



## Encouraging Joy and Happiness January 2024

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Dear friends;

Many years ago, I was sitting next to my brother in church on Christmas Eve while we listened to a parishioner read the story of the birth of Christ. She said: “On the night that Jesus was born, the angel told the shepherds that if they would go looking in Bethlehem, they would find ‘the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger’”. What I heard, however, was that the babe would be wrapped in sweaty clothes. I exploded in laughter and my brother joined me. We could not stop, even after being sternly admonished by our parents and getting looks from everyone around us. In fact, as often happens when I’ve given over to that level of silliness, those looks only serve to extend the laughter. I will admit to you, dear friends, that this has happened throughout my life more times than I can count – often at inopportune times like a Broadway show, a solemn ceremony and even at my best friends’ weddings. I will also admit that those are some of my best memories. Laughter is my very favorite medicine.

When was the last time you laughed until tears streamed down your face and your stomach ached? When was the last time you experienced peace, contentment or joy? I think for many of us, it’s been too long. All sorts of things can get in our way including our life’s circumstances, our mental health and the state of the world. Our days can feel very compressed with the weight of responsibilities and the fullness of the human experience on our hearts - and it can be hard to find openings to allow for the free, happy moments.

I’m working to slow down and create those openings; it’s a process with fits and starts, like any change, but I’m noticing some lovely shifts. Every Monday night you’ll find me in an art studio taking lessons with some of my best friends and a marvelous teacher who invites me to see light, color and form in new and beautiful ways. I feel lighter. Every morning I take some time to exercise and do a little meditation. I feel freer. At least once a day I reach out to a friend or loved one who is on my mind and I check in. I feel more connected. As often as possible I try not to rush to get my to do list complete, I work to relish and appreciate the fabulous people around me. I feel joyful.

Joy is truly found in the singularity of the day if we can create the space to notice it. Life is not to be endured, it is a gift to be treasured and celebrated, one day at a time.

All my best,

Maria Coutant Skinner  
President & CEO

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The new year means a fresh new start, filled with opportunities to embrace all the wonderful things that bring us joy. As the year progresses, let's re-evaluate our priorities. Let's make time for more fun, more laughter, more of everything that can enrich our lives and uplift us. After all, the 24-hour news cycle can be disheartening. There's the heightened sense of uncertainty that comes with an election year, as well as the distressing reality of military conflicts overseas.

"What's going on right now in our world, in this climate, there's so much intensity, there's honestly a lot of pain and suffering," McCall's President & CEO Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW, observes. The question becomes, "Are we being intentional about finding joy?" In other words, as Maria puts it, "Do we give ourselves permission to find moments of just being silly, being light, and finding some laughter?"

#### **Actively pursue joy.**

The challenges facing humanity – including the lingering shadow of the COVID virus – are making us an anxious culture. "It feels like there's sort of this pressure," Maria notes, "and there's not a lot of space."

Maria suggests that we can create a healthy space for ourselves by slowing down, noticing, and naming. It's important to remind ourselves to notice things like the beauty of nature, the sunlight in winter, the snow on treetops. Recognizing these small everyday wonders and even saying them out loud can help reduce anxiety.

#### **Embrace healthy behavior.**

"We have to make a plan," Maria advises, "we have to be active participants in our lives." For example, to help combat the negative impact of loneliness and social isolation, text a friend and schedule a meal together. It can be that simple.

Another healthy behavior is to do something kind for someone. Acts of service give us joy and can provide joy for others.

#### **Avoid traps.**

The pursuit of joy isn't always easy. As Maria points out, "We want to avoid the traps. Some things look like peace, contentment, relaxation, joy – but they might be what distracts or numbs us. Things like drugs, alcohol, disappearing into our screens, or binge-eating. You have this temporary feeling of escape, but then you end up feeling worse afterwards."

If you're checking in with yourself, if you're prioritizing your emotional health, yet you still can't access joy and maybe you can't even remember the last time you laughed, the McCall Behavioral Health Network can help. We can do a screening for depression or anxiety. You don't have to stay in a dark, difficult place.

We encourage you to connect with the resources and support provided by the McCall Network. To get started, please call our main office at 860.496.2100. Or chat with us online at [mccallbhn.org](https://mccallbhn.org). In the meantime, we welcome you to get acquainted with our capabilities by visiting our [website](#).



### **Learn more on WZBG.**

Don't worry, we've got you covered! Visit our pressroom to hear Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW, McCall's President & CEO, talk about the emotional benefits of bringing joy into our lives.

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



### **GRANTS AND GRATITUDE.**

The McCall Funding Committee is excited to announce recent financial support extended to our organization. We're extremely grateful for the generous gifts that will help further our mission.

#### **Thank you to: The Archdiocese of Hartford**

Gift amount: \$10,000

Funding will be used for: Targeted marketing efforts on local bus routes in the Waterbury area to create awareness of our mental health care capabilities.

#### **Thank you to: The Northwest Community Bank Foundation**

Award amount: \$3,500

Funding is being used for: Personal care items for clients at our residential facilities in Torrington.



## Our thanks to everyone who contributed to our Annual Appeal!

We're thrilled to share the results of our 2023 Annual Appeal – which ran from mid-November till December 31 – to help support mental health care, particularly among children and seniors.

The final tally was \$26,222 and there are just so many people who deserve heartfelt thanks. Let's start with the 85 selfless donors who heeded the call. We appreciate your invaluable support of McCall's mission to make our programs and services accessible to all.

We simply cannot express the gratitude we feel toward the wonderful people who continually support McCall or who contributed for the very first time. Your generosity motivates us and will strengthen our commitment in 2024!



***Guest contributor, Noel DeLeon, Community Engagement Specialist, gives us an update from the CLEAR team and the LCOTF. (Pictured on the left.)***

As I reflected on our team's efforts over the past year, I was looking for a main takeaway. One topic stood above the rest: Education.

