

# Journey

FOR MAINE'S RECOVERY COMMUNITY

ISSUE 9

## Tech Support

Intersection of  
a pandemic and  
an epidemic

**Braided Services:  
Penobscot Nation's  
Healing to  
Wellness Court**

**Courtney Allen  
Augusta, Maine**

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# Journey

FOR MAINE'S RECOVERY COMMUNITY

ISSUE 9

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# From the publisher -



It doesn't seem nearly enough to say "Black Lives Matter."

Not nearly enough compassion, effort, or energy can go into those three words that communicate the extent to which humanity is waking up to the fact that we as a society need a paradigm shift-systemically.

It's a multi-system issue and to fix it requires a multi-system approach: not just law enforcement, not just housing, or education, or healthcare, but also businesses and financial institutions play a part in righting this wrong.

It doesn't seem nearly enough to share postings on Facebook to amplify the extent to which the system is broken and not nearly enough to donate to our local NAACP or patronize local black-owned businesses.

I don't know what "enough" would feel like here, but one thing we do believe is that visibility saves lives.

It's important for people in recovery to share their journey so that others can see we do recover and a core value for Journey is inclusivity. Being visible and adding our voices to the volume that Black Lives Matter is an action we can take.

We can educate ourselves and do what we can to amp up the volume and be visible, vocal, bold, and consistent in our messaging, and although we'll make mistakes as we show up imperfectly we'll come from a place of love; and rather than be quiet out of fear of making mistakes, we'll continue to show up.

Alison's article in this issue, How to Be An Ally, gives us some guidance on showing up for this by 1) Listening, 2) Learning, 3) Showing up, 4) Finding our talent and using it, and 5) Speaking up. Sarah Kelly's article on Meaningful Conversations provides some tips on active listening.

As we look to do our part in creating a more inclusive future, we welcome conversations about race and recovery in these pages. And we'll actively seek out conversations to join as we learn more and engage more in being part of the solution.

From my heart,

*Carolyn*

# visible recove



## braided services

Penobscot Nation's Healing to Wellness Court weaves cultural connections into drug court program



## becoming an ally

Amy Clark shares her transition from affected other to an ally



## people like us live like this

Courtney Allen



## this recovery life

Mike Oullette

## In This Issue

- 09** Drug Court - a Lifeline
- 12** Tech Support
- 16** Growing Recovery Strong Communities
- 20** Making Service an Everyday Practice
- 22** Mission Driven
- 32** Meaningful Conversations
- 38** No Strangers
- 40** Letting Go of Holding On

## In every Issue

- 24** Recovery Allies - Being and Becoming An Ally
- 26** Financial Wellness - Prioritization
- 30** Employer Profile - Great Falls Marketing
- 34** New Ventures - Help with What's Next

# every saves lives



# Braided Services

*Penobscot Nation's Healing to Wellness Court weaves cultural connections into drug court program*

by Amy Paradyz

**R**honda Decontie grew up tagging along with her father, Frank Decontie, an addiction recovery counselor, to 12-step meetings where she would recite The Serenity Prayer along with the adults. She and her dad They lived in a First Nation community in Canada, and he would bring in ceremonial aspects—singing and prayer—while she would make headdresses and dream catchers.

“As a grown woman,” she says, “I can appreciate what he was

teaching me—the importance of weaving our Native culture together with 12-step recovery programs.”

As clerk of the Penobscot Nation Healing to Wellness Court since 2011, Rhonda Decontie has been key in developing the cultural component of what started out in 2008 very much like a state-run drug court.

“Folks struggling with addiction are often disconnected,” she says. “And, if we’re going to do work to

improve who we are, we need to know who we are.”

Drug court participants may be dealing with drug- or alcohol-related charges or a crime, such as theft, committed as a result of addiction. The Penobscot Nation, based at Indian Island near Bangor, has its own legal system and its own wellness court open to enrolled members of federally recognized tribes. Following the same key components of any drug court—including that participation is voluntary and the

offender is not violent—Native wellness courts also weave in elements of their shared cultural identity.

The success of any drug court or wellness court is measured by days or years of sobriety and reduced recidivism. Based on encouraging statistics coming out of the Penobscot wellness court, a core group—Rhonda Decontie, social worker Donna Decontie Brown (Rhonda’s sister) and Judge Eric Mehnert—have worked with the Passamaquoddy in Washington County, as well as the Hopi in Arizona and the Lac Courte Oreilles in Wisconsin, to help other tribes establish their own wellness courts.

On Indian Island, bimonthly court hearings open with a traditional spiritual practice of smudging, followed by a brief non-denominational prayer and a reading from regionally based Native moral instruction known as the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers. Participants sit in a semicircle, and everyone has the opportunity to speak, including encouraging one another and creating a supportive community.

“I was asked to develop a problem-solving court rather than a punitive court,” says Mehnert, who has served the Penobscot Nation as judge since 2008. “And that was the beginning of a whole new approach, for me, with the law. Nationally, more than three-quarters of all individuals who are incarcerated for a charge with a substance abuse component will end up back in jail within five years. That’s a frightful statistic, and what it tells us is that incarcerating people isn’t going to solve the problem. Instead, we need to help people navigate behavioral change.”

To do that, the wellness court staff is supported by a team that includes clinicians, substance

## “I can appreciate what he was teaching me—the importance of weaving our Native culture together with 12-step recovery programs.”

abuse counselors, mental health counselors, cultural advisors and, representatives of housing, law enforcement, education, and career and social services.

Wellness court participants are intentionally brought back into the fold of the Penobscot community. They celebrate New Year’s Eve together with drumming, dancing and feasting. They make drums and weave baskets, learn to make traditional regalia (a shawl for a woman or a ribbon shirt for a man) and attend sweat lodge ceremonies and sweetgrass gatherings.

“One strand of sweetgrass is not strong on its own, but when you weave it together is stronger,” Decontie Brown says. “What we’re really doing is braiding—intertwining services working tightly together to lift up and support the participant.

The Penobscot use the term “braided services” rather than “wrap-around services,” which, for some, connotes blankets and the historical trauma of blankets being a form of transmission of

smallpox to indigenous people.

“The program isn’t just focused on substance abuse counseling but acknowledging personal and historical trauma and the impact that plays on our people and our wellness,” Decontie Brown says.

Mehnert compares trauma to an infected wound. “Until we can get the infection—the trauma—out, the wound won’t heal,” he says. “A lot of people haven’t had the opportunity to be in counseling, and substance abuse often starts as self-medicating for underlying trauma.”

Under Mehnert’s leadership, the program has evolved from employing a probation officer with a law enforcement background to a case manager with a social worker background—and the budget recently grew to allow for two case managers.

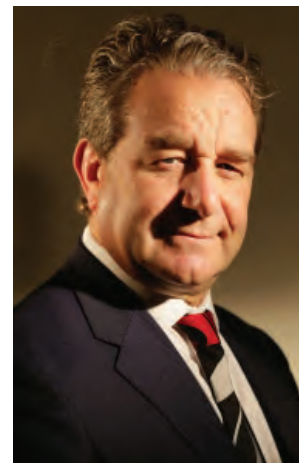
Participants go through the program in 12 to 18 months, or 90 to 120 days for each of the four phases. To move on to the next phase, the participant must have 30 days of sobriety. Medically assisted treatments such as



Donna Decontie Brown



Rhonda Decontie



Judge Eric Mehnert

naloxone are allowed; medical marijuana is not.

In the first phase, the participant meets with a case manager weekly and follows recommendations, which may include an inpatient or outpatient recovery program—and participates in three recovery meetings and three random urine screenings per week and a wellness court hearing twice a month.

When a urine test comes back positive for substances, Mehnert has the authority to sentence the offender to jail time. But that's a last resort, given that the goal isn't to incarcerate but to rehabilitate. To that end, the wellness team has been known to ask the offender to write about what triggered their lapse and how they can prevent another.

The four phases in the Penobscot wellness court are named for traditional medicines—tobacco, sage, cedar, and sweetgrass—and

are positioned on a medicine wheel graphic with each phase tied to a cardinal point direction and a spiritual gift: East for new beginnings, South for protection and purification, West for cleansing and North for wisdom.

At program completion legal charges are dropped—and, Mehnert says, the majority of wellness court graduates do not “re-offend.”

When participants complete a phase, they are given the traditional medicine for which the phase is named. At commencement, the graduate has all four elements, which they light with an eagle feather. The tribal chief or other tribal leader and family and close friends of the graduate are invited to mark the accomplishment, and the graduate wears tribal regalia, walking with pride in their community.

“The old ways are being lost,” Decontie says. “But I see people

light up when they talk about the chance to dance or be in a sweat lodge, and they share those experiences at drug court. When I see participants coming back and holding their heads high, it fills me with joy.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Penobscot wellness court has continued biweekly hearings—via Zoom—and started a weekly session with case managers and participants to discuss a chapter in the book *The Red Road to Wellbriety: In the Native American Way*.

