



## AND YET...WE PERSEVERE. February 2025

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Dear friends;

Growing up, February brought about one of my favorite traditions; our annual family vacation to YMCA Camp Hi-Rock in South Egremont, Massachusetts. Nestled among 1,000 wooded acres in the Berkshire Mountains, surrounded by conservation forest, and centered around a 90-acre lake, this was paradise for our group that included extended family and friends. We'd pack cross country skis, sleds, games and a heart full of excitement for the adventures we'd find. Accommodations were rustic, a cabin heated by a single wood stove, bunk beds, a tiny kitchen and some long folding tables. The outdoors had everything we needed to stay delightfully occupied for days on end. We'd ski and explore, toboggan down long steep hills, make up games and contests, and often, take some massive risks as we chased thrills. We'd jump off cliffs landing in feet of snow, ski off cabin roofs, and pour water on the sledding hills to create icy runs increasing the speed of descent. It was a victory to land in the riverbed on the far end of the sports field. A favorite memory is when we fashioned sails out of brooms and sleeping bags and affixed them to flexible flyer sleds as we sped across the frozen lake. A similar constitution was required to play the evening games of charades and cards with a level of competitiveness that bordered on professional. The grit that was expected of attendees came to be known as Hi-Rock material. This became embedded in our family lexicon.

When I was twelve, I'd assess the level of Hi-Rock material designation on a person's ability to enjoy these sorts of adventures. Today, I have evolved my criteria - but the core remains. Grit, courage, resilience - not measured by hurdling down an icy hill but by one's capacity to stay in the arena when things get tough.

If your news feed is causing you some anxiety these days, you are not alone. There is a great deal of chaos, uncertainty, and cruelty unfolding around us. Much has been said about the ways we can respond, and I imagine you're employing many. A combination of engagement, rest, education, connection, and advocacy are all important and useful.

I think this moment calls for us to access our courage, our grit, and our resilience. Examples abound: Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde, Governor Janet Mills, and the US Army Chorus choir. There was testimony offered to the CT legislature for Overdose Prevention Centers where brave people shared their experiences of surviving overdoses to advance legislation. There are trans and nonbinary people sharing their stories and advocating to protect access to healthcare. There are businesses publicly committing to their values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Americans celebrating Black History Month and

appreciating the lifesaving work of USAID. There are the people of Ukraine standing firm in their independence.

Every day there are people sharing with their dentist that they may have an eating disorder, their therapist that they may have a gambling issue, their doctor that they may be suicidal, their teacher that they are worried their mom is struggling with alcohol. There are children making sure that kid in the cafeteria has someone to sit with, there are police officers assuring that the people in the car accident have a safe place to return to because they are homeless. Every single story is an act of courage. There is risk involved in each - and yet we persevere because we decide that the benefits of those brave acts outweigh the risks. I often find myself truly in awe of the people we serve at McCall - the act of asking for help and sharing your story is peak Hi-Rock material.

I noticed that the conditions at Hi-Rock led to our willingness to take those calculated risks. We were among others whom we trusted, we would cheer one another on, believing in the strength of each other -and- we knew if things went awry, we'd find a safe place to land and heal - and then try again.

In the arena of life, when the moment calls us to act, we decide, knees shaking, voice wavering, heart racing - that we will do what is right by humanity.

Here's what I believe with every fiber of my being - we ALL have the capacity to be Hi-Rock material. It's so hard sometimes and we won't always get it right. But together we can create the conditions to support one another in finding the courage to build a world that values respect and kindness.

Yours in solidarity,

Maria

Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW  
President and CEO



McCall's Director of Family Services, Leann Mitchell, LCSW, shares her insights about relationships within families, starting with the relationship between caregivers and children. "The inherent human need from the moment we're born is to seek a connection with someone we know who will be there," Leann notes. Caregivers are "the safe, secure base that a child is always seeking to return to."

**Relationships can rupture.**

In some instances, factors such as substance use or mental health challenges may have an impact. They may prevent the caregiver from maintaining consistency, or from being a safe, secure base. That may leave the child trying to figure out how to operate while experiencing ruptures in the relationship.

A child may not be sure about who they can return to or how that person is going to interact with them. Over time, these ruptures impact their ability to operate in a healthy way not only with their caregiver, but with other people in their life.

