



## Walking One Another Home August 2023



Dear friends:

August 31st is International Overdose Awareness Day. It is the sacred day that illustrates the bittersweet elements of our shared humanity. It's the day we commit to allowing space for the profound sadness of grief in community with others who know that pain. It's the day we turn toward one another, acknowledging the heartache and assuring one another that we are not alone, that it is safe to feel it all.

This issue of our newsletter contains stories of grief and loss alongside triumphant stories of a life saved and the hope and promise of recovery accessed during the darkest times of a young woman's life. The juxtaposition of these articles gave us some moments of concern that celebrating those triumphs might amplify the pain of those grieving. I thought quite a bit about that concern and realized that each of the stories are manifestations of the complex mission of our agency. We are called to walk with one another through the triumphs, the grief, and the unknown. And, we can never lose hope despite the crushing grief. The full spectrum of the human experience is deeply and intensely manifested in our hearts on this day in particular.

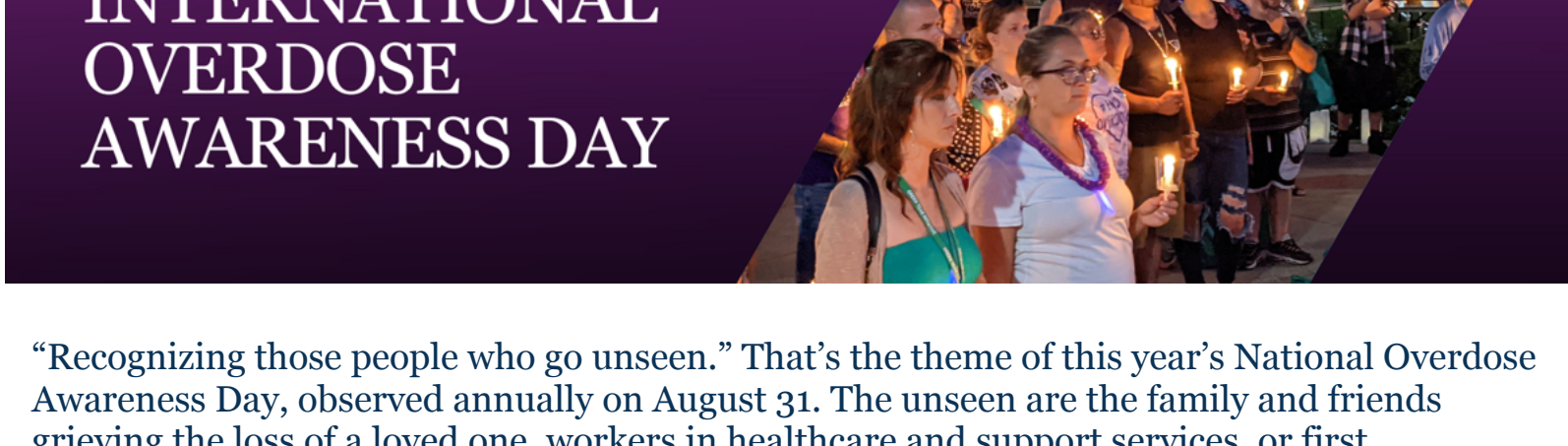
We offer options for those struggling to access hope, we offer solace to those grieving and we also receive the outstretched hands of those offering such sweet gifts. In those spaces, we find and experience the fullness of our humanity. It is our work to allow it – to trust ourselves to allow it to flow and that our community will hold the space to receive it. This is where transformative healing takes place and, my friends, we are in desperate need of some transformation right now.

Susan Cain, author of *Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole* says: "The tragedy of life is linked inescapably with its splendor; you could tear civilization down and rebuild it from scratch, and the same dualities would rise again. Yet to fully inhabit these dualities—the dark as well as the light—is, paradoxically, the only way to transcend them. And transcending them is the ultimate point. The bittersweet is about the desire for communion, the wish to go home."

International Overdose Awareness Day is poignant, an opportunity to experience the authentic and elevating response to the duality of life. Today, we offer one another a walk home.

All my best to you always,

Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW  
President & CEO



"Recognizing those people who go unseen." That's the theme of this year's National Overdose Awareness Day, observed annually on August 31. The unseen are the family and friends grieving the loss of a loved one, workers in healthcare and support services, or first responders who selflessly assume the role of lifesaver. Too often, however, they're left to bear the burden of this crisis alone and in silence.