Recently I paid a visit to someone I've been coaching since early June. I originally met this person after they had experienced an overdose. At the time, they were still processing the event. They told me that they were shocked, primarily due to the overdose even

occurring. This shock was my opening to educate them about chemical compounds being seen in illicit substances.

After our discussion, the individual explained that they were completely unaware of the newest trends in the drug supply and that, between the overdose and this new information, they would be making every effort to regain their sobriety. Fast forward six months to my most recent visit with

the same individual. While discussing the amazing strides they were making in their recovery, the topic of Harm Reduction came up.

The individual's immediate reaction to Harm Reduction was, "I don't like it – it's just enabling."

It wasn't the first time I've heard this response to Harm Reduction. As a result, I'm always prepared to provide facts to illustrate the benefits of this particular recovery pathway. I shared these facts and while I did, I saw an expression of understanding followed by a look of regret and shame on the individual's face. They immediately apologized for their words, and I quickly explained that their apology was not necessary.

I shared that I also had the same misinformed belief not too long ago and it was only through learning the facts that I was able to overcome the falsehoods that are spread about Harm Reduction. The individual's reaction and reversal of opinion demonstrated how education plays an important part in the work that we do. It also highlighted how dangerous misinformation can be.

I truly believe that the information that was discussed during our initial conversation helped the individual move from the contemplation phase to the action phase in their recovery. I also believe that the facts will be further shared among the individual's friends and family. These facts might someday help someone within their circle feel safe enough to connect with Harm Reduction Services. Such a connection has the potential to save a life.

That potential to save a life is entirely due to education – the type of education that informed the works of scientists, doctors, clinicians, and so forth, who then shared their findings to the world. These findings became the basis of the education and training that eventually reached me, allowing me to share it with others.

Evidence-based facts are the best way I know to combat the stigma and misinformation that is so pervasive and harmful within our communities, our country, and our world. I hope we all continue to learn and to educate – not only for our own benefit, but for the benefit of building a better tomorrow. My thanks to McCall and the entire task force for the valuable education and training you've shared with me. I promise to always pay it forward.

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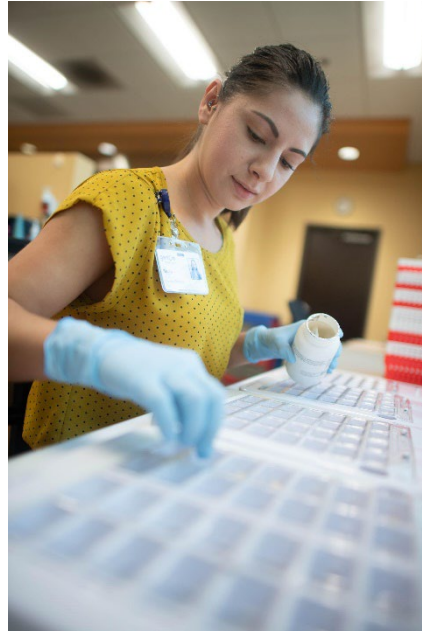


## **THE GENOA PHARMACY DELIVERS IN SO MANY WAYS.**

“We’re here to help and serve.” That’s the message from Kelly Bennett, Pharma D, Manager of the Genoa Healthcare Pharmacy at McCall’s Renato Outpatient Services location in Waterbury. Kelly brings fourteen years of retail pharmacy experience to his current role.

The pharmacy is a partnership between Genoa Healthcare and the McCall Behavioral Health Network. Genoa Healthcare is a leading provider of behavioral pharmacy and medication management services.

What people may not know is that the Genoa Pharmacy at Renato not only serves McCall clients their families.



What’s more, the Genoa Pharmacy fills prescriptions for all types of medications, not just those commonly prescribed for behavioral health needs. In many ways, it’s like having a retail pharmacy – such as Walgreens or CVS – as part of the McCall Network.

The pharmacy is located inside our Renato Outpatient Services facility at 969 West Main Street in Waterbury. Their hours are Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (They’re closed for a half-hour break at lunchtime, from 12:30 till 1:00.) Their phone number is 203.437.7280.

“We want to make the entire experience of getting prescriptions filled as smooth and seamless as possible for everyone here at McCall,” Kelly sums up, “that’s the goal.” When it comes to meeting that goal, Kelly and his team literally deliver!

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## **SPREAD THE WORD: MCCALL IS HIRING!!**

On January 24, McCall's Human Resources Manager, Danielle Brundage, B.A., SHRM-CP, attended a job fair at the Waterbury American Job Center.

McCall is proud of the safe, welcoming, judgement-free environment that we can offer new hires. Our staff members are passionate about what they do. Their motivation comes from a place of kindness and compassion. Now there's an opportunity for others to join our awesome team. Go to the Careers page on our website to see the many openings that we're looking to fill. If you know someone who may be suited for a particular role, be sure to give them our [Careers page link!](#)

Internships are also available to help someone get started in a career in human services. The person to contact is Jamie Calvano, LADC, ADS, Senior Director of Quality & Compliance, at: [Jamie.Calvano@mccallbhn.org](mailto:Jamie.Calvano@mccallbhn.org)



## MAKING AN IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY.

Rotary Club of the Torrington/Winsted Areas hosted McCall and Charlotte Hungerford Hospital (CHH) on 1/30.

Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW, kicked off the presentation highlighting FREE training offered to local employers. She was followed by Donna Bielefield, B.S., who spoke about McCall's Mental Health First Aid Training and, Andrew Lyon, MPH, CPS, and Kevin Iglesias, MPH, who gave a Narcan training. The event concluded with a Hands-Only CPR refresher from Fred Rosa at CHH.



### Our Contact Information

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