As I was reading the criteria for the Clifford W. Beers Award, I realized that Fred Terling’s image was forming in my mind more clearly with each passing word.

I am a long-time mental health professional and I work with consumers in both hospital and support group environments. In doing so, I see many exceptional, high-functioning consumers, but Fred Terling stands out in so many remarkable ways.

My name is Dyan Conaway, MHRN. I am a psychiatric nurse at St. Clair Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where I have worked in the emergency department for the past 14 years. I also facilitate community mental health support and educational groups that are open to the adult public. About two years ago Fred began attending one of my bimonthly groups.

I am personally inspired by Fred’s active pursuit of recovery and his willingness to share his struggles and in turn help so many others. He has provided me with an example of mental health recovery that brightens my attitude and elevates my work. Allow me to relay his story.

Fred currently deals with rapid cycling bipolar disorder for which he is under treatment of both a psychiatrist and psychologist at the Veterans Administration Outpatient Clinic in Washington, Pennsylvania as a Marine Corp veteran. He was diagnosed thirty years ago and was released after a three-week hospital stay. Unfortunately this treatment included no follow-up nor medication. Fred returned to active duty with a persistent over-achieving discipline and fought through the stigma of being a mental health patient in the Marine Corps. Following his military service, Fred continued striving for excellence at each step along his professional career path which included sales, marketing, politics, and independent filmmaker. His hypomania carried him onward and upward until 2014 when he experienced a hard relapse.

His mother and wife implored him to seek help, which he resisted until the loss of his younger sister to opioid addiction. Fred started a long overdue treatment program.

At first, progress was slow. In addition to clinical services, he began attending my support group at the Bridgeville Library. Fred’s confidence grew through the combination of these resources along with his persistence, the guidance of facilitators, and the interactions with those around him in group. As he became more confident, he began to give back the things that he had learned through his experience and his renewed thirst for knowledge. Fred added his unique skill set from his varied career path and went to work.

Feeling the sheer power of the shared experience through support group participation, Fred found an opportunity with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) program, In Our Own Voice (IOOV). The program provides two trained presenters to go out into the field to share their mental health recovery experiences. For the past two years, Fred has made presentations to first responders, family, peer, consumer, and student groups and has increased his involvement to include work with NAMI on other programs. He has been in the top 10 fundraisers over the past two years for the annual NAMIWalks for the local affiliate. Fred has spoken on behalf of the organization publicly to both the Allegheny County Bar Association and appeared on CBS local affiliate KDKA’s morning talk program, PTL Live, in 2017.

This was just the beginning of his involvement with consumer engagement. Fred became a NAMI certified Connection Recovery Support Group facilitator in 2017. Working with Pennsylvania 42nd Legislative District State Representative Dan Miller, he established a meeting location within the district and began with a small group of nine consumers at the Dormont Library. Since then, the group has grown to 46 with an average active attendance of 15-18 per bimonthly session.

Additionally, Fred interfaces with Representative Miller’s office in advocating legislation that the congressman is proposing to his political networks and within the mental health community, the most recent of which is Pennsylvania HB 2095 calling for the addition of early intervention depression screening to school health services.

Part of that community is the Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers’ Association (PMHCA). Fred is entering his second year as a Board Member at Large for the PMHCA. He executes advocacy work through legislative contacts, public speaking to rotary clubs, NAMI efforts, and personal projects.

Fred also pursues two personal projects worth mention.

The first is his labor of love, his website MindshareOnline.com. One thing that Fred continued hearing at presentations was that most information on mental health services in southwestern Pennsylvania were scattered and that most potential consumers gave up in frustration after a relatively short time of seeking support. Again, he went to work. Spending six months’ time and averaging ten hours each week, Fred gathered resources from the five local counties. The result was this area’s only online centralized repository of all thing mental health related. From groups to services, from children to adults, from veterans to families, information for all is now gathered here. The bulk of the site contains information on local resources, but it also includes links to national resources.

His second personal project is writing. Although Fred writes for a living, he uses his way with words as part of his mental health toolkit, both locally and nationally. Locally, he pens a monthly column entitled, “Mental Health Spotlight” for Pennsylvania Bridges Magazine. Fred started as a staff writer two years ago and has risen to the position of Managing Editor of the publication. In just another example of his dedication to helping others, Fred has made a point of recruiting writers for this paper from the mental health community.

On the national front, Fred is an official contributor to *The* *Mighty*, the largest online digital health community created to empower and connect people facing health challenges and disabilities. They have over 1 million registered users and are adding a new one every 20 seconds. The stories and videos from *The* *Mighty* are viewed and shared more than 90 million times a month.

Not only does Fred promote the concept of recovery to local, statewide, and national audiences, he encourages and inspires those around him to not only overcome their disorders, but to achieve.

Despite risks to career, finances, and public acceptance, Fred’s commitment to consumer advocacy is fearless. Fred has chosen to work from home, and although he often struggles to make ends meet, ALL of his ten to twenty hours per week is voluntary. He serves others without any expectation of return.

Nonetheless, it is clear upon reading his professional work website that he leads with his mental health condition, portraying it not as an obstacle, but a strength. If you were to ask him about stigma, he would chuckle and say, “Why would other people feel uncomfortable around me? I’m the one who battles everyday just to get up, shower and dressed – then I have to start my day. We’re the warriors!”

And Fred Terling clearly believes it.