think we will continue to face the issue of property values and affordable housing. Our area can be so unpredictable, and I'd hate to bring COVID into it again, but we don't know what kind of impacts it will have on the housing market, not to mention the upheaval and stressors the job losses and evictions and such will have on people during this time. These obstacles are truly some of the biggest obstacles any organization can face, but I believe that TR can face them and will continue to provide support for people to live independently and ensure they have access to behavioral health treatment and affordable housing.

What are you most proud to see TR accomplish so far?

All of the new housing, most definitely. When I was first there in 1992, it was just the main TRY house and next to that there was a duplex TR also owned that had a single crisis bed. There were a few homes as well in the surrounding area, but many clients were off-site living in their own homes or apartments and had to commute to the house for their care. Even back then, TR saw the value of having the model of mental health services and supportive housing and how that builds stability and community. But witnessing how much the housing piece has grown over the years has been incredible--seeing the two buildings that are now on-site so close to the main house and having the new Yancy Street Project in process as well. Obviously, housing has become even more of an important issue in our area since then, which is why I am so proud that TR continues to focus on addressing these issues in tandem. I have seen how the continued expansion has worked to solidly establish that sense of community but also how many clients are now there living their own apartments, independently, while also having their treatment and the staff be so accessible.

The new housing project in particular I'd say is the most recent one I look at with pride. It's always a scary investment and a leap of faith, but I am so pleased with our board for seizing the opportunity. I remember in our discussion we talked about propping up the housing element of our mission and it was important to make this happen. Even in this time of uncertainty, we can look at this project and know we made the right call to step up. We saw where the momentum was with more awareness and more funding for mental health and took advantage of it--who knows what would have happened if we had waited? It's been great to see it come together with all the people involved and it is so exciting that it is officially underway! It feels so real and tangible now!

What is the main thing that you would you want people to know about TR and our clients?

Mostly that mental illness can impact anyone—any family, any person--at any time. And it is so important to keep having these conversations around these issues, and that we should be proud that we have an organization here in our community that has been around for decades and has been treating those with mental illness with dignity and respect. TR has been supporting individuals and their families for decades and leading the way in this community model, and I think that is something we should be proud of not only as people who are involved with TR directly, but also as a community.

What are your hopes for TR in the future?

I think first and foremost, that we can persevere through everything that has happened and continue to stay healthy and give care to those who need it. That TR can continue their amazing work, both facing COVID and the other challenges, but to continue to find opportunities to advocate and provide the wrap-around services of behavioral health and housing. I also hope that TR continues to receive support in the community, both from a local standpoint here in West Seattle but also more broadly in the city and county. I hope that TR will continue to be a leader and model of how to help individuals with mental illness and what a supportive community can truly achieve.