### **It takes time and patience.**

In her day-to-day work, Leann encounters real-life situations in which the caregiver is struggling with substance use. “They need to seek treatment to get themselves on a better path for their overall wellness and recovery,” Leann explains. In such cases, the child may need to go and spend some time with another person in the family or be outplaced into foster care. Once their parent or caregiver is ready to come back, sometimes there’s a lack of understanding about the time and patience necessary to repair the relationship with their child.

The Family Services program at McCall helps people understand that a rupture in a family bond is often about a lack of trust in someone. Once trust is broken, it takes time to build it up again.

### **Progress, not perfection.**

When it comes to moving forward in any family relationship, it’s about “progress, not perfection,” Leann asserts. “This is not the time to place more shame or blame on the mistakes we’ve made. Take a moment to step into the other person’s shoes.” Leann recommends practicing healthy communication and expressing our own needs and boundaries.

“We’re all on a journey and we’re all working through it,” says Leann. “Caregivers, parents, spouses, partners, coworkers—none of us are expected to be perfect in life.” That’s why it’s important to self-reflect and then strive to progress forward in a positive way.

If you or a loved one needs support in repairing a family relationship, McCall’s Family Services Department is here to help. Visit the [Family Services](#) section of McCall’s website or call our main office at 860.496.2100 to make an appointment.

RECORDING FROM  
FEBRUARY 19, 2025

MISS THE INTERVIEW?

with  
**LEANN MITCHELL, LCSW**  
DIRECTOR OF FAMILY SERVICES

Repairing Relationships

McCall Behavioral Health

Sorit Rock 97.3 WZBG

### **LEARN MORE ON WZBG.**

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

Visit our pressroom to hear McCall’s Director of Family Services, Leann Mitchell, LCSW, discuss family relationships, including the challenges caregivers in recovery may face.

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

# THE IMPORTANCE OF OVERDOSE PREVENTION CENTERS.



*We'd like to thank McCall Harm Reduction Coordinator, Kyle Fitzmaurice, for contributing the following article.*

This month, I had the honor of being one of the many people who testified in support of a [Connecticut bill \(SB1285\)](#) to establish an Overdose Prevention Center pilot program. The facilities will serve as access points to treatment and harm reduction resources. They're essentially spaces where people can feel safe.

After speaking, I reflected on the 60 individuals who testified before me, sharing their stories, expertise, and valuable insights. It was emotionally exhausting to hear so many stories of heartbreaking, unnecessary loss of life. The stories from people in recovery had a common theme, along the lines of "I didn't feel like I could tell people I was using" or "I hoped someone would find me in time if I overdosed." Unfortunately, many of the stories ended with someone not being found in time.

Something that really stayed with me was a quote shared by one of our colleagues from the Connecticut Harm Reduction Alliance. He said that "ignorance doesn't have to be malicious to be harmful." That comment brought back conversations I've been part of—personally and professionally—about harm reduction. Most of the time, the common thread is that people care about the issue of substance use prevention. However, recommendations regarding the proper courses of action were vastly different. Common responses to substance use prevention sadly continue to be outdated and have been proven to be less effective, such as tough love, coercion, forced treatment, and arrest.

The objective does not have to be to change minds. Instead, we can plant seeds, leave the door open, and simply educate. I recognize that it may feel impossibly frustrating, but when I think about the times in my own life when I had my own mind changed about something, it was by people who met my ignorance with some level of grace. Any time someone shamed me for not knowing, gave a snarky laugh, or grew upset when I didn't acknowledge some key detail, my ears turned off, and I went into defensive mode. For those who have heard me chat with someone who disagreed with me about harm reduction, they've seen what leaving the door open looks like. It almost always ends with an invitation to our harm reduction office. I extend the invitation because it's hard to be against the work once you've seen it. Harm reduction is about keeping the lines of communication open so that conversations can occur when people are ready.

It was evident during the day I testified that a lot of folks understandably envision harm reduction as a way to get people into treatment. Lines like "dead people don't recover" were common. While harm reduction can absolutely be a conduit to treatment, it's not the sole objective.

