



**SPECIAL EDITION:
OVERDOSE AWARENESS.
August 2024**



Dear friends;

On August 29, we marked the tenth anniversary of the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force's Overdose Awareness Day Vigil. It is one of the most solemn and cathartic events I've ever had the honor of attending and this year's vigil was particularly profound. Instead of writing my monthly letter, I'm sharing this space with two extraordinary people who so bravely told their personal stories during the vigil and have agreed to have them included in this very special edition of our newsletter.

My very best to you always,

Maria Coutant Skinner

President & CEO



Tara Yard graciously volunteered to share these personal letters that she read aloud at the Resource Fair and Vigil on August 29 in Torrington. Here is a photo of her and her family. We're so extremely touched by Tara's warmth, sincerity, and generous desire to help others find hope and to heal.

Dearest Chuck,

I cannot believe it has been eight years since you left us. It still feels as if it were yesterday.

When I first wake up in the morning, sometimes I have a moment of forgetting you are not here. Then reality hits me and that terrible pain and emptiness comes flooding back. The dull pain and ache in my chest have become my norm. The feeling of complete happiness has permanently escaped me.

Dad and I are getting older, but you are frozen at the age of 29. Mary and Sarah both have children and wish you were here to be part of their children's lives – knowing they would adore you. Would you have also had children? Would you have a caring partner to share your life with?

I thought I had the monopoly on pain after losing you. I now realize that is far from true. Your sisters suffer your loss as intensely as Dad and I do. Your friends still talk and celebrate you. They visit you at the cemetery on your birthday. They bring their children to play in the field behind your stone. They leave behind a Frisbee with messages of love written on it.

We all seem to ask the same question, "What could we have done to help you more?" Do you know how much we love you? Did you realize we understood you suffered from a disease called addiction and never blamed you for that? Our hearts ached for what you had to deal with each day to fight the urge.

Our life lesson through this is to have empathy for ALL people. No one knows what other people are dealing with in their life. Be kind. Lend an ear or a warm hug to someone that may be suffering. Share your life lessons with someone else. No one wants to be alone on this life journey.

Love,

MOM

Tara also read this letter to individuals in recovery and their family members who support them on their journey.

To You and Your Family,

We stand with you in your struggle against addiction, and we want you to know that your fight is worth every ounce of effort. Addiction is a powerful and relentless force, but so are you. Every step you take toward recovery, no matter how small, is a victory worth celebrating.

You are not alone in this journey – there are people who care about you, who believe in your strength, and who are ready to support you through the highs and the lows. We see your courage, and we want you to know that your life is precious, your future is worth fighting for, and we are here to walk this path with you, every step of the way.

Our love to you,

The Yards



We are also proud to bring you Julian Daly's powerful words that he graciously shared on stage at the event:

My name is Julian, and it is a great honor to be here to share this space with you all. I've been asked to share about Narcan and the importance of Narcan in my community and in my own personal life.

For myself and for many others, recovery is not linear, and many have their own journey and challenges finding the path that best works for them.

I am one of those people. I am a person who has struggled immensely in my recovery journey.

My own path has included choosing to use fentanyl and other drugs despite knowledge of their harm and not truly wanting to

At the end of May of this year, just three or four months ago, I was in one of the worst spaces I have ever been physically and emotionally. I was homeless, using, and felt truly alone. I was carrying so much shame, fear, and guilt and unable to stop and I didn't yet have the courage to call anyone for help. I sat myself behind a dumpster and intended to not be found. I used and used, purposely trying desperately to disappear forever, believing I deserved nothing more than to leave life behind forever, right in that space.

However much time later, I came to – surrounded by police and EMS. I was "Narcanned." Not by them at first, but by a stranger who had been walking around that area from the back who saw my head leaning over and sticking out. I don't know who that person is – the police were sure to ingrain this in me despite the state of sickness and anger I was in.

That person was carrying Narcan and because of their quick thinking and administration of it, they saved my life until the police arrived and administered more.

Thanks to this angel of a stranger and because of Narcan, I am able to stand here to share. I have been given the literal breath of life back when it was lost.

With community, compassion, love, and kindness, we can help others immensely and continue to give myself and thousands of others another opportunity to choose recovery.



August 25 through August 31 marked Overdose Awareness Week, with International Overdose Awareness Day being observed on August 31. This year's theme, "Together We Can," highlights the power of our community when we all stand together. At the McCall Behavioral Health Network, our hearts go out to the families and friends who have lost loved ones to overdose. We continue our steadfast commitment to preventing these tragic deaths.

We were proud to be part of the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force's Resource Fair and Vigil held in Torrington on Thursday, August 29. The event honored those who lost their lives to overdose. At the same time, it was an opportunity to celebrate individuals in recovery and to share stories of hope.

Keep Narcan handy.

Kyle Fitzmaurice, a Community Engagement Specialist at McCall and a member of the Community and Law Enforcement for Addiction Recovery (CLEAR) team, talked about the importance of awareness and prevention. "We need to normalize the conversation if we're going to have any positive change," Kyle notes. "That starts with family, it starts with friends."

