



## **Lauren Grimes Bio**

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Lauren Grimes is currently the Director of Network & Peer Services for On Our Own of Maryland. She directs the activities of the Statewide Consumer Network Grant Project, provides direct linkage and technical assistance to local Wellness & Recovery Centers, and liaisons with local and state agencies. She supervises the Transitional Age Youth Outreach Coordinator, the position that she held from 2011-2014.

Lauren has a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature and International Relations from McDaniel College. Lauren has struggled with and overcome numerous behavioral health challenges since she was a young adolescent, and has extensive personal experience with the mental health system which she freely draws from in her work in the peer world. As a young adult she has worked and volunteered with youth and adults involved in the behavioral health system, as well as youth in the foster care, child welfare and juvenile justice systems. She works extensively within the field of peer support and youth-led systems change on local, state, and national levels, aiding organizations in incorporating the youth voice into their policy and operations, and helping young adults to create an equitable and reciprocal relationship with their service systems. Lauren is a trained WRAP and Anti-Stigma Project Facilitator, a Strategic Sharing Trainer, a YouthMOVE National consultant, and she currently stands on boards/committees including YouthMOVE National Board of Directors, OOOMD's Public Policy in Mental Health Committee and the Anti-Stigma Project, Maryland Coalition for Families Young Adult Council, MHA's MD Peer Support Certification Workgroup, the MD Consumer Quality Team's Child & Adolescent Branch Advisory Council, the Maryland Early Intervention Program's Advisory Council, and several others as a behavioral health consumer advocate. She is also the 2013 winner of the SAMHSA's Young Adult Advocacy Voice Award.

**An Intro to a Young Adult Consumer Publication**  
**By: Lauren Grimes**

**“I am not young enough to know everything.”**  
**- Oscar Wilde**

In one of my fitful brainstorming sessions, after On Our Own of Maryland asked me to organize a publication by and for youth with mental health struggles, an interesting idea occurred to me. Young people and mental health consumers, as two distinct populations have the salient similarity of not only both being marginalized groups within society, but as being thought of as deficient or partial in one way or another. The predominant image of a mental health consumer within American society is that of an incomplete person. They are a human being, but a flawed one, one with faulty wiring somewhere which results in insufficient data leading to limited capacity. Young people have a similar prevailing image, and one even more widely accepted than that of the consumer, because it is understood as simple science. A young person is seen as an undeveloped person, an incomplete adult. They have smaller bones that will grow to their intended length and strength with years and lots of milk. They have less knowledge that will grow with diligent years in a classroom and some hard life lessons, and a frontal lobe that will remain undeveloped until at least 25 years old, when logic and careful consideration will finally eradicate their emotional impulsivity.

Yet, hasn't science also said that once you stop growing physically, you actually begin disintegrating? Human beings are many things, but they are not static. We are either growing or dying, right? Hasn't it also been said that as you get older there is a process which we often refer to as "being jaded"? Doesn't that process normally involve forgetting something you once passionately knew to be true, or at least being less able to connect with that conviction?

With the birth of the consumer movement, one of the ideas proposed by those who struggled with their mental health was that maybe the line between madness and brilliance is much thinner than we allow ourselves to believe. Maybe mental illness is a gift rather a deficiency, a sensitivity to forces within ourselves and the world that most of us don't or won't feel, a connection to a part of the brain that is not included in the standard 10% the average human accesses. Maybe those that we burned at the stake, lobotomized, and then tranquilized in "quiet rooms," in a de-escalating manner of barbarity over the centuries, are the very people that have

graced us with the most intensely beautiful pictures and progressive ideas about life, what it is to be human, and how we connect to the rest of the universe. Their ideas have challenged us as a society to open our minds and to not only refrain from relegating individuals with mental health experiences to society's fringes in the name of social hygiene and control, but to help them cultivate their unique insight into the world, so that they may become productive partners in making our culture and society the best and most reflective of us all and of all of our truths that it can be.