Overdose Awareness Day reminds us to support people in our communities who go unrecognized. It's an opportunity to raise awareness of the hidden impacts of overdose, promote education of overdose response, and reach out to politicians to make lasting, lifesaving policy changes.

### Seeking help.

When is the right time to seek help for a substance use disorder? A lot of people may be thinking about reaching out but are reluctant for one reason or another.

"You don't have to wait a certain milestone to meet before you get help," notes Alicia Peterson, RSS, a Community Engagement Specialist at McCall. In other words, you don't have to reach a so-called "rock bottom." McCall meets people where they're at in their wellness journey, so individuals can get the resources they need.

### Alicia's story.

Alicia has first-hand experience. She's been in recovery for seven years. She lost her father, husband, sister, and her son's father – all to overdose within two years.

"There was no certain point that I had to get to," Alicia recalls. "I was fed up with the life. I was living. I knew I had to change things for my two kids." That's where Alicia was on her unique journey. And that started her path to recovery.

### Balancing grief and hope.

"There are two sides to the messaging of Overdose Awareness Day," Lauren Pristo, MPH, McCall's Director of Community Engagement, points out. "There's the grief, but then there's also a part of this day in which we want to recognize the hope – the hope that there's still opportunity for recovery, that overdose can be a preventable death, that naloxone and never using alone can help save lives."

The opioid epidemic is escalating. An unpredictable illicit drug supply is causing a great number of deaths, with fentanyl being a major factor. In Connecticut alone, approximately 1,500 people died from an overdose.

### Here to help.

"If you're considering reducing or stopping use, there is help and we are here for you," Lauren adds.

To learn how McCall can meet you or a loved one wherever you're at in your journey, please call us at 860.496.2100, or visit us at [mccallbh.org](http://mccallbh.org) (you'll find a chat feature as well). Also, don't hesitate to contact us to get a Free Harm Reduction kit, which includes naloxone and fentanyl testing strips.

McCall is a co-chair of the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force (LCOTF). The Task Force works to reduce opioid use by improving access to care and resources, as well as sharing information about prevention and treatment. Learn more at [LCOTF.org](http://LCOTF.org).

McCall also oversees the Community and Law Enforcement for Addiction Recovery (CLEAR) initiative, which provides harm reduction services and conducts follow-ups with individuals at high risk of an overdose, including those who've recently experienced an overdose. For more information about CLEAR programs, please call McCall's main number: 860.496.2100.

For more resources visit our website's 'External Resources' page.