*Freelance writer Amy Paradysz first met sisters Donna Decontie Brown and Rhonda Decontie at a Wabanaki-inspired fashion fundraiser for Maine Historical Society. Both have a passion for behavioral health and wellness and a commitment to Native culture, art and fashion.*

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**Amy** is a freelance writer from Scarborough.

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# Cumberland County Drug Court was a lifeline for Lukas Rosov

by Amy Paradysz

Lukas Rosov, 39, of South Portland says that the Cumberland County Adult Drug Treatment Court saved his life.

“I had a long criminal record with drug-related charges, selling, consuming and getting caught with drugs,” says Rosov, who was addicted to cocaine and heroin. “I had a lot of wreckage, financially and in terms of my family and the rest of my life.”

Caught selling drugs in Southern Maine, Rosov was put on probation and—not ready to give up the drugs—went on the run. When law enforcement eventually tracked Rosov down in Massachusetts, his probation officer drove there to pick him up, and Rosov spent weeks detoxing in Cumberland County Jail.

And then, just when Rosov was on the verge of sobriety, he succumbed to temptation when—while in jail—he was able to get some heroin.

“I was shocked at the weakness of my will,” he says. “I’ve only been on four drug runs in my life, but they all last years and they end with me burning my life to the ground, with legal consequences.”

It wasn’t until he was about 40 days sober that he was able to sleep more than an hour at a time and stopped fantasizing about escaping and getting drugs. And then he was ready for the opportunity offered to him—drug court, an intensified probation program.

The 18-month program has five phases, and as the participant moves through the phases, the requirements loosen. The first phase includes random urine testing about three times a week, a weekly meeting with a probation officer and a requirement to attend recovery meetings and other positive social sober events.

“As important as the steps and the meetings were, finding other men I could connect with and get vulnerable with because we were desperate,” Rosov says. “There were a number of people who I connected with early on in my recovery who experienced reality in a way in which I longed to experience reality. They were satisfied with their lives and took joy in the people they were around and in themselves.

I’m four years into it now, and I do experience reality the way I want to.

Life as a sober man is comparably more fulfilling.”

Recovery meetings and check-ins remain a big part of his life, as are yoga, prayer and meditation.

“My life is full, rich, and meaningful, and I love the people who are in it,” Rosov says. “People call me because they want my help with something or know I have an ear to listen. I love to show up for people and to feel useful.”

Giving back has included talking with new drug court participants, sharing advice and encouragement.

“Be open and stay with the discomfort, because growth is always painful,” Rosov tells them. “Get a little uncomfortable. Get a little embarrassed. When you’re new to recovery, take the suggestions. If you feel like you don’t connect with someone’s story, keep on showing up until you do.”

Information on the Cumberland County Adult Treatment Court is available at [www.cumberlandcounty.org](http://www.cumberlandcounty.org).

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*Amy is a freelance writer from Scarborough.*

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# CCCSUP: Lots of Letters, Important Work

*Cumberland County organizations come together to network and share information*

During his run for office, District Attorney Jonathan Sahrbeck met with various groups of people doing work around the addiction conversation here in Cumberland County. Once he was elected, he started a coalition—bringing these groups together to facilitate conversations and the sharing of resources and information.

**The Cumberland County Coalition of Substance Use Prevention (CCCSUP)** is a group that meets every few months, about five

times a year. The group consists of individuals and representatives from social services organizations, recovery houses, recovery community centers, businesses and the local government administration.

The group is committed to communicating and building a network that is dedicated to increasing prevention and education for all ages, working with treatment providers, encouraging harm reduction strategies, embracing the recovery community,

decreasing stigma, and increasing the safety of all citizens.

At a time when communicating and working together has an additional level of complexity, due to physical distancing, the group continues to work together via Zoom because the work that gets done is too important.

If your group is interested in attending, please reach out to DA Sahrbeck at [sahrbeck@cumberlandcounty.org](mailto:sahrbeck@cumberlandcounty.org)

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## The growing list of organizations participating in the coalition:

211	Kennebunk Police Department (and Rotary)	Portland Needle Exchange Program
Access Health (Brunswick)	Lake Region Recovery Center	Portland Police
Advocate (parent of victim of SUD)	Liberty Bay Recovery	Portland Public Health
Alliance for Addiction & Mental Health Services	Maine Association of Recovery Residences	Portland Recovery Community Ctr
Be The Influence	Maine Health	Preble Street
Blue Willow	Maine Health, Anti-Tabacco Services	Probation
Casco Bay CAN	Maine Health/CTI	Public Health Consultant
Commissioner of Public Safety	Maine Pretrial Services	RALI
Community Health Pharmacies	Maine Reentry	RN/SUD Expert (Maine Health)
Community Housing of Maine	MaineWorks	Senator Collins' Office
Cumberland County Sheriff's Office	Marketing Consultant WGME	Senior Director (Maine) Addiction Policy Forum
Deputy Director of Preble Street	Mercy Hospital	SoPo Unite
Director of Opioid Response (Governor's Office)	Mid Coast Hospital	SoPo Unite / MMC
Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)	Milestone	South Portland Police
Easter Seals Maine	Myrtle Street Sober Living (Owner)	The Family Restored
Easter Seals NH (Recovery Friendly Workplace)	Neuroscience Expert	TOA Lake Region Public Health Program Coordinator
Foundation House	Opportunity Alliance – PATH	Tobacco Harm Reduction
Grace House	Opportunity Alliance – Public Health	US Senator Angus King's Office
Journey Magazine	Pine Tree Recovery	Van Liew Mediation
Just Love Worldwide	Portland Downtown	Westbrook Communities that Care
Keeping Kids Safe (Maine)		Westbrook Police



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# Tech Support

*At the intersection of a pandemic and an epidemic, telemedicine revolutionizes addiction treatment.*

by Amy Paradysz

**W**hen Dr. Ted Logan of Maine Behavioral Healthcare transitioned his substance use disorder practice to mostly telemedicine, COVID-19 was still at least three years in the future. For him, the impetus was expanding access to rural Mainers, some of whom would have to drive 100 miles or more to a clinic.

“It expanded access,” he said, adding that patients didn’t need to take a day off from work, line up a babysitter or drive in icy conditions. When another physician was ill, Logan was able to cover for him, even though they were in different regions of the state, and patients received seamless care.

Outside of rural geographies and challenging locations such as jails, telemedicine didn’t really take off until COVID-19 pushed nearly every aspect of our lives—employment, education, religious services, social gatherings and even medical care and recovery support meetings—into the virtual realm.



televideo and—where there wasn't a smartphone or a robust data plan available—50 percent telephone.

“We really worked hard at replicating what our individuals who we work with are used to but in the remote model,” Poulin says. “For some individuals, especially those who were challenged by reliable transportation and child care, this model works very well, and it's our hope that we are able to preserve some aspects of remote care.”

Enso Recovery had already been using telemedicine with inmates at Kennebec County Jail and Two Bridges Jail in Wiscasset using a platform called Vsee, which was quickly overloaded as COVID-19 drove medical care online. Switching over to Zoom and Google Hangouts, Enso quickly moved all patient groups—not just incarcerated groups—online.

“Realistically, it was overnight,” says Steve Danzig, executive director. “As soon as this started happening, people started becoming nervous about coming into the office. You could just feel it.”

Logan, whose pre-pandemic patient load was 80 percent virtual, is now seeing his model replicated around the state. Meanwhile, due to a change in federal law as of May 15, the initial medical evaluation for medicine assisted treatment (MAT) can now happen virtually rather than in person.

“We are creating a way to match resources with people and meet people where they are at, which includes people in abusive relationships, people coming out of incarceration and people who are unemployed,” Logan says. “It's a very important thing to feel heard and understood and

**“For some individuals, especially those who were challenged by reliable transportation and child care, this model works very well”**

that people care for you and that you have things to offer as well as receive.”

By mid-April, four out of five Penobscot Community Health Center recovery sites were offering group counseling via Zoom and receiving positive feedback from patients and providers.

“They're happy to see each other and connect,” said Amanda Gagnon, manager of recovery services

“Since COVID-19, telehealth has become a mainstay of



Deb Poulin,  
Maine Behavioral Healthcare

“For years, the technology was available but you couldn't get people to use it,” says Gordon Smith, director of opioid response for the State of Maine. “And now telemedicine should be here to stay.”

Faced with a pandemic, the barriers to use of telemedicine—ensuring patient privacy and insurance reimbursements—were surmounted quickly. Nearly all medical insurance providers, including Medicaid, are now reimbursing for telemedicine.

Deb Poulin, senior director of substance use treatment and prevention at Maine Behavioral Healthcare, said that before the COVID-19 crisis, addiction treatment services for individuals, groups and intensive outpatient programs, were 90 percent face to face, nine percent televideo and one percent telephone. By the end of April, services were 50 percent



Vijay Amarendran - Penobscot Community Health Center

eatment,” says psychiatrist Vijay Amarendran, director of addiction Services at Penobscot Community Health Center. “We want social distancing, which causes some social isolation. But there have been some success stories.”

Some patients dropped a three-hour round-trip commute, while others were able to schedule their check-in during their lunch break. And, even with all this convenience, the psychiatrist is still able to see the patient and pick up on emotional cues, making telemedicine with video more effective than a phone call.

