



HEALING FORCES.

September 2024



Dear friends;

With August marking Overdose Awareness Month and September observing both Recovery Month and Suicide Awareness Month, there is a wearisome intensity to this time of the year. However, finding inspiration and renewal is vital even when you are weary. I'd like to share four experiences that centered me and serve as beautiful examples of courage and community as healing forces for humanity.

The funeral.

I attended the funeral for a beloved local pastor and family friend who was almost 90 at the time of his passing. George will be deeply missed and there is heartache, ...there is also cause for celebration of a life well lived. His children and grandchildren tearfully, and with heaps of laughter, shared their remembrances, and the overflowing church burst out with song after song celebrating the immensely beautiful impact of this one, faith filled life. I was struck by the restorative power of a loving community as we surrender and let go.

The Task Force meeting.

You will read a profoundly moving piece from Emman (Manny) Barreto in this newsletter about his recovery journey. Manny and many others courageously shared their deeply personal stories at the last meeting of the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force. Many discussed how, because there was at least one person who never gave up on them, they are alive today and sharing their unique gifts to make the world a better place. Their testimonials remind each of us of the precious promise of every life.

The Conference.

Joy Pendola and I had the remarkable honor of attending the Alignment for Progress conference at the Kennedy Center where Patrick Kennedy

and his team outlined their ambitious goals for 2033: 90% of individuals being screened for mental health conditions or substance use disorders; 90% receiving the evidence-based services and supports they need, and, 90% of those treated being able to manage their symptoms and achieve recovery. In attendance were some of our country's most influential decision makers – each with a commitment to bringing those goals to fruition. Sitting on the sidelines while others do the heavy lifting is not an option in this work. We all have work to do if we expect to meaningfully change the status quo. More about this can be found [here](#).

The Vigil.

The Overdose vigil in Torrington was held at Coe Park and we shared a transformative experience facilitated by our friend Tim Walsh from Adventure Recovery. After the reading of the names of loved ones lost, we formed a large circle where more than one hundred attendees stood shoulder to shoulder with our lit candles. Tim recognized how hard it is to let go so he counted down and we blew out the candles together. We needed two hands to do the activity in which we held a river stone in our left hand to start. He asked us to think about someone we've lost and to fill our hearts with the memories and feelings of that person as we held the stone over our heart. We felt the stone's cold surface turn to warmth as we clasped it and poured our heart's contents into it. He then asked us to take a deep breath and exhale all those emotions and thoughts onto our stone, to empty out and let go. Next, he told us to take our right hands and extend them over in front of the person to our right. Together, the entire group passed our stones to the left and received our neighbor's stones. I felt the weight and warmth of the stone from the woman who hesitantly passed to me as our eyes met and our hands lingered together. I passed my stone to my Dad, a beautiful experience for us both. Each and every person in the park that evening was moved and changed by that sharing. Letting go while honoring the loss is courageous. Witnessing is an honor. Holding another's pain is a privilege.

We are, all of us, part of a broader community where our hearts can open to give and receive the fullness of our humanity. When we do, we are moved to no longer accept the status quo, we trust and believe that compassionate change is possible and that we are precisely the ones to take on the task and make it happen together. We are cleansed with this life affirming spiritual bath generated from each other's light from within.

My very best to you always,

Maria Coutant Skinner

President & CEO



September is Suicide Awareness Month – bringing attention to a serious subject that needs to be talked about openly. In 2023, more than 50,000 Americans died by suicide.

Opening the conversation about suicide is critical because it breaks through the stigma and silence that often surround the topic, allowing individuals to feel less isolated and more supported. By fostering open dialogue, we create a space where people can share their struggles, seek help, and connect with resources before a crisis escalates. This proactive approach can lead to early intervention, providing hope, and potentially saving lives by encouraging those at risk to reach out for the care they need.

In an ongoing effort to save lives, Donna Bielefield, BA, a member of McCall’s Prevention Services team, wants everyone to know about McCall’s FREE QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention Training.

A free resource that saves lives.

The McCall Prevention team goes out into local communities and presents QPR Training for free. The informative session is generally an hour to 90 minutes. Our goal is to help people recognize when someone is having a mental health issue that may lead to a potential suicide.

