

# FRANKIANA

## MY JOURNEY TO PEER RECOVERY

### **MY STORY**

Frankiana Tsosie is a Peer Recovery Coach with the Indigenous Peer Recovery Program in Cortez, Colorado. This programming uses the White Bison Wellbriety approach to recovery which honors the role that Native American culture plays in wellness and resilience. In her own words, Frankiana shares her story about how she began doing Peer Recovery work, how family and culture are central to her own recovery and strength, and how her own experiences help her to heal and support her community for the next generation.

### **BECOMING A PEER RECOVERY COACH**

This work just fell upon me- I had people who realized that I had some kind of spark in me- that is how I became a peer recovery coach. I had a mentor who told me "I know that you are busy and you have so much going on- but I want you to do this work- this is who you are- you have the background for it." As indigenous females we are all brought up as nurturers and healers- we are taught that we have to lead our children into the person that they will become.



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## **BECOMING A PEER RECOVERY COACH CONTINUED...**

I was a single mother for a long time- I raised my son alone- now my daughter has her stepdad- but the whole time I was alone- I had my grandpa who was always teaching me that I had to be a Mom and take care. He would say "You are the one who will mold your kids" – he was pushing on the side- even though he knew I was not perfect and getting in trouble- he knew I could be a good person and he had faith in me. All these people had faith in me and I did not know I was a good person. Now I am a healer and I can help people- it came upon me. Now after my training, I realize it was my Grandpa leading me to be a healer like him. The White Bison training led me back to my culture- and other elders are teaching me things that are helping me help others.

I remember being in my Grandpa's house with all of his traditional healing knowledge- we have elders who will teach us to get back to our culture- we all died away from our culture – our culture is dying- even in my family- and we need to get back to it. My Grandma and Grandpa only spoke Navajo and now my children do not speak that language. I am trying to keep my kids in our culture- I want my kids to be able to speak to their Great-Grandma. I am learning everyday as a Peer Recovery Coach and I know it is my Grandpa telling me "Hey, you need to do this-you need to heal the community." I am starting to see signs from my Grandpa- my work is a sign from my Grandpa- who also overcame alcohol addiction. He gave up alcohol and became a roadman. He knows I can be a Firestarter for our community.

I know I am a leader- I have always been told I am a leader. I have the drive, I have the potential – my mentor knew it- she knew me when I was young- she told me you are that person- you have a spark in you- you are the person to go to- you have that heart- like your family- it runs in my family to be a leader. I have to finish what I start- even if it is difficult or it makes me mad. I was told I could not graduate from high school because I got kicked out- but I found a way and graduated from high school with my Mom. I told my Mom "Do it with me now. Let's just get it done." And we did. I know I can do this because I am a natural born leader. If you come to me as an open book, I will be open to you. I am a hard worker and I get things done- even when I am in trouble.

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## **MY OWN EXPERIENCES HAVE SHAPED MY WORK IN PEER RECOVERY**

My experiences help me to be a Peer Recovery Coach. I have hit rock bottom- I have done it all. I have seen it all. I put my own children through difficult things. It is not how we end up- it is who we become. I already know what it is like to be on the bottom- I do not want to do that again. I want to be a better Mom, a better daughter, a better wife- I know what it is like to have nothing, to be troubled- I have even been in a gang.

People around here, they see the tattoos. They see the harder me. I know people think "She has an attitude, she is trouble." You have to get to know me to know how far I have come. I am trying to become a better person- I am not that hardcore gangster girl that everyone sees when they first see me- I am a Mom, a daughter, a sister...I try not to judge people because I have been there.

## **FAMILY SUPPORT COMES IN SO MANY WAYS...**

My Mom has always been strict with me- she loves me and always told me I have a home- but I was not able to listen. She struggled after my oldest brother died- I had to raise myself because she used work to escape her grief. I basically raised myself- my brother and Dad were drinking. At 10 years old, I would come home and chop wood and get the fire started- I would make my dinner and do my homework. I am the only girl in the family- I took care of myself. I was my own friend- until I got to high school and met the wrong friends- and I started getting in trouble. I eventually found friends and family in the gang- and my children's father was in a gang and was not good to me.

The whole time I was in trouble- my Grandpa, my Mom and my Dad stood by me. They would say we are going to ask the gods to protect you- I did not understand what that all meant. I had to make the change myself. I finally realized I wanted to do better for my kids- my Grandpa helped me by praying for me, by burning cedar. My Grandpa used his cedar to open his mind- and now that is what I do- I use cedar to open my mind- it helps me when I am struggling- I burn it and think of positive things and I can re-evaluate everything and make good decisions. My Grandpa and Grandma used to show me things- and now I understand. I am a native woman- and I need this, you know. Strength is not something that comes to you without work. I had lots of healers in my family. My Grandma was a basket maker and knew which plants heal. People used to come to her for healing. Now I notice my Dad is doing this too. We planted corn last year- and my Mom was harvesting corn pollen- now I understand the importance of corn pollen. All of these little things connect me with my inner self. I am learning why we do our offerings and how it makes me who I am.

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## **CULTURE IS STRENGTH**

This job and my trainings have connected me with my culture. We need to start with ourselves-and slowly it begins to involve the whole community. Now we are working to make the next generation better-I want my kids to learn and see how you can speak up and do something about suffering. They can replace drinking and drugs with culture.They can use their culture to become better people- it gives them options to be healthy.

I fell so far away from my culture. My first language was Spanish- but when I went to preschool in Parachute, Colorado and I started to speak English. I did not really speak Navajo until I was a teenager- when I was in trouble I lived with my Grandma and she did not speak English- I did not grow up with culture until I was a teen and then I was immersed. I did my Kinaalda- the traditional coming into womanhood ceremony- and I did the whole ceremony with my Grandma- it was in the middle of Winter and I ran in the snow in the morning- it was dark and a blizzard- I fell over because the heat hit me hard when I went back inside- but they all caught me. The Medicine Man told me I would be a strong woman when I grew up because I ran so hard and far in the snow. He told me "You will overcome a lot in your life" and I have overcome things- he was right. I overcame being on my own, stopping drinking - I can be a better person- I can be myself not the bad person others might want me to be.

## **THE NEXT GENERATION**

I live with my Dad, and my Grandma and Mom are here all the time. No one thought I would be successful but I am successful! I want to make it better for our community-I want our kids to have their parents. They deserve to know who their parents are...I do not want to see any children go through difficult times. I just want the new generation to know that their parents are strong and there for them. So many people in my family and community struggled with substances and their kids were watching. But this program will show people there is more out there and everyone can be the person who their kids will look up to. My son tells me "Mom, I am happy you are still here. I would not be here without you." I want to help my children become who they will become- they deserve to know their family and their culture, because that is what will make them strong.