Paul Murphy, a clinician with Maine Behavioral Healthcare, had a patient who was quite nervous about participating in group therapy. Coincidentally, groups moved to Zoom before the patient’s first session.

“Zoom made group easily accessible to him right off the bat,” Murphy says, “and it may make the transition for him into live groups easier.”

In Maine and all over the world, support meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics

Anonymous (NA) also moved online, where it is possible to be “actually anonymous,” Murphy says, “listening to what goes on and seeing if it’s a good fit.”

That shift online was swift, though not immediate—and finding and accessing a meeting online was challenging for many in those early days and weeks. Large numbers of recovering addicts who were used to attending a meeting several days a week without fail suddenly went weeks without that support—and treatment providers saw the effects.

“That was a big loss of a support network for a lot of our patients,” Amarendran says. “We saw instability as people who had been sober for months or years took a step back—even people who didn’t relapse tended to experience more cravings, or smoke more cigarettes than before or experience more withdrawal symptoms or more depression, anxiety or social isolation.”

Examine that same glass as half full rather than half empty, and it is clear that a regular support network helps reduce cravings, depression and anxiety and prevent social isolation.

And while there are advantages to local face-to-face meetings that foster deep connections and communities, the quickly growing global network of online support is immediate and ever-present.

“Meetings are hosted all over the world at all times of day and night,” Smith says. “You can check in with people in New Zealand at 3 a.m., if that’s when you need a meeting.”

*Amy is a freelance writer from Scarborough.*

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*Portland Recovery Community Center at 468 Forest Avenue in Portland, Maine*

# Growing Recovery Strong Communities in Maine

*Recovery centers are formed by people in recovery for people in recovery*

by **Leslie Clark**

**L**et me start with a confession. Not so many years ago, I didn't even know what a recovery community center was. I'd been driving by the newly started Portland Recovery Community Center (PRCC) on my daily route, and noticed the building. I'd been hearing casual conversations about what was going on there and how wonderful it was, but I just didn't get it or understand the need for it. I'd been in active recovery for

many years but had never heard of a recovery community center. Was it another AA clubhouse? No (but there are some AA meetings there.) Is it a drug counseling center? Not at all (but, there are people in recovery who have taken peer recovery coach classes and can help.) Was it a drop-in center? Nope. (You can definitely drop in anytime, but be prepared to actively participate in your own recovery journey, including the potential of volunteering.)

Today, I know a lot more about recovery community centers and their history and growth in the United States. I am blessed to serve as the executive director of PRCC, which is also the home of the Maine Recovery Hub for recovery centers throughout Maine.

I could have never known when I first walked through the doors of the PRCC and felt its welcoming magic that I would become its

first executive director and a huge champion for recovery community centers.

What is a recovery community center and why do they matter? Recovery community centers are formed by people in recovery, for people in recovery. They exist to provide peer recovery support services, educate the community about addiction and recovery, and promote the positive benefits of recovery in order to reduce stigma. They serve as community centers for people in recovery—providing a place for people to gather and create a community that includes everything from support groups for people in recovery and their families, to advocacy activities and recreational and social events. Many recovery community centers like PRCC are independent nonprofit organizations. Others may operate with a sponsoring organization. What they all have in common is that they share some core ideals and values.

There are many pathways of recovery. Recovery community centers support multiple pathways of recovery and provide a place for people to explore, create, and find the supports that work best for them. These might include 12-step meetings, SMART recovery, Recovery Dharma, Wellbriety, yoga, HOPE, art and music groups, or other established as well as newly emerging ways of finding health and freedom from addiction.

Recovery is supported by connection with others. All humans have the inherent need to belong and to connect with others. Isolation goes hand-in-hand with substance use disorder. Forming connections with others who have shared similar experiences creates community, magnifies hope,

## **“We rebuild our own lives, and use our recovery to help build healthy communities and contribute to positive society”**

and provides vital support and opportunities for mutual healing. We find ourselves through our community of belonging.

Recovery is a lifelong journey sustained by hope, gratitude, and service. Recovery is not a linear process and is based on continual growth throughout our lives. The process of healing provides opportunities to improve health of mind, body, and spirit, and to help others. We share our stories, our experiences, and our hope to help others and to continue our own journeys in wellness.

Recovery involves addressing discrimination and transcending shame and stigma. Recovery is a process by which individuals, families and communities confront stigma, overcome shame, and stand up for others. Recovery community centers provide community education, speaker opportunities, and advocacy for just policies and increased resources for treatment and prevention. We rebuild our own lives, and use our recovery to help build healthy communities and contribute to positive society. We may volunteer to serve on advisory councils, boards, task forces, and committees at the local, state, and federal level.

In the past three years Maine has grown from having just two recovery community centers (PRCC and the BARN) to having ten, and the number is increasing. In late 2017 PRCC became its own independent nonprofit organization and our board set a bold vision—that every person affected by

addiction in Maine will have direct access to a local recovery community center that provides support, education, and individual resources that enhance their ability to heal, strengthen, and grow in their recovery pathway, throughout all stages of their journey. The state legislature and the governor’s office have been extremely supportive in providing funding to start new centers and championing peer recovery support services, recognizing their unique and important role in helping people find and sustain recovery.

If you are interested in volunteering, finding a recovery community center near you, or starting one in your own community please call PRCC at 207-553-2575 or visit us at [www.portlandrecovery.org](http://www.portlandrecovery.org).

***Note from the publisher: This is the first article from Leslie Clark in a series focusing on the recovery community centers around Maine. We’re excited to amplify & promote the great work being done at the Centers!***



*Leslie M. Clark, MSW serves as executive director of Portland Recovery Community Center (PRCC). Leslie speaks openly as a*

*person in long-term recovery to help reduce stigma and advocate for resources and effective public policy.*

## Here are the recovery community centers in Maine:

**Roads to Recovery  
Community Center**  
1 Water Street, Caribou  
(207) 493-1278

**Aroostook Recovery  
Center of Hope**  
36 North Street, #1, Houlton  
(207) 271-0085

**DownEast Recovery  
Support Center**  
311 Main Street, Calais  
(207) 952-9279

**DownEast Recovery  
Support Center**  
11 Free Street, Machias  
(207) 259-6238

**Bangor Area  
Recovery Network**  
142 Center Street, Brewer  
(207) 561-9444

**Boothbay Harbor Peer &  
Wellness Center**  
35 School Street,  
Boothbay Harbor  
(207) 315-6236

**Peer Learning Center at Bath**  
340 Oak Grove Avenue, Bath  
(207) 389-4236

**Lakes Region  
Recovery Center**  
25 Hospital Drive, Suite E,  
Bridgton  
(207) 803-8707

**Portland Recovery  
Community Center**  
468 Forest Avenue, Portland  
(207) 553-2575

**Pir2Peer Recovery Center**  
1009 Central Avenue,  
Millinocket  
(207) 723-1327

**Larry Labonte  
Recovery Center**  
412 Waldo Street, Rumford  
(207) 418-4983

**REST Center**  
205 Main Street, Lewiston  
(207) 783-7378

**Coastal Recovery  
Community Center**  
24 Lincoln Street, Ste 103,  
Rockland  
(207) 691-3697

by Nancy McCallum

**M**ike Ouellette says the lowest point of his life was November 14, 2014. He had been struggling for a long time. He had lost his parents to cancer, and a sibling had also been diagnosed with cancer.

Mike had moved from his northern Maine hometown to York County, to live with a family member. He was struggling emotionally. He felt he had no direction. He was unable to sleep. He began to self-medicate with alcohol. "At first it was relief, then after time it became a need," he says. "My father was an alcoholic, like his father before, and I swore I would not let it happen to me, but eventually I fell into the cycle where I needed to consume alcohol just to function."

Mike lost "most everything," including a place to live. "I had nowhere to go," he says. He remembered hearing about York County Shelter Programs (YCSP) at AA meetings he had attended.

"So, I showed up with just one big bag in my hand that contained all that I had, and that's really where my story begins," he says. "They welcomed me with open arms and assured me that everything would be OK. Those words meant so much for me to hear, because until then, I was so lost. It was scary at first, but after a few days of settling in, I knew I had come to the right place."

YCSP assigns new residents a "navigator" to help people address the issues that led to homelessness.



*photo provided by Nancy McCallum*

"I went to various groups, was set up with a doctor to address health issues, met with housing to make sure I could acquire a place to live after my stay, but most important of all, I was able to talk to a counselor and finally let go of all the things that were eating me up inside, and learn how to deal with life on life's terms," Mike says.

After a few weeks he was enrolled into a six-month residential substance abuse treatment program at Angers Farm in West Newfield. After completing that, he moved back to the shelter while waiting for housing, and started a vocational training program in YCSP's Food Services department. "I started doing chores like dishes and cleaning. You know, keeping busy. That was a big part of my sobriety," he says. "Learning how to do things all over again without having substances involved." He

eventually became a cook. After working two years in the kitchen, in January 2017 he was offered the position of Food Pantry Coordinator.