It’s not an easy thing to go to someone and ask: “Are you considering taking your life by suicide?” or “Are you very unhappy?”

“We recommend just asking the question,” says Donna. If you feel that you can’t ask the question by yourself, try to find support services for assistance.

Recognizing signs.

“Suicide is not something that a lot of people have wanted to talk about,” Donna notes. “Suicide Awareness Month is bringing the subject into the open.”

If I can get QPR Training to more and more people so that they can recognize the signs, then I’ve done my job,” Donna says. “We’ll go to anywhere in the Northwest Corner. Pull us in. Call McCall and I’ll set up a training.”

QPR Training isn't just for health care professionals. It's also for the general public. McCall's Prevention Services team offers the training to local agencies, organizations, and businesses (regardless of their size).

Resources that can help.

Donna has a message for anyone who is worried about a loved one or is in a difficult place themselves and contemplating suicide: Call 988, a national 24-hour Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, available in English or Spanish.

McCall's QPR Training is available at your site or virtually via Zoom. To schedule a training, just [click here](#) and register on the McCall website. You can also call McCall's main office at 860.496.2100.

TOPIC:
SUICIDE
PREVENTION
MONTH

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER 18
8:20 AM

NEW INTERVIEW

with
DONNA BIELEFIELD,
PREVENTION FACILITATOR

Tune in for a conversation on the importance of talking about suicide and how each of us has the power to provide hope and support.

McCall Behavioral Health NETWORK

FM 97.3 WZBG
"Litchfield County's Favorite"

LEARN MORE ON WZBG.

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

Visit our pressroom to hear Donna Bielefield, BA, Prevention Services, talk about the value of McCall's free QPR Suicide Prevention Training.

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



NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH.

A personal story of hope.



National Recovery Month is observed every September. It's a month dedicated to hope and healing. Emmanuelle Barreto, Managing Director of Tidewater Residences in Canaan, CT (a facility that supports individuals in recovery) was kind enough to share his personal story with us:

My name is Manny Barreto and I am a person in long-term recovery. I am blessed to live today with a message and as an example of hope. As someone who lived a life with substance use disorder, I understand the pain of loss that cannot and need not be explained. The type of pain that hurts so often it rendered me unable to verbalize or process beyond an expression of numbness.

Little more than a decade ago, I looked around and noticed that among people of my generation I had attended more funerals than weddings, baby showers, and graduations. I bore witness to the unfairness, faith in destruction, obsession, and pain that pulled me to depths with little more than a hopeless wish for a permanent end.

Today I am grateful because that same hopelessness has left me fertile for the connection and support which ultimately pushed me into a new beginning. One day and step at a time, I have been able to continue to grow and heal. Since those humble beginnings I can now confidently say that I am not only a person in recovery. I am a person in recovery, I am a son, brother, uncle, and friend.

There is not enough time nor space to describe life when lived with the joy of living, the peace of mindfulness, and excitement for tomorrow. My living message for those who still wander is this: you are understood, recovery and healing are possible, and you are not alone.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH.

A reflection and celebration of life as a Dominican growing up in the US.



The following article was graciously contributed by Euchy Silven, an Addictions Case Manager here at McCall.

I was born in the Dominican Republic. At four years old, I came to live with my father in the United States. Yet what amazes me today is how those still vivid, preschooler memories have sustained a lifelong bond and connection with the culture and ways of my Island.

It took me, however, a long time to realize what it meant to be culturally and ethnically Dominican – and the many ways it impacts who I am. Growing up, my family embraced our culture through music, food, and language – our parents made sure we spoke Spanish in our home.

To this day, I cherish the memories that certain songs, smells, or words immediately elicit, and that is why I strive to continue the same traditions with my own children.

Today, I can confidently say that I am proud and feel the uniqueness and honor that comes with being Dominican, especially having been born there.

Nevertheless, growing up I never understood why my parents had to work so hard to provide for their children. Yet their hard work paid off and they were able to achieve what some might call the American Dream. In spite of having an elementary-level education and limited English skills, my parents worked and managed to purchase a home and safe vehicles and were able to provide and meet their children's needs.

There is value in the universality of stories, and in my case, the simple truth is that my father and mother, albeit in different ways, both made real sacrifices to bring me to the U.S. with the sincere hope and confidence that here I would not be faced with similar struggles to the ones they confronted growing up.