Kyle wants to remind everyone that administering Narcan (which is the brand name of a nasal spray that contains an active ingredient called naloxone) can save the life of a person experiencing an overdose. People should keep Narcan handy. "Everybody should carry it in their first aid kit or car or wherever else," Kyle advises. A container of Narcan is small enough to fit easily in a handbag. "It's super-easy to use," says Kyle.

Leading with empathy.

Why are there so many overdoses? Kyle points to two significant factors. “One, the drug supply on the street is unregulated and unsafe. And two, people are using alone because of the stigma around substance use.” People don’t want to talk about the fact that they use substances. As a result, they often use substances behind closed doors and they’re more likely to pass away because of that.

There’s so much that can be done to combat overdoses from substance use. “Be open-minded and not judgmental,” Kyle suggests. “When we lead with empathy, so much can happen.”

Resources and training.

McCall provides support and connection for those facing substance use challenges as well as people who have loved ones struggling with substance use. Among our most valuable resources is free Overdose Prevention Training (including how to administer Narcan) for businesses and organizations.

To learn more about Prevention Training and about all our programs and services to help individuals heal and recover, visit mccallbhn.org or call 860.496.2100.



TOPIC:
OVERDOSE
AWARENESS
DAY

WEDNESDAY
AUGUST 21
8:20 AM

NEW INTERVIEW

with
KYLE FITZMAURICE,
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST

Tune in to learn about the upcoming Overdose Awareness Day Vigil and Resource Fair on August 29, 2024!

LEARN MORE ON WZBG.

Miss the interview? Don't worry, we've got you covered!

Visit our pressroom to hear McCall Community Engagement Specialist Kyle Fitzmaurice talk about the role of awareness and prevention in reducing overdoses.

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



**GRANTS AND
GRATITUDE.**

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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: Thomaston Savings Bank

Award amount: \$3,000

Funding will be used for: The launch of our new "Recovery and Caregiving" support group that will focus on helping adults in recovery who are either currently in a caregiving role or working toward regaining their role as a caregiver for a child or children.



TRAILS TO WELLNESS CELEBRATED PATHWAYS TO HEALING AND SELF-CARE.

On August 1, the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force and the McCall Behavioral Health Network hosted “Trails to Wellness” in Torrington. The fun, family-friendly event showcased the many different pathways to healing. It highlighted different self-care and holistic wellness activities (such as aromatherapy, yoga, meditation, qi gong, adventure, music, and much more). Activities for kids included face painting and a tie-dye T-shirt station.



THE WATERBURY SUMMER EXPO.

Glenn Ryan, CAC, CADC, Director of Special Services, attended The Waterbury Summer Expo this month with representatives from DMHAS. McCall promoted our Senior Outreach and Engagement services along with local vendors serving our elders and added a little sunshine to their day.



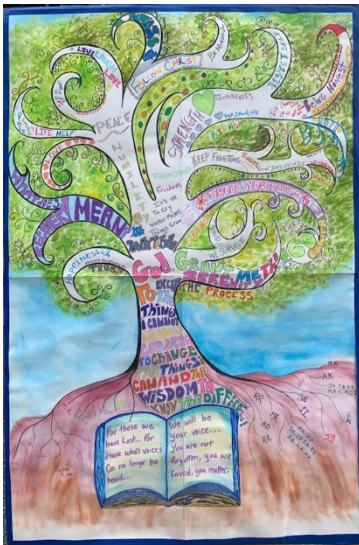
WATERBURY INTERNATIONAL OVERDOSE AWARENESS VIGIL.

Shawn Boahene, MAT Employment Specialist, and Ximena Varas, Community Engagement Specialist, attended the Waterbury Vigil on Friday, 8/30.



LCOTF OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY RESOURCE FAIR AND VIGIL.

Community members gathered in Coe Park in Torrington on August 29 to honor the lives that have been lost to overdose. The Litchfield County Opiate Task Force's Resource Fair and Candlelight Vigil was also a celebration of recovery and hope. Individuals shared inspirational and courageous stories about their ability to limit substance use or eliminate it from their lives altogether. The event raised awareness, reduced stigma, and provided resources to help prevent tragic deaths from overdoses.











**DONATE TO OUR
FIRST ANNUAL
CARNES WEEKS
CENTER**

**CLOTHING
DRIVE**

**NOW through
the end of
September
2024.**

We're looking for new and/or gently worn men's and women's clothing of all sizes. All donated clothing will be made available to our residential clients who are in need.




**IT'S
EASY.
HERE'S
HOW.**

ITEMS NEEDED

- ✓ T-shirts and sweatshirts
- ✓ Shorts and casual pants
- ✓ Shoes and new packaged socks
- ✓ New packaged undergarments
- ✓ Coats

Call to schedule a drop-off:

Danielle Verderame
860.496.2107, ext. 2205

**Carnes Weeks Center is located
at 58 High St. in Torrington.**

Unfortunately, unscheduled drop-offs
are not possible at this time.



Our Contact Information

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860-496-2100

www.mccallbhn.org/

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