

# This is what recovery looks like: Community is key for long-term substance abuse recovery

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By Nicole Carter

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Nicole Proctor of South Paris has battled through substance use disorder and homelessness to become a registered recovery coach and a force in helping rural communities establish recovery centers throughout Maine. *Nicole Carter / Advertiser Democrat*

PARIS — According to Paris resident Nicole Proctor, people seeking help for substance use disorder (SUD) have lots of choices for their recovery program. But one other critical factor for them to succeed is support from the community.

Proctor, who has been in recovery since Oct. 22, 2017 and is program director for Portland Recovery Community Center knows this firsthand. In addition to her family's assistance, she found the community support she needed in her recovery at PRCC. Today she works to establish recovery centers in communities across the state.

"When I started working at PRCC, there were two recovery centers in all of Maine," Proctor shared during a recent interview with the Advertiser Democrat. "Now there are 17."

“For me, a 12-step fellowship was what worked, but what really mattered, was getting involved in the recovery community. It’s about finding connections with like-minded people.”

Proctor first walked into PRCC back in 2018, after she completed a seven-day detox treatment and was living at a women’s recovery residence for sober living in Portland. She accompanied a friend to the center and decided to start volunteering to fulfill the service commitment of her sobriety plan.

“I started by going and hanging out there and meeting people who were doing the same thing I was trying to do.”

As PRCC expanded its services and was awarded grants to operate the Maine Recovery Hub, an initiative to develop community recovery centers throughout Maine, Proctor was offered a full time job, first as administrator coordinator and more recently as the Hub’s program director.

“We work with communities that do not currently have a recovery center (like in Portland) but want to develop their own program,” Proctor said. “I meet with different communities and coalitions to help them create the plan. What do they need – resource assistance, training for recovery coaches.

“We’ve been fortunate for support at the state level to expand recovery supports. But what is still hard is that there are so many communities, groups and coalitions that I meet with that want recovery community centers. And there are not enough resources to make it happen.”

The other difficult part, she explained, is making communities what she calls recovery-ready.

“The community has to be ready to support recovery” for a recovery center to succeed, Proctor continued. “Because of the stigma and shame people with SUD feel” that can stop them from seeking recovery.

“I know what it’s like for rural towns to get people (with SUD) to walk through the door. They don’t want to be seen walking into that place. Getting community buy-in and support can be hard.”

Over the last four years PRCC has succeeded in facilitating community recovery centers from Bridgton in western Maine to as far east as Calais and north to Houlton and Caribou.

“Recovery centers help to break the stigma that active addiction and recovery are totally different,” she said. “When you say you’re in recovery people instantly go to the perception of ‘active addiction,’ which it is not. That’s why I am very open – I am a person with substance use disorder and I am in long-term recovery.

“A lot of times, I won’t say what my substance abuse is because it doesn’t matter. The substance might be different but it’s all the disease of addiction. It might be food, sex, gambling, alcohol or drugs. It’s for the same purpose, for escaping and numbing. And community centers allow recovery fellowships to come out of the basement and be in one place with a common goal.”

PRCC is celebrating its 10th anniversary as it settles into new headquarters it recently purchased. Proctor said more than 50 different recovery and wellness meeting are held there weekly, from 12-step programs to yoga and meditation classes to art groups and corn hole games and get-togethers.

She is thrilled that the Western Maine Addiction Recovery Initiative and its coalition partners around Oxford Hills have too been awarded a Health Services and Resources Administration (HRSA)-Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) grant to establish a local community center.

Development of the Oxford Hills project will be a collaboration between WMARI, River Valley Healthy Communities Coalition, the Larry Labonte Recovery Center in Rumford, Common Ground Counseling in Norway, the Oxford County Sheriff’s Department, the Oxford Hills School District, and MaineHealth/Western Maine Health (Healthy Oxford Hills).

Proctor said supportive communities are necessary to reduce the stigma that can stop people with substance use disorder from pursuing recovery, but also to help their families and loved ones recover.

“When I went into recovery, almost five years ago, my family had gotten to the point where they weren’t in denial or trying to hide from anybody that their life included someone with an active addiction,” Proctor said. “It’s a family disease and the family has to recover as well.”

In Proctor's family's case, there were two daughters entering recovery about the same time, that they were determined to support.

"Five years ago my family would not have envisioned recovery for either of us," she shared. "Today, my family would say that they are proud to have children who are in recovery from substance use disorder.

"And that's important because it helps break stigma for other family members in our community to be able to say the same. Each time, it is one step closer to making recovery-friendly communities."

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