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September is Recovery Month - NHDOC Recovery Happenings!

The New Hampshire Department of Corrections (NHDOC), in the last several years with support through the State's Opioid Response Grant, has implemented a Peer Recovery Program. This program offers training to residents to certify as peer recovery coaches inside our prisons with transitional employment opportunities in this area post-release. The goal is to successfully engage in one-on-one mentoring sessions with fellow incarcerated participants who have struggled with substance use disorder and to help facilitate their reentry into the community. Corrections staff members identify residents who would be successful and effective coaches; if interested, they begin a week-long training process using external and internal training resources.

Diane York, Administrator of our Substance Use Disorder Services with a team of licensed alcohol drug counselors and a behavioral health clinician: Melony Lyons, Patrick Perkins, Brinkley Ortega, Nancy Maguire, and Alexa Diaz along with over 30 residents received Peer Recover Coach training in a train the trainer format by Ginger Ross, a certified peer recovery coach, from Choices. Said staff and residents are now prepared to continue to train those eligible residents who are incarcerated in our facilities to do peer recovery through our departmental Peer Recovery Coach Program. The Peer Recovery Coach Program will be offered on a regular basis at all prison sites. Once the resident is trained, they will be able to assist other residents with their sobriety and recovery under NHDOC clinical staff supervision.

“Human connection and mentoring others are such a meaningful part of the recovery process,” said Commissioner Helen Hanks. “We aim to improve people's quality of life by setting our residents up for success and with this program, we are making strides each and every day to help people tackle chronic health conditions like substance use disorder.”

In addition, the team also went through the Certified Recovery Support Worker (CRSW) training, which is a four-day training on HIV, Ethics, and Suicide Prevention as well as a Train the Trainer program that Ginger teaches to staff. This allows those trained to be able to train and certify DOC residents to be CRSWs upon reentry into the community. To qualify for a spot in a training, they must be residents who want to participate and help other residents who are struggling with substance use disorder, and they must have a good understanding of substance use disorder and their own diagnosis. They must also have held onto their own sobriety for a year. If a resident meaningfully participates and has a good understanding, staff will sign off on their successful participation and Choices will issue the certification.

In addition to the peer recovery program, the department provides a modified residential therapeutic community called, the Focus Unit, which provides substance use disorder treatment services with an emphasis on rehabilitation and wellness. It is available to men at NNHCF and for women at NHCFW. The goals of the Focus Unit are to help individuals learn new behaviors and develop coping skills/wellness strategies for managing substance use disorders. Participants are assisted with follow-up services after completion of the Focus Unit program. There are 3 Focus Programs running (2 Focus units at Northern New Hampshire Correctional Facility in Berlin and 1 Focus unit at New Hampshire Correctional Facility for Women in Concord) and the plan is to have Recovery Coaches supporting their peers in the program.

We are hard at work reaching out to offer this training to residents who have been in the Focus program previously, who may have a longer sentence who also understand their focus on sobriety, and who have a willingness to help their peers.

The goal is to have peer recovery coaches built into the Focus Units in more of a mentoring model.

Many residents receive this certification after they complete the Focus program and have enough insight about their recovery, as well as maintaining their sobriety to be able to attend the training. By the time they are certified, they are near parole.

Many have benefited from this offering already, there have been residents who have received this certification and have paroled as well as a few residents who have taken their new certification to other units within the facility.

To our staff...Keep up the wonderful work helping so many find a path to recovery!



Pictured from left to right-Diane York, Melony Lyons, and Patrick Perkins from NNHCF.