"After all I had been through, when I thought my life was ending in hopelessness ... I was able to turn it all around by doing one thing: Asking for help," Mike says. "That's what it's all about: Hope. I love my job, the agency I work for, and the people that surround me. I was given a new lease on life, and I am so grateful!"

Who else can say that every day when they come to work they get to pay it forward and freely give the tools and hope that were so freely given to them! I am truly blessed, and owe so much to York County Shelter Programs."



# Making Service an Everyday Practice

by David Lee

If you feel like you don't have time to volunteer, that doesn't mean you can't engage in service.

Engaging in service doesn't have to mean volunteering at a soup kitchen, animal shelter, or for some other non-profit.

Instead of seeing service solely as volunteering for a worthy organization or cause, what if we see it as something we bring to our everyday lives?

It's like the saying "charity begins at home."

So does service.

It's just as important—if not more important—to recognize simple opportunities in our everyday lives to give to, and uplift, others.

Here's an example:

A few months ago, I met with Liz Cotter Schlax, CEO of United Way of Greater Portland at their office in the Old Port. I walked in and introduced myself to the receptionist, Sharon Roberts.

Not only was she warm, friendly, and welcoming, she also said at

the end of our pleasantries "Boy... you have lots of energy for a Friday afternoon! That's great!"

I remember being touched by her generosity of spirit... both in bothering to notice and appreciate when someone shows up in an uplifting way, and in bothering to share her observation with that person.

Think of how rarely that happens.

Within a couple of weeks after my interaction with Sharon, I was reminded of the simple gift she gave to me, when I encountered

two other receptionists who interacted in a bored, indifferent manner.

I noticed the difference in how I felt after interacting with them, compared to how I felt after meeting Sharon.

The difference speaks to a line from Jim Carrey's famous commencement speech:

"The effect you have on others is the most valuable currency there is."

Your effect on others might also be the greatest gift you have to bring to the world.

You can show up in the world in such a way that your interactions are a gift and an act of service through bringing more mindfulness and intentionality to all of your relationships and interactions.

## We can do the following:

Be fully present and truly listen when talking with others.

Instead of acting in an impersonal, "you don't matter" way to clerks, consciously make eye contact, smile, and speak as if you were talking to any other person who matters. Better yet, beam love at them.

Smile at strangers.

Practice being more aware of opportunities to give sincere compliments and be more generous with your compliments.

Do the same with gratitude.

Practice being tuned into noticing opportunities and potential connections that might benefit others, and then follow-up by taking the extra step to let them know.

Share uplifting stories of people overcoming challenges or being kind to others (can't think of any, Google "inspiring stories" or "positive news").

Remind people who are feeling scared of the things they've overcome—i.e. "If you overcame that, you can overcome this!"

Practice managing our emotional state so we are filled with joy, gratitude, and goodwill. When we are filled with these emotions, we can't help but show up in a way that uplifts others.



*David Lee is an internationally recognized authority on organizational and managerial practices that optimize employee performance, morale, and wellbeing, and a career*

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*Eddie Greyfox Burgess in his 1965 Ford Fairlane | photo credit: Brian Delaney*

# Mission Driven

## *Eddie Greyfox Burgess delivers curbside wellness*

by Amy Paradysz

**N**othing draws a crowd like a turquoise 1965 Ford Fairlane shining in the sun—and that’s exactly what Eddie Greyfox Burgess was looking for in a “wellness mobile.”

“It was contemplating its life mission and its personal worth,” Burgess says, with dry humor. “I talked it out of going to the scrapyard, and it now has purpose and a better life. It does get a lot of attention, especially with all the flags on it.”

Burgess, who has health issues that make it difficult for him to continue working full time as a social worker and substance abuse counselor, didn’t think that the state’s dusty pallets of printed materials on topics such as substance abuse, violence and diabetes prevention should go to waste. Four years ago, he started driving around in his pickup truck, handing out old brochures and coloring books and starting conversations with people—sometimes making an impact on the lives of people in desperate situations.

It wasn’t until Burgess refinished the Ford Fairlane two years ago and took it out on an outreach spin that he really started to make some traction—both in terms of event invites and the numbers of people drawn into dialogue. Since then, Burgess has encountered about 50,000 people, distributing marketing materials published by the Centers for Disease Control, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the State of Maine, some printed during the Baldacci administration a decade ago.

“I can’t tell you how many coloring books were shredded to ‘say no to drugs’ or ‘stop drinking’ or ‘don’t smoke,’ which are all messages that should be given out today,” says Burgess, who has been sober since 1994. “These are all important messages. But somebody sitting in a cubicle thought that this coloring book was worthless because it has been sitting in a pallet and nobody requested it.”

Confident that the materials would be appreciated even if not requested, Burgess loaded them into the trunk of the Fairlane—along with issues of *Journey* and poison control and suicide prevention hotline magnets—and went to antique car shows, festivals and public safety events in and surrounding Oxford County. He puts the materials out on a table and lets that start a conversation. “It’s not a clinical setting, and people aren’t hindered in any way and just talk,” he says. “People come and tell me their stories all the time.”

A few years ago, Burgess encountered a young mother with substance use disorder who was living in her van with her son. He encouraged her to get treatment and didn’t know whether he had gotten through to her. It wasn’t until she was picked up on possession charges and went to the Maine Correctional Facility in Windham that she was ready to make a commitment to herself—with medication-assisted treatment (MAT), group counseling and one-on-one therapy.

When she saw Burgess again last summer, she told him that she had 18 months of sobriety and was living with her son in an apartment. A conversation with an empathetic stranger had made a difference—which is, in a nutshell, the mission of Burgess’ Wellness Mobile. It isn’t really about a car or printed materials—it’s about using those tools to forge connections in which Burgess can leverage his personal and professional experiences to pay it forward—to throw a pebble in the pond and wait for the ripples, whether he gets to see them or not.

Sometimes those ripples start in unexpected ways, such as the story of how Burgess turned his life around. “My family is

## Eddie throws a pebble in the pond and waits for the ripples, whether he gets to see them or not

pretty rampant with addiction—drinking, smoking, gambling, and then some other substances like cocaine,” he says. “Addiction has always been around me. Even at a young age I can remember going to people’s birthdays, barbecues, and family gatherings, and everybody was getting hammered. There were always substances.”

Though he is Micmac on his paternal grandfather’s side, Burgess hadn’t grown up connected with the tribe. Nonetheless, the tribe came looking for him in 1994 when he gave up on substance abuse treatment and disconnected from his family. Out of the blue, three Micmac tribal elders showed up at a bed and breakfast in rural New Hampshire and found 22-year-old Burgess sitting in the dark. “They evaluated me, they gave me my name—Greyfox—and they realized the situation that I was in, which wasn’t good,” he says. They led his first recovery meeting—and many more after that, connecting him, both literally and figuratively, with a tribe. “How they found me, I really have no idea,” he says. “But thank goodness they did.” Burgess never drank again.

After studying human services substance abuse services at Maine Community College and the University of Maine at Augusta, he spent many years as a social worker helping people with substance use disorder, sex addiction or post-traumatic stress disorder. “My health has deteriorated enough now that I don’t really do well in an office,” he says, adding that he is studying for a chaplaincy certificate. “The Wellness Mobile

gets me out of the house, driving around in an old car and talking with people.” The Fairlane—and car shows, in general—may be taking a back seat this summer due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But Burgess has shifted gears to dropping off bags of materials—including issues of *Journey*—in economically challenged areas of Franklin, Oxford, Sagadahoc, and Androscoggin counties. Gas card donations keep the old gas guzzler on the road.

More information is available on the Wellness Mobile Facebook page, which is evolving into a community bulletin board of wellness-related resources on everything from substance abuse and suicide prevention to finding food distribution and healthcare resources and avoiding tick-borne illnesses

“It’s funny: As a kid, I learned how to drive in a Cadillac similar to what John Kennedy drove, and now I’ve kind of gone full circle,” says Burgess. “The Native elders will always tell you life is a circle; where you start, you always return.”

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*Amy is a freelance writer from Scarborough.*

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# Five tips for being a recovery ally

by Alison Jones Webb

**B**eing a recovery ally is a journey, a lifelong commitment to take actions that support people in recovery. There are many ways to show your support. Here are some tips that I have learned from my friends and colleagues in recovery.

## 1. Listen

There's nothing like talking to a person in recovery who is open and willing to discuss their experiences. Ron Springel of the Maine Association of Recovery Residences suggests getting to know people face-to-face. "It's really hard if you haven't had addiction to understand the power that addiction has." Most of our friends and neighbors who are in recovery are eager to talk about their own recovery and to answer open-ended questions like, "What is your recovery journey like?" or, "What do you like most about being in recovery?"

## 2. Learn

Make a point of learning about the pathways of recovery. A great place to start is by watching two documentaries: *The Anonymous People*, about recovery, and *Generation Found*, about youth recovery.

Maine's recovery community centers are the best places to learn about local recovery resources (see page 16 to learn where to find the centers)

Many 12-step meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous are open, which means anyone can attend. There are hundreds of meetings in Maine. A list of AA meetings is at the Central Services Office website

The Recovery Research Institute is

the one of the best online resources to answer just about any question about recovery.