RECORDING FROM AUGUST 14, 2023

### MISS THE INTERVIEW?

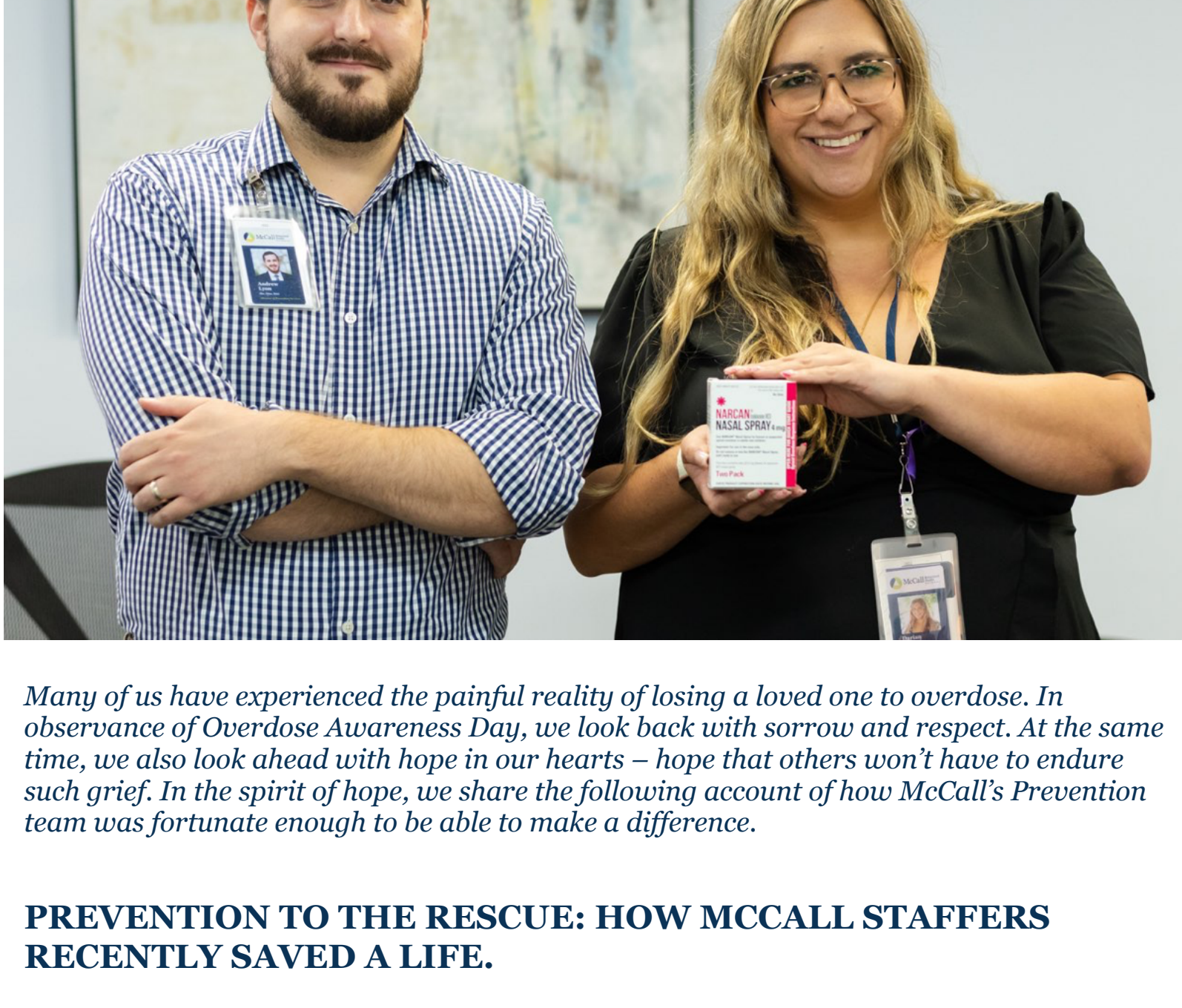
Did you miss the interview? Don't worry, we've got you covered! Visit our pressroom to learn about Overdose Awareness Day from Lauren Pristo, MPH, Director of Community Engagement, and Alicia Peterson, RSS Community Engagement Specialist.

Click on the image to listen to the full EM 92.3 WZBG interview.

OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY  
LAUREN PRISTO, MPH  
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ALICIA PETERSON, RSS  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

McCall Behavioral Health | 860.496.2100



Many of us have experienced the painful reality of losing a loved one to overdose. In observance of Overdose Awareness Day, we look back with sorrow and respect. At the same time, we also look ahead with hope in our hearts – hope that others won't have to endure such grief. In the spirit of hope, we share the following account of how McCall's Prevention team was fortunate enough to be able to make a difference.

### PREVENTION TO THE RESCUE: HOW MCCALL STAFFERS RECENTLY SAVED A LIFE.

Call it irony, coincidence, or just good fortune. McCall staffers who educate communities on overdose prevention were faced with the opportunity to apply their knowledge during an actual life and death situation.

Nothing can better demonstrate the value of overdose training than to hear how this training literally saved a life.

On Wednesday, July 26, at approximately 11:45 a.m., Andrew Lyon, MPH, CPS, Director of Prevention Services, was pulling into the parking lot of the Prevention Services Department at 21 Prospect Street in Torrington. Other members of the Prevention team, Donna Bielefeld, BA, Darian Graells, BA, and Chelsea Kapitancek, BA, arrived in a second car.

Darian heard a commotion – and saw people running toward The Gathering Place, a drop-in center for people who are experiencing homelessness.

Outside The Gathering Place, a person had collapsed on the ground and their partner was trying to rouse them to an alert state.

The person seemed to be struggling for breath and was mumbling incoherently. Their partner had witnessed blue lips and a seizure and passed the information along to the Prevention team.

