



ACT News Brief: Howie the Harp Graduate, Kyle Williams, Reflects on Working with the ACT Institute

July 21, 2020

The ACT Institute was deeply privileged to host 2 Howie the Harp Interns from February through April of this year. Kyle Williams & Orlando Nunez brought their skills, perspectives and compassion to their NYSPI internship and the ACT Institute is eternally grateful to them. They were active participants in ACT Institute planning and hosted a series of Peer Specialist Support calls, pulling from their own lived experience, their educational process through Howie the Harp, and all they learned from their time working on the NYSPI inpatient unit.

Kyle Williams (he/him/his) shared a reflection on his experiences and work with ACT Institute.:

I was on “Twitter” last night and there was trending topic on “cultural reset”. It mostly incorporated a host of memes & random “Disney +” moments, however I couldn’t help but to meditate on the trend. A cultural reset speaks to me, no matter the subjective overlay or humor. I see the lives of the participants we work with hang in the balance of the “1%” better we choose to be or ignore daily. How valuable to have a profession in the scope of mental health & human services. “Human” being the master component.

A “cultural rest” in this context is a call for all to consider how language engagement and energy leadership still proceeds the sleepless nights it took to get to our relative points; that’s what I’ve learned. The only hierarchy is “care + those who are need of care”. To void the humanity of the participant for the benefit of our “Little Fires” is no different than those with privilege realizing they have to thief hardship for depth.

I’ve learned that a diagnosis is information & not the house of fears that society desires for me. I’ve learned that all stigma stems from one’s inability to evolve outside of the comfort and warmth of ignorance & misguided personal assessment. To serve is to incorporate humility and selflessness. To serve is to meet people where they are and nurse the “need”, then the chains begin to link. The chain is infinite because we are all connected at the point of trauma and rehabilitation. Everyone’s human experience is one trauma away from activating a diagnosis.



“Fall in your ways, so you can wake up and rise.” –Solange Knowles

I walked into this opportunity with a lens of humility, gratitude and uncertainty. I’m leaving this opportunity submitted to the cause of service, accountability & purpose. I learned that my representation didn’t need to be toned down; my representation is my superpower. It’s vital that institutions (especially those of prestige) hold the door wide open for identities of difference with their nuances in tow.

The cultural reset here is the acknowledgment that implicit & explicit biases serve our fears and not our participants. The acceptance of equality being a myth, noting there’s still work to be done to ensure we truly arrive to a point the seats at the table have open availability. The grace in getting it “wrong” and adhering to a narrative that fosters mutuality. The opportunity to change lives by the scales of the individual and not the ease of a blanket model.

Community & public regard as well as cultural competency is not a choice, it’s the standard. We are a sum of whom we assist, advocate & hold space for. Our intentional education and relative ego deaths speaks to work we believe in and measures the impact on a societal standard. May all the stories on the way to completion bring the fulfillment we’ve hoped for; there’s always room to be better. Thank you for a life changing opportunity.

Kyle also facilitated an online webinar title, ***Pronouns Matter***, during the ACT Special COVID-19 Webinar Series, introducing to the use of pronouns and their impact on the LGBTQIA+ community & POC intersections. The information Kyle provided during the webinar offered ACT Providers the opportunity to look at ACT work through the lens of social justice, we strive to continue educating ourselves on how to best serve the diverse population of ACT Participants and their intersecting identities.

We, at the ACT Institute, would like to thank them for their service to us and wish them all the best in their future endeavors. We are so thankful that they chose to spend their internship with us.