



## Recognizing One Another's Humanity December 2023



Dear friends;

Much has been discussed and written about Litchfield County's efforts to shelter our unhoused community members this winter. I won't go into the details, as those are well documented, but in reflecting on this process which unfolded concurrently to our Empathy conference, I'm hopeful there are some valuable takeaways.

On November 30, nearly 700 people gathered at the Warner Theatre for the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force's conference, "Reimagining Empathy: A Decade of Unity and Resilience." We marked ten years of our community's efforts to connect and heal the root causes of addiction and suffering. The event was a true triumph, a beautiful example of how each of us, if we do our own work of healing, has the capacity, and indeed the calling, to care for our fellow citizens.

World and locally renowned speakers shared stories of the value of celebrating and respecting the humanity of each and every person we encounter – and the remarkable results that can follow. Johann Hari reminded us of Millicent Fawcett's call to action in the women's suffrage movement, "courage calls to courage everywhere," and how empathy must be accompanied by courage or else it's an empty concept.

Optimism without feasibility is cruelty.

As for our homeless neighbors, the calendar pages kept turning without an acceptable space, this despite the Herculean efforts of many. I watched as the concerns and urgency grew to a groundswell that dominated every local conversation. I know this community to be an accepting and compassionate place so it's not surprising that folks were responding with suggestions, research, advocacy, and offers of buildings for consideration.

There were many collections of blankets and tents, as well as outreach efforts to those impacted. But, as time marched on with no solution, I noticed something else: anger and blame. It felt terribly unjust that this issue persisted when clearly there was the will, the resources, and even the space to house people and keep them safe and warm. I am not exempt from these feelings!

Now, there will be many who will find fault in some of the players who put barriers to viable solutions in place, and I understand that. However, I observed that in our attempts to do the right thing by the vulnerable populations we all care about (namely, the unhoused and children), we found villains on "the other side" and our ability to find solutions was stymied. Ultimately, it wasn't just the homeless we needed to view as fully human, with flaws and strengths and gifts to offer, it was those of us on opposing sides of the issue.

As of this writing, the shelter has not opened and close to 100 people remain outdoors. We are in a humanitarian crisis and only the recognition of one another's humanity can solve it. In order to demonstrate our empathy, we are called to work together, shoulder to shoulder, to resolve the final hurdles and bring our neighbors inside.

My best to you always,

Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW  
President & CEO



"The holidays can be a really stressful time for anyone," says McCall's Alicia Peterson, RSS, "especially if you have a family member or loved one who's struggling with a substance use disorder."

As a Family Recovery Coach, Alicia works with people to help them create boundaries, communicate effectively, and listen with empathy. Alicia herself is in long-term recovery. For her entire life, she has lived in a family of individuals who have substance use disorders. Sadly, she lost her father, her husband, her son's father, and her sister, all within a two-year period.

### Give yourself the gift of less pressure.

"Our society as a whole," Alicia observes, "pays a lot of attention to social media, and tries to come up with the perfect holiday, the ideal holiday. We have to be aware that there is no such thing." Alicia suggests we should all be mindful of the things we enjoy doing, and not overwhelm ourselves by saying yes to every invitation. You shouldn't feel pressure to live up to everything other people expect of you.

"Just take it slow," Alicia advises. Sometimes it's important to ask your family member or loved one what you can do to help support them if they're trying to cut down their usage. Coming up with new, alcohol and drug-free traditions can be key in this kind of situation. Try not to have expectations of other people. "We can just manage how we feel and how we act," Alicia points out.

If anyone needs help communicating with their family members this season, you're more than welcome to get in touch with Alicia. She knows how stressful the holidays can be. She's available Monday through Friday. Call her cell at 959.229.4814 or her office number at 860.294.4044. You can also email her at [Alicia.peterson@mccallbhn.org](mailto:Alicia.peterson@mccallbhn.org).

### Give others the gift of mental health support.

In this season of giving, McCall's Director of Development and Marketing Marisa Mittelstaedt, MBA, is bringing attention to individuals who may be facing mental health disorders. "This year, through our Annual Appeal, we're raising money to support programs for children and seniors," Marisa explains. "We look at who is really struggling now. Oftentimes, they can't necessarily speak for themselves. We're asking our community to help us support these populations and all the people we serve."

The statistics show that the need for support is real:

- Half of all lifetime mental health conditions begin before the age of 14. (That's why programs that support early interventions are so important.)
- 23% of Connecticut residents aren't getting the mental health support that they need.
- Nearly 1 in 4 Connecticut residents have had symptoms of mental health disorder.

