

Salute to Excellence

Award Winner Nomination Write-Up Example

The following write up was submitted by an ABH Member Organization for our Salute to Excellence 2025. The nominee was ultimately chosen as a Salute to Excellence 2025 award recipient. Please refer to this as an example of a successful nomination write up. Some information, including the organization name and recipient name(s), has been redacted for this purpose.

I have known [recipient] for more than three decades in roles ranging from direct service worker to his current position as [redacted]. He was the original peer specialist at [org name] and now leads a team of over 45 Peer Specialists and Recovery Coaches. Today, his leadership and influence are felt far beyond the [org name] community; he is known nationally and internationally as a principled, ethical leader and a passionate advocate for system change.

In the words of our Chief Medical Officer, [recipient] has a steadfast commitment to doing what is right—even when it is hard. He uses his power and position to advocate passionately for people whose voices often are left out of conversations. He uses his voice to communicate diverse perspectives, even when they diverge from or challenge behavioral health system generally accepted practice. He does not shy away from "difficult conversations," and in doing so, he makes everyone around him better and improves the lives of the people we support, now and in the future.

Throughout his career, [recipient] has promoted alternatives to traditional services, based on respect, mutuality, and trust. He is deeply committed to elevating the voice and choice of people receiving services, promoting welcoming environments free of judgment and coercion, advancing trauma-informed practice, and centering dialogue over diagnosis. He led the development of [program name] and has been a consistently strong voice opposing forced treatment, advocating instead for collaborative approaches including innovative models involving long term engagement of peers and family partners.

With his voice and the strength of his convictions he asks – are we doing right by the people we support? Are we honoring their wishes? How is their voice used (or not used) in furthering wellness? Who defines what wellness looks like?

In the words of friend and colleague:

"The work of those in peer support roles is wrought with challenges—and [recipient] was a pioneer in this space. It is not easy to have one's work be deeply connected to personal struggle—and the most difficult of all are the roles embedded in provider organizations. It is a vital but often isolating position—serving as the authentic voice for those with lived experience while navigating spaces filled with those who often don't fully grasp the realities of recovery or how our systems can both help and harm.

In a leadership role, the weight of representation is immense; being the voice for those whose perspectives and experiences are too often overlooked in policy discussions and their own treatment planning. The role is part educator, part advocate, constant strategist and difficult truth teller. Over thirty years [recipient] has been that person time and again. His presence alone disrupts the traditional power dynamics.

He understands deeply how important it is to nurture and support those new to this work—emerging advocates who are passionate and committed and have no idea what they don't know. It is difficult to articulate how hard it is to always be in spaces with experts where your job is to push for change and yet your words and body language and energy are constantly under scrutiny.

And the progress is so slow. [recipient] knows that creating system change is a marathon not a sprint; that real transformation requires persistently pushing for policies and practices that center the voices and needs of those most impacted. Even when it feels like swimming upstream against decades of entrenched institutional thinking, Keith is generous with his time and energy—his tenacity and courage and stubbornness have been contagious."

[Recipient] has been a moral compass; a truth teller, sage adviser, patient teacher and stalwart supporter. We can think of no one more deserving of this award.