

Gateway Rehab Center of Excellence Offers Addiction Recovery and Renewal

By Nancy Kennedy

At Gateway Rehab Center, a groundbreaking recovery program is sweeping away the dark shame of addiction and replacing it with the light of hope, dignity and the healing power of human relationships.

This month, Gateway Rehab will mark the fifth anniversary of its' Opioid Use Disorder Center of Excellence, a powerful program of addiction recovery that was launched by Governor Tom Wolf in 2016 to identify outstanding treatment centers across the state, in response to the opioid overdose epidemic. Gateway's Center of Excellence (COE) has the distinction of being one of the first facilities so designated by Pennsylvania, and it has lived up to, and exceeded, the standard of excellence. The COE provides comprehensive care coordination in support of long lasting recovery, with an innovative approach: the core of the program is peer-to-peer support, with a team of Certified Recovery Specialists (CRS) who have lived the journey of addiction recovery.

"Our CRS team members have real life experience in long term recovery," says Lori M. Nau, MA, Manager of Care Coordination. "They know the disease of addiction personally. Through their own experience they are able to provide emotional support, address treatment needs and help meet non-treatment needs, while helping individuals learn to navigate barriers to recovery. They are living proof that addiction is treatable."



The Center of Excellence Program Team at Gateway Rehab

The COE program is community-based and practical, Nau explains. "The CRS walks side-by-side with the person in treatment or early recovery, for up to a year. Each person receives a personal, strength-based support plan that addresses the non-treatment needs that could otherwise become barriers to recovery, such as transportation, child care, housing, mental health care and employment."

The Gateway COE staff includes a team of master's-level clinicians and case managers who perform intake assessments, coordinate treatment and services, and are available as resources to the CRS. But it is the CRS who is the essence of the program, according to Nau. "Our team of seven CRS are people who are personally in recovery, helping others who are trying to reach recovery. A CRS has training, with formal certification, plus personal experience. They have credibility with others in our region's recovery community. They have walked in their shoes; they have relapsed and encountered the barriers to recovery. Their experience gives them the passion to do this work."

"Addiction is prevalent in the U.S. but shame keeps many people from getting treatment. The CRS team is helping people who otherwise don't seek help. The CRS can customize the program around that

individual's strengths and barriers – to empower them."

Tess Rem-Canofari, CRS, FPS (forensic peer specialist) has been a member of the COE team since 2017. She is open about her own history of addiction and skillful in her capacity to apply her experience to help others. "Persons in recovery need life skills in addition to recovery skills. Traditional rehab teaches you how not to get high, but it doesn't teach you how to live – how to develop coping skills, ace a job interview, manage relationships or ask for help. Life skills are an essential aspect of our program and if you have been getting high, you probably haven't used these skills for a long time. Our program gives you skills plus structure. It's a solid foundation for recovery."

An ideal treatment plan, Rem-Canofari says, usually includes detoxification, rehab, and time in a halfway house or long term facility, plus outpatient follow-up. Twelve-step meetings, working with a sponsor and even equestrian classes may be part of the stepdown program. It's a long term commitment, she says, but that time investment fosters healing relationships. "What I love most is that I can plant a seed and watch the person grow. They will struggle – relapse is a reality – but when I see a person who had hit rock bottom achieve a year clean,

it's deeply rewarding."

The Gateway COE program has served over 1200 persons across southwestern Pennsylvania since 2016. "We serve opioid users and others with any type of substance abuse," Nau says. "The program is voluntary and anyone can enroll. We want to help everyone. We are a mobile team that brings the program to the person. We use social media and word of mouth; we work with the homeless; we meet people at 12-step meetings and at our treatment centers," Nau says. "To enroll, you have to have an opioid diagnosis and Medical Assistance coverage, or any substance abuse diagnosis for Aetna insurance. We're working on getting other commercial insurers on board."

Addiction is a disease that is treatable, Nau emphasizes. "Addiction is a medical condition and treatment is available and effective. There is hope. Our program is a living, breathing model of that hope. It breaks through the persistent stigma about addiction. People in recovery need a close connection and mentoring, and the relationship with their CRS empowers and inspires them. They see the success of the CRS and that is motivating. They see that recovery is possible."

To learn more or to enroll, visit www.gatewayrehab.org.



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