

# QUARTERLY report

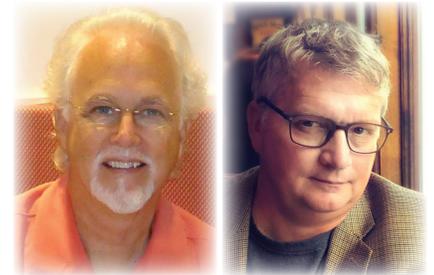


Volume 22, No. 2 | 2020

## The Digitalization of Recovery: **SUPPORTING** *those Left Behind*

By Bill White & Bill Stauffer

Recent essays predicted the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the future of addiction recovery and celebrated the resilience of communities of recovery as they transitioned from face-to-face to online recovery support meetings. This brief article calls attention to those potentially left behind in this transition to digital support and explores the ethical and effective implementation of digital recovery support platforms. *For a more expansive version, go to [www.williamwhitepapers.com/blog/](http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/blog/)*



### Transition Problems

To achieve an inclusive recovery community, we must be mindful of persons or communities for whom virtual platforms are unavailable or unsuitable. To achieve the maximum range of person-platform fit, we must insist on engagement of diverse recovery communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of these new resources. PRO•A in Pennsylvania provides an example of standards for the delivery of ethical and inclusive e-recovery support in its 10 Assurances statement.

*Continued on page 2*

## ..... My Journey to Stephen's Place

By Sherman Myers, Stephen's Place Program Coordinator

As a person in long term recovery, my journey has been a wonderful experience, both personally and professionally. As in most life experiences, there were highs and lows of which I approached as merely challenges along the way.

My personal journey in recovery began in early 2002. At that time, the pain in my life became great enough for me to either go on as best I could which included jails, and institutions or find a new way to live. I chose the latter.



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### PRO•A'S 3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL LEADERSHIP IN RECOVERY EVENT IS

going  
virtual

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WORKING  
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TO MAKE  
"RECOVERY  
VOICES COUNT"  
IN PENNSYLVANIA



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Volume 22, No. 2 | 2020

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# The Digitalization of Recovery: SUPPORTING those Left Behind

## Problems of Access

*Continued from page 1*

In our celebration of the explosive growth of online meetings and other virtual recovery supports, we should not forget those who lack access to such platforms. Those at risk of exclusion include: 1) people who are homeless, 2) people in rural and frontier communities, 3) people who rely on public facilities for internet access that are now closed due to pandemic mitigation measures, and 4) older adults in recovery and others who lack knowledge and skills in navigating online resources.

## Problems of Comfort

Put simply, there are many people who have access to digital recovery support but find the digital experience less helpful than face-to-face recovery support media. The potential size of populations using digital recovery support as a primary recovery support mechanism compared to those who use digital recovery support as an adjunct to face-to-face meetings remains unclear.

Recovery support comes in multiple media, including one-on-one communication, group interactions, print resources, and video/audio media. Successful recovery often involves combining and sequencing multiple activities across the stages of long-term recovery. The key for each person is to find a stage-appropriate fit between themselves and those ingredients that best serve to strengthen recovery initiation, maintenance, and enhanced quality of personal and family life. At a systems level, the key is to increase recovery prevalence within affected populations by assuring the broadest possible menu of recovery support options.

## Problems of Vulnerability

New e-treatment and e-recovery support media, like all digital media, raise privacy and security concerns. A particular concern is the potential of such media as tools of manipulation, exploitation, or harassment. In the delivery of e-counseling services, we must assure that the protections built into face-to-face counseling (e.g., informed consent, confidentiality, delivery of evidence-based practices, clinical supervision, standards of ethical practice, etc.) are not lost within the e-counseling process. In the delivery of peer recovery support, we must make group values, communication guidelines, and member expectations as transparent as possible (e.g., anonymity, crosstalk policies, etc.) at the outset of participant involvement and use our collective conscience as a guide to refine online recovery support norms and etiquette.

## E-Recovery Limitations and Side Effects

The transition from face-to-face to online recovery support has inherent limitations and potential risks. Much could be lost in this transition, such as pre- and post-meeting socializing, reduced depth of sharing from some and oversharing for others, erosion of sponsorship relationships to brief text exchanges, serial virtual performances without the sense of real connection and closeness, and a reduction or loss of service activities linked to face-to-face meetings.