They wanted me to have a chance at a better education, a chance to pursue a career, the opportunity to build a name and a life for myself. As part of this, they made sure to instill in all of their children a work ethic and respect for the fruits born from hard work.

While each person's journey is uniquely paved, today I am proud to note that mine includes being the matriarch of a happy family, earning a college degree, and having an impactful career at a distinguished community organization that recognizes the value and diversity of ALL its employees and staff.

MCCALL NAMED A TOP WORKPLACE FOR THE SEVENTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR.

Hearst Media also recognizes Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW, for excellence in leadership.



We're so proud to announce that McCall was named as a Top Workplaces 2024 honoree by Hearst Connecticut Top Workplaces for the seventh consecutive year. The award is based entirely on employee feedback collected through a confidential, third-party survey administered by Energage, LLC, highlighting key areas such as employee respect, support, growth, and empowerment.

“The fact that this recognition is based on feedback from our own staff makes it incredibly meaningful,” said Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW, President and CEO of McCall. “Our staff’s compassion and dedication create a space where both employees and clients feel at home. We are immensely proud of our team for fostering a culture of acceptance, connection, and growth. Congratulations to our exceptional staff for making McCall a truly special place to work.”

In addition to McCall’s Top Workplaces honor, Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW, has been named the recipient of the 2024 Top Leadership Award for midsize employers. This marks her second time receiving this prestigious recognition. Read the full interview in the CT Post [here](#).

“I’m deeply honored to receive the Top Leadership Award,” said Maria. “Leading McCall has been a privilege, and my priority has always been our people. While there are challenges - especially in the nonprofit world - our biggest investment has been in cultivating a culture of connection, communication, and care. It’s not just about budgets; it’s about asking, ‘What do you need? How can we support you?’ Our staff is what makes McCall special, and this recognition belongs to them as much as it does to me.”

HELPING A LOVED ONE TRANSITION HOME AFTER TREATMENT.



Since 1989, September has been recognized as National Recovery Month, an observance that promotes and supports new evidence-based treatment and recovery practices, honors the country's strong and proud recovery community, and salutes the dedication of service providers and community members who make recovery in all its forms possible. It also serves to increase public awareness surrounding mental health and substance use disorders.

One concern that I'm often asked about by the family members of individuals facing substance use and mental health challenges is: What can we expect and how can we support a loved one's recovery journey once they leave their inpatient treatment?

Understanding your role.

First, be prepared for their homecoming. Holding a family session before your loved one leaves the treatment facility will help you understand your role in their recovery process. It is also important to stay committed to rebuilding your relationship.

Recovery is a lifelong process that is not facilitated by treatment alone. In other words, treatment is just the beginning. Your loved one will be navigating a substance-free life, trying to gain acceptance from family members and friends who may be unsupportive or who may not understand what it's like to undertake a recovery journey.

Substance use disorder affects the entire family, so it may be wise to seek out support for yourself while your loved one is in treatment. A Family Recovery Coach or a therapist can educate you on substance use disorder, help you make changes in your household routines, teach you how to create boundaries, and prepare you to deal with challenging situations moving forward.

Keep realistic expectations.

To help your loved one transition from an inpatient facility to their home, it's helpful to keep your expectations realistic. Your loved one has worked on discharge planning with their counselor in treatment to distinguish when and how they should return to or find work, engage in family responsibilities, and engage in social commitments outside of recovery meetings and functions. It's unrealistic to expect them to instantly resume all their usual activities. Such expectations only put added pressure on them (at a time when they are already anxious).

When a loved one returns home after treatment, you may be tempted to bombard them with questions about what it was like and what they learned about themselves and about their substance use. However, this line of questioning is not advisable. Inpatient treatment for substance use is an intensely personal experience – so it's important to allow your loved one to talk to you about things only when they feel comfortable to do so (that is, if they decide to share at all).

One other important note: every single household should have life-saving naloxone (aka Narcan) in hand to help prevent an overdose – it should be a standard item in every first aid kit!

Stay in the moment.

Try to remain focused on the present moment. You may feel compelled to rehash old situations that went unresolved or to bring up circumstances where an apology should have been given. Unfortunately, doing this can make your loved one’s transition even harder. It can be helpful to think of the transition as a new beginning and commit to letting the past go.