This concept, pioneered by the mental health consumer movement as well as the civil rights and gay rights movement among others, is, I believe, rightly applicable to young people as a group as well. Instead of marrying ourselves to the linear picture of young people as incomplete or underdeveloped adults, I challenge you to allow them to be a full and complete entity all their own, and to find whole value in the way they see the world. Rather than simply tolerating the characteristics of young people that make them typically "young," or striving constantly to replace them with characteristics which we consider to be more "adult," consider that those very things are a comprehensive worldview rather than an unfinished one; that their instinct, which we spin with negativity and call impulsivity, and the intense emotion of adolescence, which we make trite, are not deficiencies in age or shortcomings of knowledge, but valuable worldviews which, when we easily dismiss them under the pretense of "they don't understand yet," we rob both ourselves as a society of their unique insight and the young people themselves of the idea that their notions at all stages of their lives are important, inspiring, and worthy. Maybe the minds of those with mental health experiences are not short-circuited but more fully connected, and the frontal lobe of the young is not undeveloped but a different kind of mind altogether.

In the past decade there has emerged a new culture among young adults, fed by changing social norms such as the large-scale inclusion of women in the workforce, later ages for marriage and childbirth, and the pursuance of higher education by both sexes. This nascent culture of the 'emerging adult' rests at the intersection of adolescence and adulthood, between the colorful dreams of childhood and the more rigid lines and roles of adulthood, between the inherent supports of our youth and the great responsibility of seeking the those supports needed in adulthood.

We, as a behavioral health system talk at length about the great challenges and numerous difficulties that come with the young adult transition age, and about how we can and need to help with this process. I do not discount the potency of these challenges nor the need for support because the challenges have certainly overwhelmed me and supports have certainly helped in some cases. While this is valid, what I don't think we talk enough about are the enormous gifts of insight

that have also developed as the culture of this new age-group has emerged. Linearly, with regard to age, we as young adults rest at an intersection, but so therefore do the lessons we learn, and the knowledge we gather, and the experiences we have. These lessons and experiences which then become distinct ideals and values are derived from two different worlds simultaneously, and therefore young adults are often uniquely able to connect with the experiences of both adolescents and adults, two populations who often have great difficulty connecting with one another. 'In between' comes with undeniable challenges, but it also comes with wonderful gifts that need to be acknowledged before they can be cultivated just as challenges need to be recognized before they can be supported.

A 23 year old young woman wrote in her story *Too Close to the Sun*, which was published in The Icarus Project's Reader/Roadmap in 2006, that the most honest statement that has ever been uttered to her about psychosis is that "it is very hard to argue with a person who is not only manic and delusional, but [also] not really that far off the mark." There are advocates who have been touched by mental health experiences and who believe in its gifts as much as they do its challenges, and who insist on the benefit that could be reaped by us all if a concerted effort were made to understand the language of psychosis, so that these salient thoughts are not lost to us as a society. I see a similar dichotomy with youth. Our thoughts are often laden with angst or other emotions that can dilute the salience of a point the way that the symptoms of psychosis can also dilute a relevant thought. I am advocating here that this same effort toward understanding be applied to young people, especially those with mental health challenges, as I believe such a learning experience would benefit our larger society, as well as shed light on how to best support and care for youth and young adults both within and outside of the systems that serve them.

As a consumer movement, we have advocated for decades that recovery from the darkest depths of grief, addiction, mental illness, and trauma is a journey that teems with valuable skills and insights. Some of these come quickly and others slowly, some of them come from dreams and others persistent and careful routine. But so many of these skills and insights lay fallow as society continues to paint individuals with mental health experiences as dangerous, unpredictable, unrealistic, not whole, and because all of these assumptions, *not credible*. If you consider it for a moment, we so often do the same to young people.

We all feel like we have held *the* shimmering piece of truth in our hands; that we have touched its shininess, caressed its conundrum of perfect gelatinous angles; have known the thing that everyone else seems to be missing. We have held it on our tongues and waited to speak it or we have spat it at you because we want badly for you to know its unadulterated beauty too. We all deserve the

latitude to hold these truths fast and dear, and also to have them validated. I think adults are often not even aware of the frequency that they dismiss, ignore, and even deliberately squash the truths belonging to the young. The ideas that glow for them at 10, 14, or 18 years old should be stoked as a fire, and young people should be encouraged to speak them aloud, not despite the fact that they do not reconcile entirely with a more adult perspective, but *because* they don't. I believe we have as much to teach the world as we have to learn from it.

Young people and mental health consumers have much in common, and young mental health consumers have a voice doubly insightful and bursting to be heard. Here is what we have to say. Go ahead. Doubt us. We are not going to stop talking. Frankly, dear old mad, mad world, you do not have it all figured out.