When humans connect, something vital happens that brings us together in a powerful manner. We are only beginning to understand the science behind how and why these connections occur. As recent paper on autonomic mimicry and neurocognition suggests one key that we experience emotional contagion through body language, eye contact, and the subconscious sharing of information. The digital medium available to us today may be limited in its capacity to transmit such subtle information and may result in a less powerful sense of connection.

*Continued on page 3*

As creatures of excess, there is a parallel risk of seduction into this digital world (e-addiction)—a risk enhanced by the now infinite number of online meetings and the advent of marathon meeting formats. Hyper-connection could result in an erosion of social skills and our comfort with face-to-face communication.

The future of e-recovery support hinges the pace of improvements in the technologies used in these media and the development of ethical guidelines to govern their operation.

### **E-Services within Larger Systems of Care and Support**

How will the rapid expansion of e-treatment and e-recovery support services effect larger systems of care for substance related problems? One concern is that funding authorities facing pandemic-spawned economic austerity may cut funding for traditional face-to-face services. The rationale for such action would likely be that online services can be delivered with less costs and by peers in recovery rather than by paid service professionals. E-recovery support should represent an expansion rather than a contraction of choices within the service menu. We know that 85% of us who are able to sustain recovery for five years stay in recovery for the rest of our lives. Digital support services may well augment and extend our current care strategies in meaningful ways to help even more of us reach that critical five-year benchmark mark.

### **Reaching Those at Risk of Being Left Behind**

Digital recovery support is a cool—low touch--medium of communication. Our challenges are how to warm it up to fit the existing culture of recovery and how to reach people who are unable or uncomfortable in the digital world. Below is a summary of what we envision as possibilities.

- Including the voices of people in recovery in all decisions related to the design and conduct of digital recovery support platforms
- Providing digital devices to people in recovery who cannot afford them
- Workshops and one-one-one tutoring by recovery community organizations on mastering online recovery support media
- Providing online access via recovery community centers
- Greater reliance on recovery literature, including manual-guided recovery protocol replete with personal recovery stories
- Renewed and expanded access to earlier-era resources, e.g., recovery talks on cassettes and CDs
- Expanded availability of e-counseling services (e.g., telephonic or video counseling)
- Smaller face-to-face meetings with modified meeting rituals (using physical distancing precautions)
- Home visits by recovery coaches (using physical distancing precautions)
- Telephonic recovery check-ups and smaller telephonic recovery support meetings arranged by recovery coaches
- Expanded recovery literature distribution
- Use of traditional mail service for recovery support communications
- Expanded use of recovery magazines and newsletters as vehicles of recovery support
- Creating and communicating consensual ethics and etiquette of online recovery support
- Creating ethical guidelines for organizations hosting e-counseling and e-recovery support services, and
- Creating ethical complaint and disciplinary mechanisms for e-recovery support services.

The key is that we engage the digital champions, the digital doomsayers, and everyone in between with viable recovery support choices. We must aspire to a recovery standard that supports all pathways of recovery, all platforms, all modes of recovery, and all people who seek recovery. The future is not at all clear in respect to e-recovery support, but what is clear is that it will be an increasingly visible platform of recovery support. What is not clear is how effective and authentic it will be and who it will include and exclude. The answers to those questions are up to us.

*Together, we can and will make a difference.*



# ..... My Journey to Stephen's Place

It was a life changing decision which required help from a fellowship (NA) and a Power much greater than myself who is both loving and caring because I needed to learn how to love myself. Through God's grace and mercy, I celebrated 18 years drug and alcohol free in January of 2020.

I would love to say I knew what I wanted to be when I grew up, but as a 41- year old man in early recovery with a criminal background, my options were very limited. It was either construction or warehouse work. For a number of years, I did them both.

My journey in this new way of life led me in another direction. I became a part-time Tech at a Halfway Home, an in-patient facility where I was once a resident. I began to see purpose and meaning in my life by helping others who were just like me. So, I continued in the process and eventually became the House Manager, a position I held for nearly 5 years. One of the deepest lows I experienced was being terminated from the place that helped me stay on the path of recovery. It seemed like a dark time for me and I wasn't sure what I would do next. While I was out of work and filled with unsurety, an opportunity to get my CRS certificate became available and I enrolled in the course, took the exam, and passed. Now I needed to find work.