### "We need Narcan!"

Not a second was wasted. Everyone intuitively took on a role: Donna retrieved a Narcan kit from her car. Chelsea flagged down an ambulance. Darian held the person, trying to keep them still. Andrew administered the Narcan, doing what he's been teaching others to do for years.

Andrew and the team couldn't be 100% sure they were dealing with an overdose. However, Andrew wisely decided to proceed with the Narcan, knowing that there was no risk involved. He also knew that, when in doubt, it's always better to use the Narcan. Good thing he did.

Thanks to the teamwork of the McCall Prevention Services Department, the person survived. In fact, Donna found out they were back on their feet the very next day.

### So, how's it feel to save a life?

"Intense and scary," is how Darian described the successful rescue. Chelsea was amazed at how quickly everyone jumped into action.

The team agreed that they experienced a spike in adrenaline while it was happening and there was certainly a lot to process.

Andrew noted afterwards, "You know it's going to be intense. It's going to be high adrenaline. People are understandably a little panicked. It's easy to get overwhelmed in a situation like that. You realize that you need to slow down, take a breath, assess, and then do the right thing."

Anyone can find themselves in the situation that the Prevention team encountered on July 26. It underscores how important training really is and that people really should be familiar with Narcan administration.

"A common sentiment we often hear from people is, 'it's not my job. It isn't something that will happen to me' or 'I don't work with high-risk people,'" Andrew said. "All members of the McCall family should have knowledge of what Narcan is and how it should be applied."

In this case, knowledge turned into action that saved a life. Everyone at McCall can be proud of our fellow staff members who stepped up big-time in the most challenging of circumstances.

### REMEMBERING A SPECIAL FRIEND.

On August 20, a very special cat named Bella sadly passed away. Bella was a long-time member of the McCall family. In Bella's honor, Michele Smedick, Recovery Support Specialist at Carnes Weeks Center, wrote the following tribute:

Bella's tenure at Carnes Weeks Center has come to an end. Bella joined the Carnes Weeks team in 2008 as a wise and compassionate soul. My understanding of how she gained her beloved status here is as follows...

Bella was born in 2008 and made her way to the main campus from her place of birth on Washington Avenue. Cats know their calling from the day they arrive on earth and Bella knew she was needed here. It took some convincing from the ever-persistent Bella and she eventually moved into the Carnes Weeks Center and became an official member of the team. She was destined to fulfill her life's journey – right here – with the people she needed and the people that needed her.

I, like so many, have been so blessed to have been able to love her and be loved by her. This is not to say that our spic girl and I didn't have our moments. Like the many trips in the cat carrier, or her meow times over the years, and that dreaded flea and tick treatment. She would get so mad, she'd run away from me and then look back with that "Bellatude." She always forgave me though.



I've been extremely lucky to hear so many clients and staff members share their stories of their time with her. Here are examples of what they would tell me: "I was so happy to see there's a cat here" and "Bella cuddled with so-and-so today, she knew they needed her."

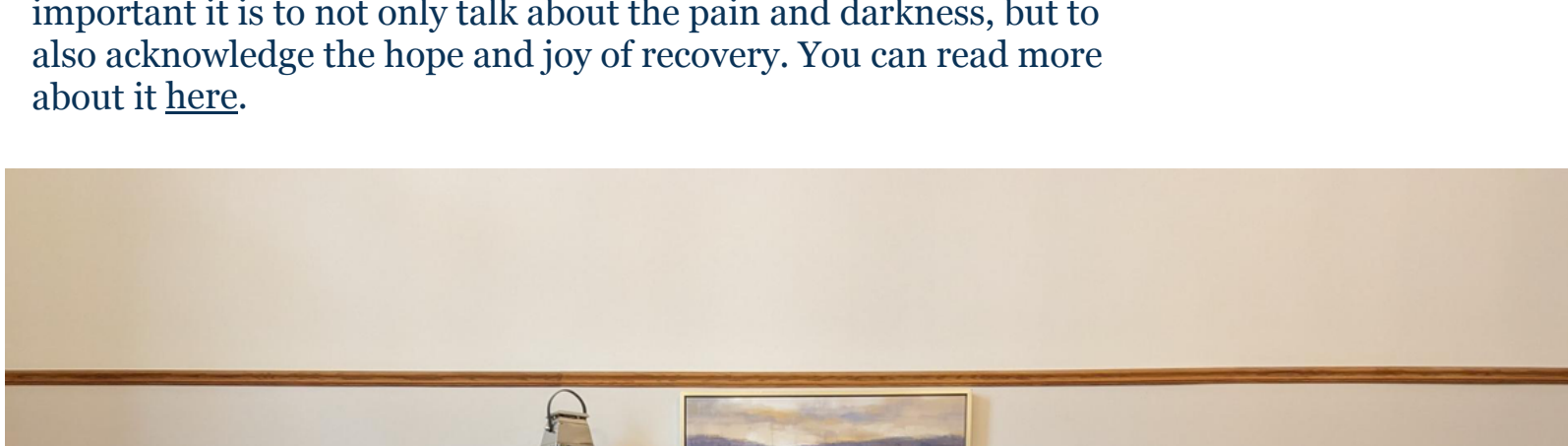
Bella was the cushion for many fallen tears, the right amount of sass, the comedic relief, the absolute purrfection.