Most importantly, openly communicating with your loved one will help them with their recovery. Express your love and support as honestly as possible. Remain flexible regarding your expectations of your loved one. Like anyone else, they’ll have good days and bad days. Try to respect your loved one’s values. Understand that they’ve worked hard in treatment to learn self-respect and to respect others – so encourage them to continue these positive behaviors.

Self-care is key.

Please remember to take care of yourself. It’s impossible to pour from an empty cup, so do whatever it is that keeps refilling yours. If you would like help with any of these challenges or you’re struggling in your relationship with a loved one who is using substances, don’t hesitate to reach out to McCall’s Family Recovery Coach.

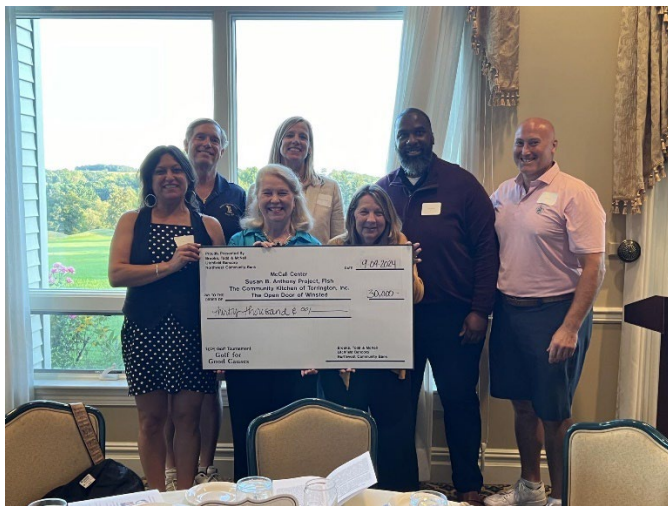
Alicia Peterson, RSS
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[Click here](#) to receive the newsletter in your inbox.



SWINGING FOR A GOOD CAUSE.

McCall Behavioral Health Network is grateful to be part of the 24th Annual BLN Charity Golf Outing. We are honored to be among the local charities benefiting from this incredible community event, which raised \$30,000 to support essential services such as food, shelter, and protection from domestic violence for the residents of Northwestern Connecticut. Our CEO, Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW, was proud to be there to accept the award alongside the other deserving organizations: Susan B. Anthony Project, FISH / Friends in Service to Humanity of Northwestern Connecticut, The Community Kitchen of Torrington, and Open Door of Winsted.



STANDING TOGETHER: JOSE COLON MEETS SENATOR MURPHY AT VETERANS STAND DOWN.

On September 20, Jose Colon, Case Manager at McCall Behavioral Health Network, had the honor of meeting U.S. Senator Chris Murphy at the Veterans Stand Down event in Danbury, Connecticut. The Stand Down, an annual service fair for Veterans, brings together state and federal agencies, Veteran organizations, and community-based nonprofits to provide crucial resources, from health screenings to housing assistance, for those who have served. This event is an invaluable opportunity to connect Veterans with the support they need and deserve.



MOOSE-TASTIC MOMENTS AT NCCC AS MCCALL CONNECTS WITH STUDENTS.

Kevin Iglesias, MPH, Prevention Facilitator, and Marisa Mittelstaedt, MBA, Director of Development and Marketing, attended a student resource fair at the Northwestern Campus of CT State Community College. During the event, Kevin and Marisa had the delightful opportunity to meet the school's beloved mascot, Maddie Moose, while connecting with students about the resources McCall Behavioral Health Network provides



MCCALL JOINS THE CELEBRATION AT CCAR'S ANNUAL WALK.

On September 28, Traci Eburg, Community Engagement Specialist, and Marisa Mittelstaedt, MBA, Director of Development and Marketing, proudly attended CCAR's annual Recovery Walk. This inspiring event, part of National Recovery Month, brings the community together to celebrate

the strength, hope, and resilience of those in recovery, while promoting awareness and support for ongoing recovery efforts.





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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



KIM CARTER-TILLMAN

Giving the Best to Those Who Need the Most



STEVE PEMBERTON

The Lighthouse Effect: A Chance in the World



BRYN LOTTIG

No Child Left Inside



JUSTIN & ALEXIS BLACK

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