I truly believe in the God of my understanding because, out of nowhere, a position became available at a place called Stephen's Place. I was hired as Program Coordinator for this non-profit halfway home for men who have been incarcerated and suffer from substance use disorder.

Run by Director Sister Virginia Longcope, Stephen's Place has been helping men change their lives and transition back into the community as productive citizens since 1993. We provide a supportive, transitional, family model that includes counselling, twelve-step programs, and basic life skills training.

My experience as a recovering person, combined with my experience with managing a facility, set me on this path. I am extremely happy with the person I have become as well as the place that I work. My journey to Stephen's Place has been one of joy and sorrow, but most of all, fulfilling. I am a grateful recovering person named Sherman.



*Left to Right: Sherman Myers, Program Coordinator of Stephen's Place, Sister Virginia Longcope, Director of Stephen's Place, and Nina Corona, founder of (AFIRE) Active Faith Implementing Relief in the Epidemic*

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# Un-Common Grounds, Ltd— Serving Up Hope... ONE CUP AT A TIME



As persons on the journey of recovery ourselves, our goal as a company is to help others who are rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of active addiction. Providing a SAFE and SUPPORTIVE environment to work, grow, or just come and relax, as well as supporting various organizations that offer help to those suffering from, or affected by, substance abuse are just a few of the ways we strive to give back, break the stigma, and to show others that there IS life after addiction.

Un-Common Grounds, Ltd started out as a dream a few years ago with a coffee truck, UnCommon Grounds Mobile Café. Husband and wife duo Michelle and Mel K set out to be living examples of the journey of recovery; the ups and downs, the victories and the struggles, and hope to help break the stigma along the way. In addition, they wanted to help others in recovery.

**MICHELLE:** I know how hard it can be. Keeping busy and being part of something can go a long way to keep us on track in recovery.

People in the recovery community know us, and know that we are on the journey. They have been so supportive, and are our best cheerleaders. We LOVE to bring the coffee truck to recovery and awareness events! But to a good portion of our customers we're just the coffee people, and that's okay, too. We don't hide that we are on the journey, we just don't advertise it. It lets people get to know us without the stigma of addiction, without that label. They get to see who we are and what we are doing in the community at large and we've built quite a rapport with our customers. Then when/if they find out the back story, they are like "wow, these are real people" and that is a good thing.

We've had quite a few people on our travels with the trailer reach out with stories of family members who are suffering, and even a few who have reached out for themselves. We were able to share with them our own experiences and hope, and are blessed to have connections to put them in touch with for help. That, for us, is what it's all about.



## MEETING CHALLENGES BY HELPING OTHERS

We were building a bit of a following even while only running the trailer part time on weekends and for events and were still working full time jobs. But, this past year we had the opportunity to expand the business and open up our first brick and mortar café in Weissport. So, we both made the move to leave our "day jobs" and do coffee full time. The dream was beginning to become reality! We were only open a month when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. We no sooner opened our doors and then had to close them again, with no other jobs to fall back on. That was scary. But something we learned in recovery is the importance of reaching out to help others, especially when we may be struggling ourselves. So, when we heard about the truckers having a hard time getting food and drinks with all the rest area shut downs, we knew what we had to do. While we had to close the doors on the café, we still had the trailer. We started out with the plan to just go give out coffee to truckers that were out on the road. It was actually a customer of ours that reached out to us to help by paying it forward and donating a cup of coffee. And the JAVA HEART campaign was born. From there it grew to a full on pay-it-forward campaign and the community really rallied to help us, to help others. We then expanded it to include front liners and first responders, and eventually to also reach out to other small businesses. People were nominating organizations and businesses and it was really great to be a part of it. It helped us to stay on the positive side of a not-so-positive situation and we were so grateful for the opportunity to serve the community.

Since then, we've opened the café back up part time and we also have the mobile unit running when we can. It seems like any time we're having a rough day and worries are getting us down, we get those God shots out of the blue to let us know that we're on the right path. That's what keeps us going. We're not sure yet what the future holds, we just keep "following the bread crumbs". Both the recovery community and general community continue to rally around us and that definitely helps keep us going. They cheer us on and we cheer them on!