We will all miss her "group check ins," when she would make her way, always from left to right, around the room, to check on everyone, sometimes quietly, other times meowing her special little meow that sounded as though she smoked a pack of Newport 100's daily.

We once had a client that overcame her fear of cats, making it a goal to pet Bella at least once a day. Another former client shared how he was ready to leave treatment against advice, and he encountered Bella outside and she meowed and meowed until he pet her. He stayed because of that moment and is now several years into his recovery.

Staff members have stories as well. You could never eat a meal alone here. Bella was a constant for any mealtime with staff, and practically no one could resist her plea (demand). Bella converted many people who did not like cats.

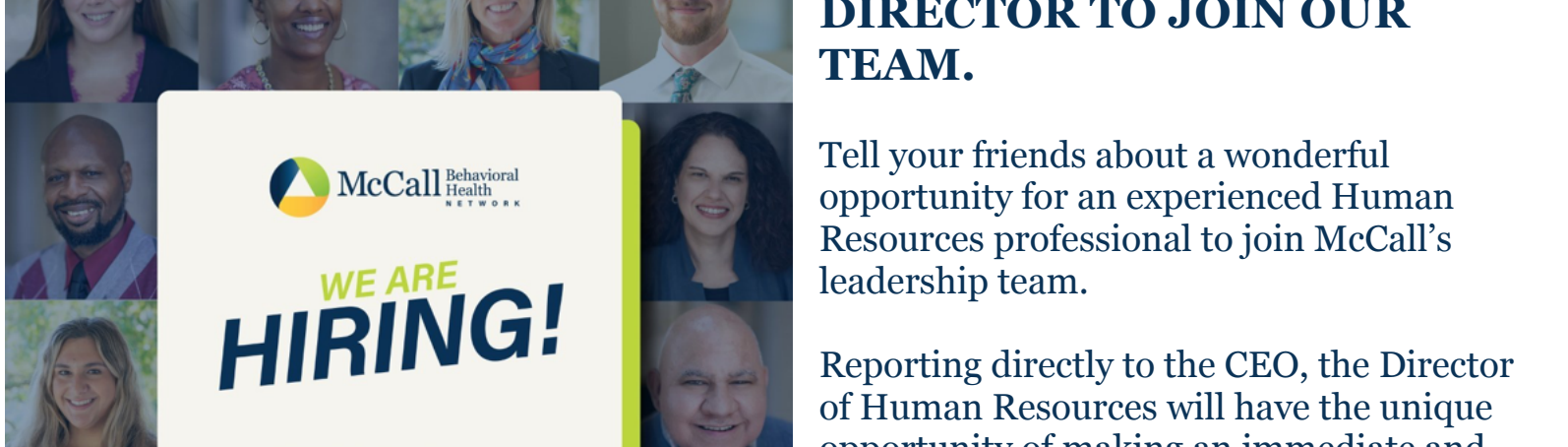
Bella understood what it felt like to not have a home, to not have love, to be a 'stray,' and she vowed to never allow clients of Carnes Weeks to feel that way.