## 3. Show up

Tom Coderre, Northeast Regional Administrator for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, suggests becoming involved in a local task force or coalition that already has a strategy they are implementing rather than starting something new. "Allies can bring new energy, thoughts, and experiences to the group," Tom says.

Attending community events like recovery rallies and community meetings to discuss addiction and recovery is a great way to show your support.

## 4. Find your talent and use it

Employers can hire people in recovery and create a safe space for employees to disclose their recovery status.

Teachers can speak in positive terms about the possibility of recovery and the hope that a healthy lifestyle offers.

Faith leaders can create a safe place for members of the congregation to talk about recovery.

Community members can volunteer at local recovery community centers.

Community members can become recovery coaches. Recovery community centers and other organizations in Maine offer recovery coach trainings, which aren't just for people in recovery. According to Phil Valentine, Executive Director

of the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery, the organization that designed the recovery coach curriculum used in Maine, "If you're lit up, if you're fire is stoked internally, it doesn't matter whether you're in recovery or not. It's really just the ability to love and care and sit with somebody and have your spirit warm theirs."

People in leadership positions, including policy makers, can examine the role that discrimination against people with substance use disorder plays in organizations and systems – like health care, employment, and housing – and work to make system-wide and structural changes.

## 5. Speak up

We can all call out stigma. Philip Rutherford, Executive Director of Faces and Voices of Recovery, the national advocacy organization for people in recovery, says that, like fighting racism, one of the best ways to fight the stigma of substance use disorder and recovery is to call it out, one-on-one, person-to-person when you hear it. When you hear someone using insulting or offensive language about people with substance use disorder, or people in recovery, speak up. Rutherford suggests saying, "When you say that, it can have a negative effect on people trying to change their life. Is this what you meant? Tell me more about why you feel that way."



Alison Jones Webb is a public health professional who has worked in the field of substance use prevention, treatment and recovery in Maine for over 15 years.

# Becoming a Recovery Ally

*No special skills required*

by Amy Clark



**W**hen the opioid crisis hit my family it did so with the force of a wrecking ball, destroying everything in its wake. My family was lucky; our story has a happy ending. In the years since, as I watched the crisis continue to ravage the Bangor area, I have constantly felt compelled to give back, in support of families like mine.

It seemed like an impossible idea; after all, I am not a social worker or a medical professional. I did not know anything about addiction, and outside of my family I had never even met anyone who identified as being in recovery. I didn't think that I had anything to offer. And then, a friend gave me a tour of the Bangor Area Recovery Network (BARN).

The first time I walked into the BARN, I knew it was unlike anywhere I'd ever been. At the time, there was no full-time staff. Almost all the work was done by volunteers, and they were completely self-funded. It was inspiring, the amount of love and commitment that went into such an accomplishment. I remember the first thing I said when I left was, "I honestly didn't

know there were that many good people in the world."

I began volunteering, serving on committees, and trying to learn everything about the recovery community that I could. I was able to share my family's story with the BARN's monthly Addiction in the Family meeting for affected others.

What I remember most about my family's struggles was the deep loneliness that I felt. Although I have always been lucky to have amazing friends, none of them understood what we were going through. The way addiction hung over our family was like a black cloud. We lived every single moment of our lives wondering "What's next?"

Groups like that didn't exist when my family needed them. As I sat for the first time in a room full of people who totally understood what I went through, I immediately understood the importance of connection and community, not only for those in recovery, but for their friends and family as well. A few months later, one of the creators and facilitators of the meeting moved out of the area and asked if I

would be willing to take over for her. I was surprised, honored, and honestly, a bit terrified.

Two years later, I continue to co-facilitate this now bi-monthly meeting and have just begun my second term as Chair of the BARN Board of Directors. I have been able to learn so much in that time, not only about addiction and recovery, but about service, advocacy, strength, and resilience. I have met the most amazing people who have dragged themselves out of the depths of hell and became healthy, happy people, who do all that they can to help others just like them. This place that I went hoping I might be able to inspire one person with my family's story, ended up inspiring me more than I ever expected.

After years of believing I couldn't help, I now support people in recovery, work to have a positive impact in my community, and help families just like mine. Anyone can be a recovery ally, all it takes is compassion, empathy and a willingness to show up. No special skills required.

# How to prioritize bills and spending during times of financial insecurity

by Casey McClurkin

Ladies and gentlemen: it's official. We have reached the most unpredictable moment of our lives. Because of the COVID crisis, our economy—be it city, state, country, and the entire world—is facing unprecedented insecurity. I don't need to go into details; you read and watch the news. Suffice it to say that with unemployment rates in April being reported at 14.7 percent, and with more people filing every day, there's a good chance your wallet has been impacted by this crisis.

Even if you still have your job, I'm willing to bet you have changed your spending and saving habits in some way, intentionally or not. For example, if you are working from home, you are saving on fuel and maintenance on your car. Many automobile insurance companies are sending refunds or automatically discounting their rates. Perhaps you are no longer spending money on child care. Maybe you aren't spending as much on clothes, toiletries, haircuts, etc. Dining out and going to the movies is no longer an option, so you're saving there also.

However, many of you may not have your jobs any more. My heart goes out to you! If that is the case, you have much bigger things to worry about than "well at least I don't have to spend money on a haircut." It is not lost on me that there are much bigger problems. Mortgage, rent, credit card bills, medical bills: none of these things are negotiable. Or are they?

Here's the thing: many banks and lenders are offering a great deal of leniency to their customers. The absolute worst thing you can do is nothing. Just because you cannot pay your bill on time, it doesn't mean you can simply ignore it. The best thing you can do is communicate with your bank or credit card company. Grab your last



bill, find the customer service number, and call it. The person who answers the phone wants to help you.

I recommend calling with a smile on your face and humility in your heart. Explain your situation in as simple and straightforward a manner as you can and ask, "Is there anything you can do to help me?" and then wait. Perhaps there is payment assistance, or waived late fees. Maybe you could set up a payment plan. Arm yourself with the facts and do what you can.

But be prepared: there is always a chance there is nothing the customer service agent can do to help you. In that case, say thank you and ask politely to speak with their supervisor. Again, explain your situation and ask "Is there anything you can do to help me?" If the answer is still no, you have some tough decisions to make and you need a plan; it's time to weigh your options.

First, you need to list the absolute most important financial needs: food and shelter. In the state of Maine, Governor Janet Mills signed an executive order to prevent evictions for most tenants (visit [Maine.gov](http://Maine.gov) for more information). I encourage you to learn what assistance you may be eligible for.

Second, it is important to list your other bills to know where you might be able to cut costs. Could you reduce your cable bill? Phone bill? Insurance costs? Where can you cut out costs completely—for example, do you have any recurring subscriptions you no longer use? Think about what is most important to you and your family; it's easier to make decisions if you know your values and what is most important.

Now is not the time to be worried about your credit score, reducing

debt, and saving for an emergency fund. This is the emergency you've been saving for!

Cash flow is the focus right now. Pay the minimum balance on your credit card if you can, don't put money aside into savings if you need to pay your rent and electric bills, prioritize your spending. If you have savings and you need it, now is the time to use it!

Additionally, The CARES Act provides for people who have been affected by Covid-19 to borrow from their qualified retirement savings accounts (IRA, 401k, etc.) without penalty and you have up to three years to pay it back. There is some fine print, so before you decide to make that particular move, you should speak with a tax, accounting, or finance professional. The point is: if you have that resource and you need it, now is the time to help yourself.

To learn more about the CARES Act, google "CARES Act 2020."

Things will get back to a "new normal" one day. None of us knows when that will be and what that will look like. What we do know is this: our economy has weathered many storms and this storm, too, shall pass.

My heart goes out to all of those affected by the coronavirus and I especially want to acknowledge the essential workers who put themselves directly in the line of fire every day to make our lives better: medical professionals, public and safety professionals, and every person who contributes to the supply chain. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.



*Casey McClurkin, who started her recovery journey in 2012, is a Behavioral Financial Advisor.*



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# People Like Us Live Like This

by Lara Santoro

## Courtney Allen Augusta, Maine



**C**ourtney Allen remembers the first time she saw the color green. She was 22 years old, a mother of two, and just a few months in recovery. She turned towards one of her oldest friends and said, “Have the trees always been this green?”

Courtney’s color-blindness set in at age eleven when her grandmother died of brain cancer. By then, “generational poverty, substance use, physical and sexual abuse” had placed her at the mercy of a mother plagued by mental illness and two aunts who shot up regularly in the bathroom. “My family did not know anything different and could teach me nothing different,” says Allen. She did what she had seen everyone else do. She dropped out of school and began to drink. “I became instantly alcoholic,” she remembers.

With alcohol came drugs. With drugs came correctional facilities, psychiatric wards, the experience of homelessness -- at age fifteen, with a baby. “We heard the rent was cheaper in Augusta,”

says Courtney, who left her life in Rockland for a circus act in Maine’s capital balancing two jobs, a child, and an addiction to opioids and cocaine. She got pregnant a second time. She learned of the existence of Suboxone at a needle exchange and was able to give birth to a healthy baby, but the weight of so much untreated trauma knocked her back into the hole of addiction within two years.