You can follow our unfolding story on facebook @UnCommon Grounds Mobile Café' and @UnCommon Grounds at the Mill, or on the web at [www.uncommongroundsmobilecafe.com](http://www.uncommongroundsmobilecafe.com)





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PRO•A would like to take a moment to thank all Essential Workers for their commitments during this unprecedented time. In addition, our gratitude goes out to all individuals in the recovery field for their dedication and allegiance to individuals and families with substance use disorders. Our Recovery Community Organizations, Peer Specialists, Therapists, Staff, and Volunteers and their innovative ways of assisting individuals are seamless examples of how together, we do recover!

# PRO•A WANTS TO INCLUDE YOU!

PA Statewide Recovery Month Live & Virtual Event Calendar  
31st Annual National Recovery Month

## live & virtual events

The Pennsylvania Recovery Organization Alliance is putting together a calendar of statewide LIVE & VIRTUAL events in celebration of Recovery Month, which will occur in September 2020.

We want to show how we celebrate recovery across our great state and to get people involved in the great work that you are all doing!

If you, or an affiliated entity, is holding an event for Recovery Month, we want to include it in our Recovery Month Edition of our newsletter.

Utilize our new web feature on the PRO•A calendar page at <http://pro-a.org/calendar/> or contact the PRO•A Recovery Program Development Manager, Patti Baranowski, by email at [patti.b@pro-a.org](mailto:patti.b@pro-a.org) or phone at (717) 545-8929.

You may also send your event information and flyer to (484) 274-0184.

### SUBMISSIONS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN AUGUST 1, 2020. PLEASE INCLUDE:

- The date and times of the virtual event
- A contact name, phone number and email address
- A brief description (one or two sentences) of the event including what you are doing, and including costs if any to participate

## Congratulations, Monica Russup!

During this challenging time of physical distancing, there is still evidence of positive occurrences happening everywhere. One inspiring story is that of Monica Russup. As an individual in recovery, Monica completed her CRS Training with PRO•A, and received her certification through the Pennsylvania Certification Board. Although she has been working as a Barista at Hope & Coffee in Tamaqua for over a year, Monica admits that her skills as a CRS and a recovering individual have been far more important in this job than her skills as a coffee connoisseur. She admits that serving hope, not just coffee, is what makes this role so rewarding. Monica recently decided to apply her recovery knowledge and skills to a full time role, and accepted a position at New Roots Recovery Support Center in Wilkes Barre as a Certified Recovery Specialist, where individuals share the common goal of long term recovery, balance, and fellowship with their peers. Monica joins her peers Kerri Ann Scheitrum, Leslie Napolitano, and Shane Evans (all front row CRS participants!) at New Roots Recovery Support Center, assisting individuals in recovery in their journeys, and sharing their strength and hope as CRS's.

Monica admits that she had never imagined that this would be the life that she has today. She asserts that she is a warrior and a survivor, and that things sometimes happen more slowly than we'd like. But she encourages individuals to have patience, and above all, remain grateful. Congratulations on your new employment at New Roots Recovery Support Center, Monica, and thank you for your service and your continued testimony that *We Do Recover!*



# Wyoming County Chapter of Young People in Recovery



*By John Fabiseski, Chapter Lead*

The Wyoming County Chapter of Young People in Recovery was very pleased to present a check for one thousand dollars to the Seven Loaves Soup Kitchen. During these uncertain times surrounding COVID-19, Seven Loaves has prepared thousands of meals for those in need. They have also supplied a meeting space for those in recovery, as all regular meeting spaces have been closed during this time. Young People in Recovery Wyoming County members have volunteered at the soup kitchen in the past and have been welcomed by the staff. When there is an opportunity for our recovery community to offer assistance to individuals and families in our community, we rise to the occasion!! The soup kitchen is not only preparing meals for those that walk in, but also preparing meals to be delivered by a local food program. Among the many that are volunteering to deliver meals to county hubs, and to homes, individuals in recovery are proud to assist. We are very grateful to Seven Loaves and the incredible support that they provide the recovery community and the community as a whole.

