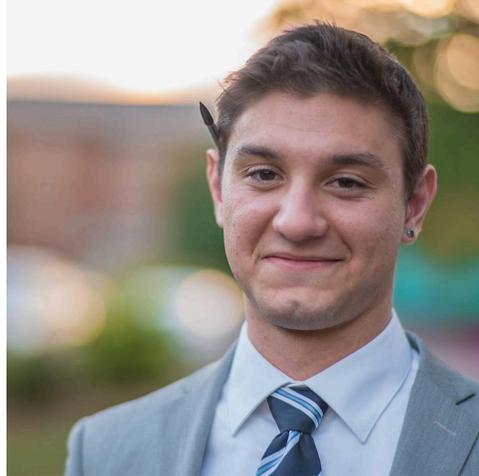


My name is Eli Wenger and I'm a Community Advisor (CA) in Parkwoods. This is my third year in Residence Life, and it's been a big part of my college experience. After three rounds of training, I'm lucky enough to know the visionaries behind the Res. Life mission—Eric, Scott, Matt, and Sarah—pretty well, and I trust, respect, and admire them greatly. This article is my attempt to share my front-row seat perspective on Res. Life, and to work towards kicking off another great year at EMU with all of us on the same page.



There are many who think that because a CA is accountable to their Residence Director (RD), they cannot help people where they're at. A hypothetical scenario like this is often cited: "It's late on a Saturday night and a resident is at a party, feels unsafe, but can't call their CA for a ride home because then they'll get in trouble for drinking." These scenarios always seem to boil down to "I can't ask for help because I'll get in trouble." Fortunately, it is the official policy of EMU Res. Life that in any case of self-reporting, disciplinary consequences are moved off the table. This is so important I'm going to say it again. In any case of self-reporting, disciplinary consequences are moved off the table and the focus is shifted entirely to finding ways to help and care for the resident in question. The policy of Res. Life is to interpret any kind of self-reporting as asking for help. This means that instead of getting in trouble, conversations are started about whether the best choices for personal safety and sanity are being made. The professional staff takes the time to get to know students so they can understand how they can help the resident in question – we never, ever want anyone to be afraid to ask for help.

There are many anecdotes I could supply at this point – the guy who, after hearing that smoking isn't allowed on campus, came to an RD to say that he had been trying to quit for some time and hadn't quite managed to do it yet but wanted grace while he kept trying and accountability once he did (which was all granted), or the students who had a six-pack in their room because they were having trouble connecting and instead of a typical alcohol violation were given the chance to throw a party for their hall. The thing that makes the difference in these situations is willingness from the residents to cooperate and speak honestly – and a commitment from the professional staff to act in the best interest of the resident. In training we are told over and over again: it is not our job to punish or enforce, it is our job to care deeply for our residents.

The bottom line is that those who have become CAs have chosen to do so because we care. We care that alcohol is involved in some 90 percent of college sexual abuse cases. We care about the 1,800 college students that die from alcohol poisoning every year. We care about the untold thousands of lives the college party narrative grounds down into the dirt; because for every story about the awesome night you had with your friends, there's a story where somebody was raped, choked on their own vomit, or was left unable to move past the unhealthy habits they started in college.

Creating an alternate culture is not a passive job. It's active; it takes work. It's a project. Those of us in Res. Life care about trying to create an alternative narrative where no one feels like an outcast for skipping the party on Saturday night, and we need your help. As we start a new year together, I ask that you all trust your CA and your RD to care about you, and

to scrap the idea that Res. Life is out to get people. Our highest priority is to do our best to make sure your college life is as safe and healthy and fulfilling as it can be, and we hope the fear of getting in trouble never keeps you from asking for help.