The turning point came after a night of drinking, with foggy memories of a knife fight but a clear image of blood splattered on the walls of her apartment. “I didn’t know where my children were and I was terrified,” she says. She scrambled out of bed and ran to her children’s room. They were playing videogames. Says Courtney, “I looked into their eyes and I saw the same look I gave my family members when I was a child.”

In active addictions, Courtney believes, “a door to a new life

opens for just an instant.” She checked herself into detox and to this day asks herself what would have happened if there hadn’t been a bed for her. “That was my moment,” she says.

What followed, Courtney says, was a life filled with “privilege and luck.” Every time she asked for help, “there was somebody there to welcome me in.” She had

### **“a door to a new life opens for just an instant”**

lost her children to the state, her life was in shambles, but when she got to Family Treatment Court, Judge Eric Walker told her to approach the bench. “I’m crying. I’m shaking. I can’t put two words together. He smiles at me and he says: ‘Tell me about your children. This is your chance to brag them up. I know you want to.’”

Courtney told him about Wyatt, how quietly intelligent he was for an eight-year old, how he loved to draw. She told him about Aimin, a redhead with all inner fire of a

redhead. His third birthday fell precisely on that day, February 28th 2015.

It took just shy of one year, checking in every morning, being open and vulnerable, working a twelve-step program, facing the feelings she had numbed herself to her entire life, but the day she got her children back, the courtroom was packed to bursting and shook with the applause.

She'd woken up that morning early. Her children were already under her roof. Like that morning a year before, there was the sound of videogames. She'd wrapped Aimin in a bear hug, and said to him, "Today is the day I become your mom."

That burst of applause in court scattered the seeds of many more. Courtney recently graduated at the top of her class from the University of Maine – Augusta with a degree on the intersection of justice, substance use, and public policy.

She spent the spring interning on Capitol Hill in Senator Angus King's office and is now the Lead Research Assistant at Colby College for a project on the obstacles to long term recovery faced by women in Maine.

Her plans for the future? "I'm heading to Muskie in the fall for a master's in public policy. I plan to pursue my doctoral degree," she says, "I am going to go from a sixth-grade dropout to Dr. Courtney."

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Lara Santoro is a writer in Portland Maine.

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# Employer Profile : Great Falls Marketing

by **Patricia McCarthy**

**G**reat Falls Marketing has one key requirement for job applicants—that they possess a desire to succeed.

“We’re always looking for great motivated people,” says Steve Mondor, vice president of sales and marketing for the call-center operation based in Auburn. “Regardless of your background, if you’ve got the motivation to work and can put a smile on your face, and you’ve got the desire to earn and can follow a process that we teach, you can do extremely well.”

This attitude has helped Great Falls gain a reputation as a “second-chance employer” that’s

open to hiring people in recovery and others who may have spotty employment records. Because of the nature of its business handling so many credit-card transactions, background checks are done. So an applicant with a criminal history of fraud, for example, won’t be hired. But Steve says a gap or two on a resume is a non-issue.

“A lot of employees come to us with gaps for whatever reason. And that’s OK. It’s certainly not something that would make you ineligible. As long as you have that desire to learn and work, we want to talk to you.”

Great Falls tries to accommodate a variety of people, including those not quite ready to plunge

into a typical 40-hour workweek. “Some people maybe aren’t able to do a job where they have to present themselves 9-to-5. Maybe they want to work nights or weekends or something different. We have that flexibility.”

The company, which started in 1999 and was renamed Great Falls Marketing in 2005, had workers at three centers and a warehouse until March when COVID-19 led to transitioning all 400-plus employees to remote setups.

With an 8-year-old at home and a wife who works at a healthcare facility, Steve directly understands the many interruptions this new brand of workday creates.

“It’s going better than we thought it would, but there are challenges,” he says, noting that the goal is to bring people back on site as soon as it’s feasible. “If you could work without distractions, it’d be one thing. But when your kids are home all day and there’s no daycare or summer camps ... we as a company have to be really supportive. Our middle- to top-level managers are fantastic. They have an average of seven years working at this company. That has really helped for transitioning new people.”

At a time when so many businesses are struggling just to stay afloat, Great Falls is seeing robust sales and continues to hire. “We’re very fortunate. We survived Y2K, we survived the recession of 2008 and everything else. We continue to be extremely busy,” Steve says. “I deal with business development and client relations so I’m always talking about what’s happening in the industry. Right now, people aren’t going to retail, so they’re looking to purchase stuff either through a telemarketer or online. And it’s happening across the board with all of our clients.”

Easily recognizable products Great Falls sells include still-popular Time Life DVDs and CDs (think Johnny Carson and Dean Martin roasts!) and Ancient Nutrition. It sells a lot of health and wellness and CBD products, beauty devices, exercise equipment, home goods, everyday household items.

Steve, who has worked for the company 11 years, says most people have only a vague sense of what goes on at Great Falls. He offers a snapshot:

“Our specialty is inbound sales. So info-mercials you might see on TV—‘Call now to order this, call now to order that’ – there’s a

**“Regardless of your background, if you’ve got the motivation to work, can put a smile on your face, and you’ve got the desire to earn and can follow a process that we teach, you can do extremely well.”**

good chance if you call that toll-free number, it could ring into one of our centers in Maine. We specialize in selling products to people.”

Great Falls also provides customer service, answering questions, explaining returns, handling email correspondence for some clients. A Brand Ambassador outbound division involves calling customers to check on their satisfaction and thank them for purchasing, in hopes of developing relationships that lead to more sales. And the company also has a growing fulfillment house in Saco where it ships products out.

Most employees come to Great Falls without sales education and get extensive training. They learn through role-playing, feedback on calls (“Hey, here’s where you might have said this and it would have changed the way that call went”) and positive reinforcement.

“It’s not easy. It’s not for everybody,” Steve acknowledges. “Sometimes you have to have tough skin to work in this business.” But for employees looking for a fresh start, and to succeed, it can be a great opportunity.

“You can make really good money,” he says. “Our top agents are making \$25 to \$30 an hour every single week. Our average agents are probably closer to \$18.

But it’s an opportunity where you literally sit down, and warm leads come right to you. You can learn so many things, not only sales, but confidence and really how to overcome rejection, how to control a conversation, how to put the best foot forward to maximize your results. People skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills – and how to listen. The skills you learn here can translate to really any type of industry.”

Steve attributes the company’s success to building good relationships.

“We’re well-recognized as one of the best in the business in the country, and we have clients from all over the world that use us. It’s a little hidden gem here in Maine.”



*Patricia McCarthy is a writer, editor and photographer from Cape Elizabeth.*

# Meaningful conversations

*Take them to the next level through listening*

by Sarah Kelly



One of the most beautiful pieces of recovery is the sharing of stories—the connection that happens between two people or a group of people. There is a bond and mutual respect that occurs based on witnessing another person share their most painful times and how they healed.

Meaningful conversations take effort. The first step toward a deeper connection and conversation is to listen. We live in a world that doesn't always listen, and this permeates into our lives in recovery. We are inundated with technology on a daily basis. Our brains have adapted to multi-tasking, and our attention span has shortened. If we are distracted by the phone in our hands or trying to think of a response before the person has even finished speaking, then we are guilty of not really listening or being present.

Active listening is a skill used often by coaches and counselors to build relationships, but you don't need to be a professional to use this skill. Using active listening in your own recovery journey will deepen your relationships, build trust, allow you to feel more empathy, help you practice mindfulness, and learn to be more present. When you actively listen, you also create a safe place for vulnerability to exist. In turn, the trust that develops allows your own voice to be heard in a more expansive way.

Here are some tips for developing your practice of active listening and meaningful conversation:

**Put down distractions:** Turn off your phone notifications and set it aside. If you're somewhere that is noisy or offers distractions, face yourself towards the person in a way that won't tempt you to look around.

**Body language:** There's a reason the saying "poker face" exists, our bodies and facial expressions tell a story! It's important to notice your own body language. Sit or stand in a way that is open, make eye contact, nod in affirmation.

**Listen to listen, not to respond:** How often are you already thinking of what you want to say next before the person has even finished their thought? We all do this because we've learned that responding is what you're supposed to do in a conversation, but how do we respond if we haven't really heard? As your mind begins to drift, bring it back to the words that the person in front of you is saying. As with meditation, you can't always help it if your brain drifts, however you can acknowledge your thought and come back to the present.

**Affirmation:** Simple ways to affirm what you heard include a simple nodding of the head or making an affirmative noise such as "mhmm." Another way is by reflecting back to the person by restating what you heard them say, then giving the time for them to confirm if this was accurate.

**Ask permission to respond or offer advice:** Sometimes it's just about getting something off their chest; the person isn't looking for advice or for someone to fix the situation.

Having someone listen to them sharing their truth could be the only thing that person needs. Ask for permission before responding with your own personal story or offering advice.

**Ask open ended questions:** Instead of giving advice, ask questions. Support their process by helping them work through their own answers rather than immediately offering advice. Curiosity also shows interest that you want to learn more about the person or the situation.