### SENATOR BLUMENTHAL VISITS MCCALL.

McCall extends our thanks to US Senator Richard Blumenthal for stopping by our main campus on Friday, August 11, Senator Blumenthal was on hand to announce a generous \$325,000 federal grant that will be used to fund renovations at a historic Torrington residence that McCall recently purchased. The house will become the new site of McCall's Hanson House, a residential treatment program that will provide a safe and welcoming environment for women in recovery.

During his visit, the Senator met with current and former Impact House clients. Individuals shared their stories about the impact McCall programs have had on their lives. They discussed how important it is to not only talk about the pain and darkness, but to also acknowledge the hope and joy of recovery. You can read more about it [here](#).

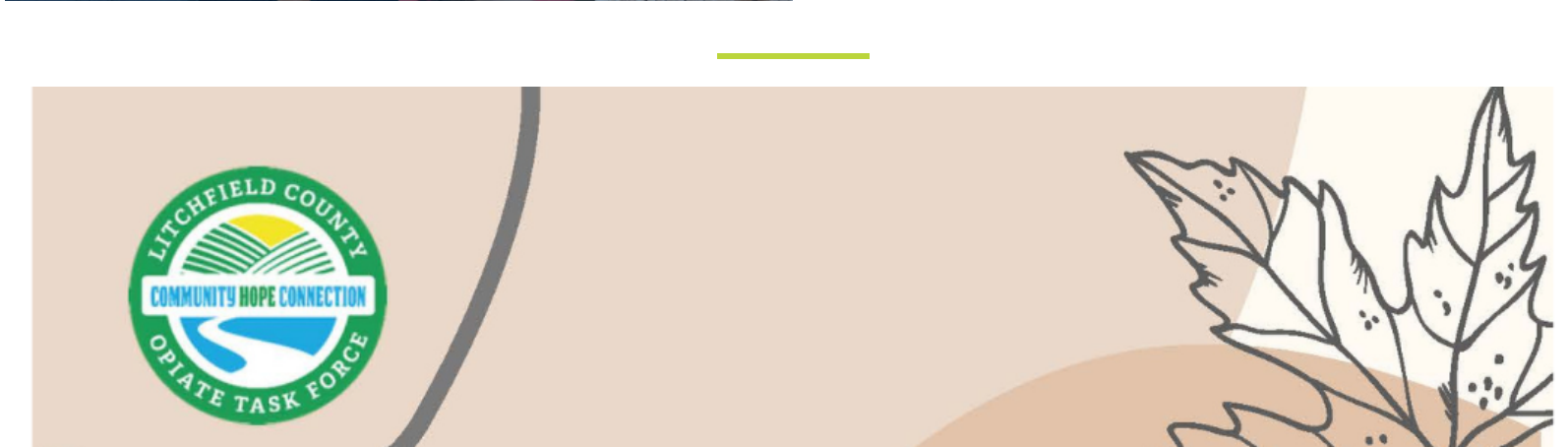


### WE'RE LOOKING FOR AN HR DIRECTOR TO JOIN OUR TEAM.

Tell your friends about a wonderful opportunity for an experienced Human Resources professional to join McCall's leadership team.

Reporting directly to the CEO, the Director of Human Resources will have the unique opportunity of making an immediate and lasting impact on a work culture that's highly supportive and satisfied. In fact, we've been named a Top Workplace in Connecticut for the past five years.

To view more information about the position and apply, [click here](#).



### Litchfield County Opiate Task Force presents Trails to Wellness

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2023

5:00PM-8:00PM  
COE PARK MEMORIAL PARK  
TORRINGTON, CT 06790

CELEBRATING THE MANY PATHWAYS TO RECOVERY AND WELLNESS.

PLEASE CONTACT ALICIA PETERSON FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
(959)229-4001  
ALICIA.PETERSON@MCCALLBH.ORG



### OUTPATIENT SERVICES

- Outpatient Treatment Groups
- Medication-assisted Treatment
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- Holistic Therapies

Now offering services in Spanish and Portuguese!

[mccallbh.org](http://mccallbh.org) | 860.496.2100



Our Contact Information  
McCall Behavioral Health  
Network, 58 High Street  
Torrington, CT 06750  
860-496-2100  
[www.mccallbh.org](http://www.mccallbh.org)