### Reach out to help yourself or to support others in need.

"We're really so grateful for all the support from our community," Marisa adds. "Whether you are able to donate or looking for help for yourself, please reach out to us."

It's easy to contact the McCall Behavioral Health Network. Call our main office at 860.496.2100. Or chat with us online at [mccallbhn.org](https://mccallbhn.org).

It's also easy to donate to our 2023 Annual Appeal, just visit [mccallbhn.org/donate](https://mccallbhn.org/donate).

TODAY: GIVING AND RECEIVING THE GIFT OF COMPASSION

NEW INTERVIEW



ALICIA PETERSON, RSS  
Specialist  
Community Engagement Specialist



MARISA MITTELSTAEDT, MBA  
Director of Development and Marketing

Time is to hear about family support services for you and your loved ones, as well as options for supporting the mental health of children, seniors, and everyone in between.

WEDNESDAY  
DECEMBER 29  
8:30 AM

**LEARN MORE ON WZBG.**

Don't worry, we've got you covered! Visit our pressroom to hear Alicia talk about ways to manage holiday stress, and Marisa discuss our 2023 Annual Appeal to support children and seniors with mental health disorders.

Click on the image to listen to the full FM 97.3 WZBG interview.



### GRANTS AND GRATITUDE.

The McCall Funding Committee is proud to announce recent grants awarded to our organization. We're extremely grateful for the generous gifts that will help further our mission.

#### Thank you to: The Anne and Rollin Bates Foundation

Award amount: \$50,000  
Funding will be used for: Furnishings for 176 Migeon Avenue in Torrington, the future home of our Hanson House Intensive Residential Treatment program

#### Thank you to: Foundation for Community Health

Award amount: \$15,000  
Funding was used for: Theatre rental, catering, and technological support during the LCOTF "Reimagining Empathy" conference

#### Thank you to: Thomaston Savings Bank

Award amount: \$2,500  
The grant funding provided toys for 20 children and holiday assistance gift cards for 10 families who are clients at McCall's Renato Outpatient Services in Waterbury.

#### Thank you to: The Northwest CT Community Foundation

Award amount: \$2,100  
The grant funding along with our angels at Cigna provided holiday gifts for over 50 families who participate in our Family Services programs in Torrington.

### GET YOUR TICKETS BEFORE THEY SELL OUT!

#### "Accessing Inner Peace and Resilience" with Gabby Bernstein.

McCall Behavioral Health Network Presents  
An evening fundraiser with Gabby Bernstein.  
February 9, 2024, at The Warner Theatre in Torrington



Join #1 *New York Times* bestselling author, Gabby Bernstein, for this intimate live talk. All proceeds go to McCall Behavioral Health Network to support our vital work in helping individuals heal from substance use disorders, mental health disorders, or both.

Here's what you can expect:

- An inspirational talk to help you access inner peace and resilience
- Transformational techniques for serenity and genuine happiness
- A powerful guided meditation—you'll walk away with a sense of calm and serenity
- Audience Q&A where you can ask Gabby anything
- Pre-event shopping with local vendors

Schedule of events:

- 6 p.m. — Doors open & pre-event shopping at local vendor tables
- 7 p.m. — Talk & Q&A
- 8:30 p.m. — Conclusion

Ticket info (All proceeds will go to McCall!):

- Regular admission: \$69
- VIP Admission + Happy Days Digital Course: \$129

The VIP ticket includes preferred seating and lifetime access to Gabby's Happy Days Digital Course and Guided Practices Album — A spiritual program to help you transform old patterns so you can experience genuine inner peace (\$540 value).

**Please note your email address will be shared with Dear Gabby, Inc. in order to fulfill delivery of the digital course — Access details will be sent via email within 7 working days or your purchase.**

2023 Annual Appeal

**Give Today!**

Now's the time to put everyone in a good state of mind.

**WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU.**

*Let's make a difference together!*



Time is running out on McCall's 2023 Annual Appeal. This year, our Appeal focuses on providing mental health care to children and seniors — two segments of the population that sometimes get overlooked.

Thank you to everyone who's contributed — your gift is going directly to help individuals to heal and lead healthier lives. If we are still on your 'to do' list — please consider donating today.

**DONATE HERE**



**Our Contact Information**  
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860.496.2100

[mccallbhn.org](https://mccallbhn.org)

