

Western Pennsylvania Guide to Good Health

Health News You and Your Family Can Use

What to Expect in Outpatient Addiction Counseling at GRC

By Nancy Kennedy

Kelly Coldren, executive regional director of Outpatient Services for GRC, understands how hard it is for people with addiction to seek treatment. Coldren oversees all of GRC's outpatient services throughout the region, and has over twenty years of experience in the field of addiction treatment. She has a passion for her work, and is especially grateful to be at GRC, which is renowned for its expertise, creative solutions to emerging community needs, and compassion for those who come there seeking help. "The people who come to GRC for addiction treatment come from all walks of life," Coldren says. "The stigma persists, but persons with addiction can be healthcare professionals, business people, artists and musicians, or seniors dealing with chronic pain. Often they are people who have a history of trauma. They thought, 'This will never happen to me' - but it did."

At GRC, Coldren says, the staff extends a bridge to the community. Their streamlined process includes assessment, a discussion of options and an explanation of what to expect from the experience. "The person entering treatment will engage in group therapy. Groups are mixed genders and consist of ten people; they are in-person or via telehealth. Group therapy is dynamic; there's a lot of learning from each other and about the disease of addiction," she explains.

Teaching coping skills is a focus of addiction treatment, Coldren says. "Many people with addiction lack fundamental life skills. We help people look at the things that must be faced, like the relationships they have damaged and past deceptions."

The most satisfying aspect of working in GRC's Outpatient program, says Coldren, is seeing the results. "Everyone reaches recovery in their own way. I get to see people save their own lives and in time, become the best possible version of themselves."

Jeff Stone never imagined that he would one day face addiction. He was a man with a full life and meaningful work as a police officer – a job that he loved. But it's a tough, demanding job, and the struggle to cope with the stress unfortunately can sometimes lead to addiction. "We tend to stereotype a person with addiction," Stone says. "We have an image in mind and I didn't fit that image. But in fact there is a high rate of addiction among police officers."

Stone realized that he needed help but was reluctant to ask for it. He needed to tell the truth, to face the consequences of his addiction, to ask for help and to accept that help with humility and an open mind. "It truly is a matter of courage," he explains. "You have to be willing to go into a recovery program and do whatever they tell you to do. You have to give up your need for control. When you are addicted, you think you are in control because the

disease tells you that. But you're not at all in control. It's almost impossible to achieve recovery by yourself."

Going into an outpatient recovery program at GRC was one of the hardest things he has ever done, Stone acknowledges. "I felt shame, guilt and hopelessness. My addiction had given me a false self. I had to face the consequences of my behavior. It's hard work, but eventually it gives you meaning and new hope. The physical part of recovery was the least difficult part."

Most people who enter outpatient treatment programs do so because external circumstances have demanded it – they have lost a job, been arrested, or had a DUI, for example. They are ordered to go into recovery. Fewer people enter into treatment because of an internal motivation. But once you are in treatment, says Stone, you will find that internal motivation. "It takes time, but a switch takes place. One day you learn that you really want to do this and you can feel good when you are sober. You have to give your brain the time it needs to recover." Outpatient therapy provided Stone with connection to others, which is an essential aspect of recovery. In group therapy, everyone shares their story, and barriers dissolve.

For Stone, addiction treatment has had a life-changing impact. He has chosen to make it his second career: for the past three years, he has been employed at GRC as a Peer Recovery Navigator. "I love this job; it's my second calling. I worked hard for this. I have the lived experience of addiction and recovery and sharing my story helps others. I know that recovery is a lifelong journey and I am still traveling on that journey. You have to stay vigilant, so that you don't lose the ground that you have gained. Don't quit before the miracle happens."



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~Jeffrey Stone



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