Treatment—even abstinence—certainly can be considered harm reduction. Harm reduction values autonomy, celebrating the small wins, and ensuring that there's simply a space for people who so often feel like there isn't one. Harm reduction is not, however, any type of forced, coercive, or judgmental push in any direction. Overdose Prevention Centers, syringe service programs, and supplies ranging from safer smoking kits to safer

sex kits, all center around the core idea that people are going to do what they're going to do, and we don't have to condone the behavior to ensure they're safe.

People tend to forget that our neighbors who are feeling hurt or alone want us to show them we care and then ask them what they need. Often, they just simply want us to be there for them. They don't always need nuggets of wisdom. They need someone to sit in the mud with them and for them to be validated enough to feel what they need to feel. They need acceptance.

For one hour a week at our harm reduction sites, we can provide that acceptance. Individuals come to us for harm reduction supplies, access to treatment, and a warm conversation. Then they leave until the following week. They often use substances alone in their homes, their cars, and their tents. What an Overdose Prevention Center offers is so much more than a safe space. It's a place that may help save lives. A place where people know their belongings won't be stolen, where people won't be assaulted if they're unable to protect themselves. A place where people can receive compassionate care without judgment. A place to feel accepted.



## **UNDERSTANDING INCARCERATION AND SUPPORTING YOUR LOVED ONE UPON RE-ENTRY TO SOCIETY**

*Graciously written and shared by Alicia Peterson, RSS, Family Recovery Coach.*

When a loved one is incarcerated due to substance use, families often face a whirlwind of emotions—grief, guilt, hope, and uncertainty. Discover how individuals can offer meaningful support while setting healthy boundaries, connecting loved ones to treatment, and prioritizing their own well-being.

Don't miss these insights from our Family in Recovery Newsletter – [click here to read the full article](#).

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## A PROPOSED SCORECARD FOR MENTAL HEALTH COVERAGE.

Accessing mental health care shouldn't be a guessing game. A [key proposal](#) in the newly released 2025 Comptroller's Healthcare Cabinet Report hopes to change that with a mental health insurance scorecard—a tool designed to bring transparency to mental health coverage across Connecticut. McCall's own Maria Coutant Skinner, LCSW, is a co-chair of the mental health subcommittee. The initiative would help consumers understand which insurance plans truly support mental health care, while also holding insurers accountable. It's a bold step toward affordability and access that could shape the future of mental health care in Connecticut. Learn more from a recent article in the Yale Daily News—[click here](#).



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## ADDRESSING MISINFORMATION ABOUT FENTANYL.

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid contributing to the rise in overdose deaths. However, misinformation and fear about fentanyl exposure can create undue panic and hinder life-saving efforts. The Community and Law Enforcement for Addiction Recovery (CLEAR) team presents a short video that addresses common myths and provides accurate information that all first responders and community members should have. [Click here](#) to view the video.

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## IMPORTANT REMINDER: MCCALL GOES TOBACCO-FREE ON MARCH 1.

Starting March 1, 2025, McCall will become a tobacco-free agency, reinforcing our commitment to a healthier and more supportive environment for all. This policy prohibits the use of tobacco products on all McCall properties and applies to clients, staff, and visitors. We understand that quitting can be challenging, and we're here to help with free cessation resources, including counseling, nicotine replacement therapies, and support groups. Thank you for joining us in making this positive change!

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A photograph of two bright red hearts resting on a light-colored wooden surface. The hearts are slightly overlapping and are the central focus of the image.

**GRANTS AND  
GRATITUDE.**

## EXPANDING HOPE: MCCALL'S NEW CHILD & ADOLESCENT SERVICES IN WATERBURY.

At the McCall Behavioral Health Network, we believe in the power of early intervention to change lives. Thanks to a generous grant from The Cigna Group Foundation, we've expanded our Child & Adolescent Services to Waterbury, ensuring that more young people and their families receive the compassionate, culturally responsive care they need. By addressing barriers to care, McCall and Cigna are bringing hope and healing to a diverse community. McCall is proud to be featured in a Cigna Newsroom article—[click here](#) to read it.



## CLEAR TEAM JOINS NATIONAL SUMMIT ON DEFLECTION AND RECOVERY.

Members of McCall's Community and Law Enforcement for Addiction Recovery (CLEAR) team attended the 6th Annual National Law Enforcement Summit in Tampa, FL, hosted by the Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative (PAARI). This event brought together public safety and health leaders to explore non-arrest deflection programs that connect individuals to treatment and recovery.





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