*Check Presentation: Pictured at left is Ann Shaffer of the Seven Loaves Soup Kitchen and John Fabiseski, Chapter Lead Young People in Recovery Wyoming County*



*By Brian Sabo, Program Director, Change on Main and Change on 3rd*

The COVID-19 Pandemic has disrupted all of lives, especially those of us in recovery. Human contact plays a huge role in recovery; fellowship before and after meetings, sponsor/sponsee step work, recovery events, etc..... Change on Main averaged over 250 individuals in recovery on a weekly basis who attended various traditional 12-step and non 12-step recovery meetings, journal writing classes, Karaoke Night events, and fellowship through-out the day. When the Pandemic hit, we adhered to CDC protocols and closed our doors.

However, WE chose logic over panic! With the support of Northampton County Drug and Alcohol Unit and the L.V. Intake Unit, we are still able to assist those seeking and maintaining sobriety. Change On Main has acted as a ‘hub’, coordinating over 40 weekly zoom meetings in the Lehigh Valley area. We answer phone calls daily from those seeking support and continue to monitor our facebook and social media pages, providing meeting lists and passwords. A list of men and women with long term recovery is provided to “newcomers” who are seeking guidance or temporary sponsors during this unprecedented time.

We did not stop there. Part of my initiative when opening Change on Main in August 2018 was to “give back” to our community and help break the “stigma” of addiction. During this pandemic, individuals in recovery and I spent over 20 hours cleaning two public parks in the Borough of Northampton. We received a letter from the Mayor’s office thanking us for our efforts. More park clean ups are scheduled for the weeks to come.

We refused to allow this pandemic to delay or stop our Community Garden from being finished. The “People Standing Up Group” is a community-based group of people who are invested in creating a town that everyone wants to live in. Due to the corroborating effort of Change on Main and the People Standing Up Group, we were able to obtain a grant to erect and maintain a community garden. All of the proceeds will be donated to the Northampton Food Bank!

Maintaining a garden of this size will not be easy. I had posted an opportunity for service work on my facebook page (Victor Hampton) asking for volunteers from the Recovery Community to assist with the garden. The response has been overwhelming. Within a day, I have had over 50 responses. Individuals in recovery WILL BE maintaining and harvesting, giving back to “Our” community and making a difference in someone else’s life.

**Recovery Works! We are people first!** Change On Main will continue to assist individuals who are seeking and/or maintaining sobriety! If you would like to volunteer or be informed of Recovery Resources please contact me at [Brains@changeonmain.org](mailto:Brains@changeonmain.org) or visit Victor Hampton on facebook.



Sage's Army has been boots on the ground in Westmoreland County and beyond since 2012. We were excited to have our Open House for the new Recovery Center in Greensburg when there was a Stay at Home order put into place due to COVID-19. This has not slowed us or those that we serve down. If anything, the pandemic we are currently experience throughout our world has made our little Recovery Community Organization blossom in many ways. We expanded our family and other support groups to a virtual format which enabled a lot of the individuals that have not been able to physically get to our meetings the chance to attend.



Our individuals have been engaged throughout this process and staying determined to continue their recovery process. Our Certified Recovery Specialists took their individuals through a seamless transition to offer them support in a virtual world. They kept them active in meeting their goals making gratitude boards, making sure basic needs were met, and getting Narcan to anyone that needed it. With the time we took away traveling, this enabled us to give more time to everyone that was in services and really make sure that they were handling the abrupt changes around them in healthy ways. Sage's Army has a helpline that rings 24/7 that is run by dedicated volunteers and staff. We have loved ones and individuals that call sometimes just needing someone to listen, others for referral to treatment, or to obtain resources in their area..

We also were able to see where we as an RCO are such a needed venue, with or without the building being full of people; we can be a voice for those that need to be heard. We have been making sure that the cries of the individuals we hear calling our helpline are heard far and wide by the stakeholders that can make a difference, opening the doorways to get them the access they need to make the changes. The collaboration and coordination of the team has been beautiful.

We are in the Recovery Center working hard and looking forward to when we will have our "new" Open House. We are planning to have some of our events online and some at the Recovery Center, all while following CDC guidelines. Like us on Facebook Sage's Army, Inc. or visit our website at [www.sagesarmy.com](http://www.sagesarmy.com)

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details on page 6

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