**It's okay to want to be heard too:** Active listening isn't about not having a voice, it's about allowing someone the space to use their voice before you jump in.. In any meaningful conversation, there is the opportunity for everyone to share their own stories, insight or struggles. Wait for the time in the conversation when it is appropriate to offer your thoughts or before you switch gears to talk about something going on in your life.

Just like any new skill, active listening and meaningful conversation takes practice. It's okay to not do this perfectly right away or all of the time. You can continue to develop the skill and see how it benefits you and your relationships. Try it out!



**Sarah Kelly**, owner of Sarah Kelly Coaching, is a National Board Certified Health & Wellness Coach (NBC-HWC) and Connecticut Community for

Addiction Recovery (CCAR) Certified Recovery Coach. Sarah is an active member of the recovery community.

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From left, Lisa Sweet, workforce development specialist; Sarah Hutchins, administrative specialist in the Southern Region, and Gigi Guyton, regional manager and microbusiness specialist for New Ventures Maine.

# Wondering what's next?

## *New Ventures Maine helps point people in the right direction*

by **Patricia McCarthy**

**T**hree years into her recovery from substance abuse, Roseanne St. George of South Portland knew it was time to get her finances on track, too. While figuring out how to do that, she found an organization online that wound up improving her life forever.

Roseanne enrolled in a five-week program called My Money Works at New Ventures Maine, a program of the University of Maine at Augusta that offers a

variety of free services to Mainers around the state.

“I got so much out of New Ventures,” says Roseanne, 51, who went through the program in 2018. “It basically teaches you everything about money. I set up a budget and slowly started chipping away at my credit reports. It took a lot of work to clear it all up, but I did it, and it feels amazing.”

Roseanne gives much credit to instructor Lisa Sweet, the

New Ventures Maine workforce development specialist for Cumberland and York counties for three years. Besides teaching courses that range from cleaning up poor credit to writing a spending plan, she helps people find jobs, figure out career moves, create resumes, hone interview skills and more.

“I love the work that I do, and doing this work with different populations,” says Lisa, one of 20 employees at the organization

that started 41 years ago to help displaced homemakers with everything from managing money to starting a business. Funded through the state, grants and donations, New Ventures Maine has evolved into a multifaceted organization.

“We specialize in helping people who are in transition, whatever that looks like,” says Gigi Guyton, a regional manager and microbusiness specialist who has worked for New Ventures for 12 years. “We target people who are low income or in marginalized populations. So that includes people who are incarcerated. The past few years, we’ve really done a lot with the Southern Maine Re-entry Center for women and the Maine Correctional Center, both in Windham. We’re finding that a large majority of the folks who are incarcerated are in recovery or trying to be.”

Gigi explains that education to provide firmer financial footing is crucial for people leaving prison “so they won’t go back to their old ways ... and can have some little nest egg as they’re being released.” Inmates on work release who successfully complete a 15-hour New Ventures Maine financial class can have their savings matched upon release. The nonprofit offers a variety of incentive matching programs like this.

Lisa says working with women who are about to resume life outside of prison is the most rewarding part of her job. “They have some really good success stories,” she says. “When they’re nearing release, the conversation shifts to, OK, what’s your plan? Where are you going? What’s your support system like? Will you be working? Those types of things. We build trust and relationships so that hopefully they do call us when they release

so they can receive the match funds, but also so we can continue to help them.”

New Ventures Maine puts a lot of focus on smart money planning and budgeting, not just saving money.

“One thing we talk about a lot is what do you need versus what do you want – and what did that look like before and what does that look like now,” Lisa explains. “We get at the root of why folks interact with money the way they do. And then we offer some tools to change that thinking if you want to change that thinking.”

This was a big takeaway for Roseanne, a former convenience store manager on disability for chronic back problems who says that lesson makes sticking to a budget much easier.

“Do I really need coffee at a store, or can I go home and make it? I look at things like that now, and I’m able to save money,” she says. “It’s such a relief to have savings in case the car breaks down or whatever.”

Among other things, New Ventures Maine also helps to administer the statewide Family Development Account program for low-income people with minor children; manages the statewide CA\$H coalitions that offer free tax-prep; runs a Totally Trades program that lets middle and high school students explore trades careers; and teaches business startup programs. Gigi teaches a popular 12-week Venturing Forth class – for soup-to-nuts business planning.

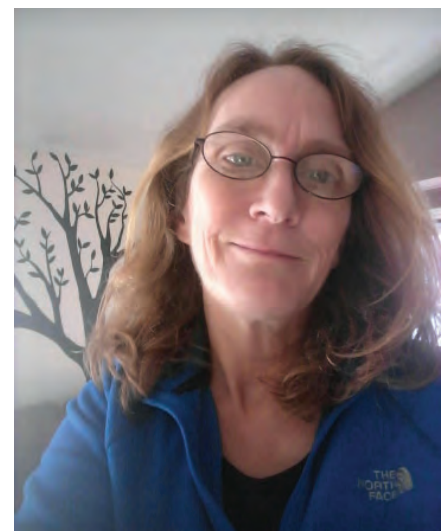
Courses and one-on-one communications have switched

## “We specialize in helping people who are in transition, whatever that looks like”

to online Zoom classes and phone calls because of COVID-19. That’s been manageable, she says, as most students have been able to participate these ways, even if only listening in via phone. But it’s been logistically challenging coordinating to continue services for incarcerated people and communicating with immigrants who much prefer in-person dealings. And Totally Trades, which features hands-on training, is being rethought and is on hold for now.

“We’ve been able to piece it together and do the best we can,” Gigi says. “We just have to be very nimble.”

Lisa adds that New Ventures Maine employees definitely have many more questions to address – and find answers to – because of the pandemic limits. Questions run the gamut: What do I need to qualify for unemployment? How do I plan for the summer with children and working? Is it the right time to look for a job?



Roseanne St. George

Should I sign up for the Payroll Protection Program? Can you talk me through reopening my business? Fortunately, Gigi notes, the organization has a healthy network of partnerships to connect people to.

No day at New Ventures Maine looks the same, which presents challenges – and opportunities. Both Gigi and Lisa light up when asked what they love about their work, and Gigi sums up:

“Oh, my gosh,” she says. “It’s so, so rewarding when people you’re working with get it, whatever it is you’re teaching them – when they move through whatever barriers were in their way.”



Patricia McCarthy is a writer, editor and photographer from Cape Elizabeth.

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# Finding Recovery "In the Rooms"

Recovery meetings happen all over the world in the rooms of church basements, recovery centers, hospitals, jails and prisons, recovery clubs and the homes of those in recovery. People have gathered in self-help groups for more than 85 years and over time, many different types of 12 step and non 12-step groups have formed. For many people, this is a primary tool in the process of recovery, but for others, in-person meetings can be difficult to attend or are not a safe option.

In places like Aroostook county and other rural areas here in Maine, meetings are hard to get to for those without transportation and where public transportation is not an option. Transportation isn't always the thing stopping someone from attending a meeting, as fear and anxiety can be a determining force in a person's ability to go to a public meeting as they may need to keep their recovery secret.

Sickness, physical immobility, and hospitalizations were other factors that Ken Pomerance and Ron Tannebaum, two men in long term recovery, considered when they co-founded, created and tested the online recovery website called In The Rooms.

They understood the need for anonymity that many groups required, and created a platform where anyone could join an online meeting from the safety of their own home, their hotel room or even their hospital bed. The

site grew rapidly from word of mouth alone, much like the growth of in person self help groups.

In The Rooms believes in all paths of recovery and hosts meetings in everything from Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and other specialty 12-step recovery programs, food recovery programs, dual-diagnosis meetings, codependency groups, as well as a variety of blogs and articles. In the 12 years since its inception, the site has grown to over 130 live video meetings every week and has over 600,000 members worldwide.

In The Rooms has more than just meetings, with a variety of ways to connect to recovery resources and other people in recovery: blogs, articles, meeting finders, daily meditations, podcasts, speaker tapes, events calendars, message boards and more.

A whole section called "Getting Started in Recovery" has 2 guides dedicated to those in early recovery or for anyone curious about recovery. The first guide is for those seeking recovery and contains a lot of information on alcohol detoxification and what to expect in the first week and month of alcohol recovery. The second guide is for friends, family and allies.

In The Rooms has made support in recovery easy to access and private. The site has embraced



*Ken Pomerance and Ron Tannebaum, founders of intherooms.com*

that there are many ways to recover and has gathered all of the options into one easy location. The co-founders say they have received emails from people who have never gone to a face to face meeting who have gotten and stayed sober although their intent for the site is as a supplement to in person meetings. In The Rooms has been giving the gift of recovery to over half a million people, each in their own rooms.



*Niki Curtis of Portland is a woman in long-term recovery whose passion is helping and teaching others to love themselves.*



# No Strangers

*In the midst of strange times, we can maintain and even enrich our relation to each other*

by **Kimble Greene, PhD**

**T**he other day, during a virtual gathering, we were discussing the challenges of staying connected in these strange times. My friend Jody exclaimed, “We may be living in strange times, but we are not strangers!” So poignant and a good reminder of the importance of maintaining if not enriching our connections with loved ones and people around the globe. Another common utterance I hear often these days is, “I want things to go back to normal.” As hard as it may be to accept, that’s not likely to happen. We’re in the midst of a

hard reset. Change is challenging for many people in regular circumstances. In a situation like this, change can truly be a struggle. The ongoing changes in our lives and the world are made even more daunting because no one really knows when the current situation will end, what’s going to happen when it does and how life will look on the other side.

There’s more to the story, however. What’s taking place in the world is an important catalyst for significant change, both for the planet and its inhabitants.

We are being asked to re-evaluate our lives, our perspectives, and our choices. Additionally, mother earth is receiving a much-needed respite from the overabundance of human activity.

The scope of change taking place globally isn’t so different from individual change. When you think about it, transformation in people’s lives often comes on the heels of some sort of life altering, frequently traumatic event. Things like accidents, disasters, abuse, transition, recovery, loss, illness, and so on. Being launched

into a new way of life happens to people all the time. It's just that right now it's happening globally, to everyone all at once.

As hard as it is—and it's really hard in many ways for lots of people—we are in a period of transformation. The potential for and promise of new growth and rebirth is palpable. If we embrace that promise, we will come out of this temporary period of heightened vigilance with new perspectives, renewed energy, as well as personal and global alterations, enhancing the quality of our lives along with the planet.

While there's lots of discussion about crisis and disaster, it's much more crucial that we focus on how we choose to influence the outcome and how we decide to respond individually, within ourselves and toward others. Change and growth are constant...we're evolving!

As we settle into new ways of living and working, we must also create new ways of loving and connecting. Relating—to ourselves, one another and the planet—is the lifeblood of our existence. While the ways we connect are shifting, they're not going away; they mustn't go away.

We are necessary to one another, for surviving and thriving. So, seek out and create new ways of connecting to and embracing—yourself, one another, and the world.



*Kimble Greene PhD,  
Founder and Chief Catalyst  
at Catalyst Enterprises  
Worldwide, LLC is an  
author, master coach, and  
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# Letting go of holding on

## *Grief and Recovery during the Covid 19 pandemic*

by Sarah Siegel

**T**he COVID pandemic has resulted in a great deal of loss worldwide and as a result, many people are experiencing grief as a result. People in recovery from addiction are familiar with the grieving process, because healing often asks us to let go of A LOT. After all, we must release the way things were, to move towards something new. Even though the process of letting go is natural and normal, it can feel overwhelming, confusing, and scary. As the world changes because of the virus, The Five Stages of Grief™ model can help us understand our feelings about loss without trying to resist or escape them by using dangerous substances or behaviors.

If we were grieving before the pandemic, it may now feel

compounded because of the added losses of employment, childcare, personal space, and the general loss of the life we had before the world was changed by the virus. Knowing that we are not alone, and that others are experiencing these feelings too can help us feel more comfortable with reaching out for support. We truly are stronger together, there are lots of people who want to help and none of us needs to navigate these times, or any times, alone.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, who was a Swiss psychiatrist, created a five-stage model for understanding grief after observing the process many people went through at the end of life or when dealing with the loss of a loved one. Her research and model have been helpful to

so many since she first published it in 1969.

Originally published in her groundbreaking book, *On Death and Dying*, in 1969, The Five Stages of Grief™ are: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. It is important to note that these stages—which also apply to coping with grief unrelated to death—are not necessarily linear and not everyone goes through every stage. The model shows that it is normal to experience these (and other) feelings after a loss. After all, feeling an array of different emotions is not a bad thing, it is part of what makes us human.

However, for people in recovery from addiction, grief can feel extraordinarily overwhelming. We have relied on substances or behaviors to numb ourselves

## Knowing that we are not alone, and that others are experiencing these feelings too can help us feel more comfortable with reaching out for support.

in the past and it can be hard to learn how to “feel” again. We may be afraid that if we allow ourselves to feel things, we will become overwhelmed and have a setback.

The good news is that feelings are constantly flowing through us, always changing, and no single feeling lasts forever. If we can learn to take care of ourselves during times of emotional intensity, we do not need to be afraid of having setbacks when we “feel” in a big way. Instead, big emotions can remind us that we need to lean into our support system more and pick up some of the tools in our toolbox. The more we learn to cope with feelings that once were overwhelming, the more trust we will have in our ability to heal.

In her 1975 book, *Death: The Final Stage of Growth*, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross writes: says “The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”

Ultimately, she maintains, even loss can contribute to our personal growth. Sometimes, the hardest experiences in life can be gifts in disguise, as they allow us to get clear about what really matters and to appreciate people and things we may have taken

for granted. This is especially true now, when so many all over the world are adjusting to this strange, new normal way of life during the coronavirus pandemic. We can use this time to cultivate gratitude for everything we still have and compassion for all those who are struggling, including ourselves. We can use this time to reassess our priorities and become more intentional in how we live. We can ask ourselves, “what really matters in my life?” and “how can I focus more on what really matters to me?” We can find ways to be of service to others and to stay connected emotionally even if we are distant physically. Above all, we can heal, and we can recover. We do not

need to wait for the virus to go away, or for things to go back to “normal.” Instead, we can choose to seek healing and recovery here and now and we do not need to do it alone. We never need to do it alone.



*Sarah Siegel is a recovery coach at Crossroads as part of an innovative project with Portland Recovery Community Center. She has been in recovery from*

*opioid use disorder and substance use disorder since 2007 and from working the sex industry since 2003. Today she is a mother, interfaith minister, meditation coach and writer.*



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# MANY PATHS

## About this column

*We are fortunate to live during a time when there are many options for finding and sustaining lasting recovery from addiction. We are all individuals and while there are many aspects of our personal journeys that may be similar to those of others, we are each called to discover for ourselves what works and what doesn't work for us. Journey's Many Paths column provides options and shines a light on different approaches that people use to maintain lasting recovery without endorsing specific approaches or recovery programs. We ultimately leave it up to you, the reader, to decide what works best for you, while presenting you with multiple pathways to recovery.*

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### **Heroin Anonymous (HA)**

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[www.marijuana-anonymous.org](http://www.marijuana-anonymous.org)

### **Narcotics Anonymous (NA)**

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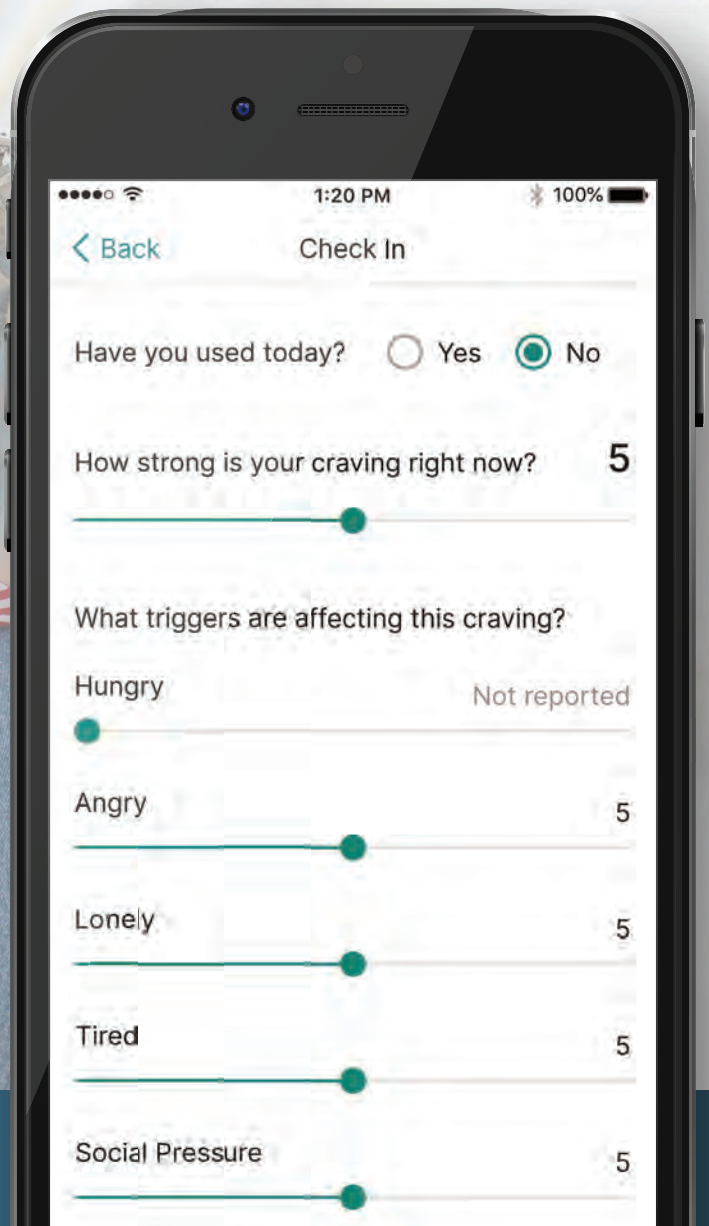
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