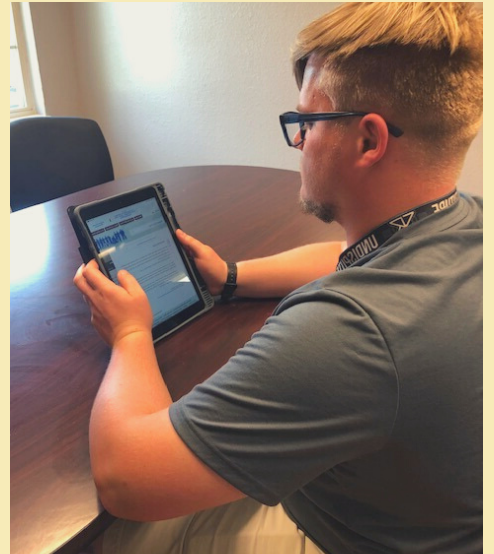


RECOVERY

*The official newsletter of the
Fletcher Group Rural Center of Excellence*



Building Rural Recovery Ecosystems

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TOGETHER**

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IN THIS TOGETHER

by Founder and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ernie Fletcher

Whether you live in urban areas or the rural communities served by our Rural Center of Excellence, the Covid pandemic shows just how vulnerable and fragile our interconnected world can be. It also shows how much we need and depend on each other. In that spirit of understanding and cooperation we are happy to launch the new Fletcher Group newsletter. Our goal, as always, is to meet each challenge with energy and dedication so that we can emerge as better people contributing in small but important ways to a better world.





HOW WE'RE ADJUSTING

by Fletcher Group CEO Dave Johnson

As the Covid-19 pandemic consumes our time and attention, medical experts have highlighted the higher risk the virus poses to the elderly and those with chronic health conditions. Rarely, however, do they mention the dire implications for those with Substance Use Disorders.

One exception is the National Institute on Drug Abuse which has issued warnings regarding two threats: The risk to those with compromised respiratory and pulmonary health (because COVID-19 attacks the lungs) and the risk that increased isolation may prompt some to use drugs again.

Dr. Marvin Seppala, Chief Medical Officer at the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, thinks of addiction as a “disease of isolation” and is worried that reductions in support meetings and services will worsen the sense of isolation that drove people to drugs to begin with.

Rural Challenges

Before COVID-19, many communities, particularly in rural areas, suffered high rates of substance use. Unfortunately, those rates may rise after the pandemic subsides. Why do I say that?

In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the rate for Substance Use Disorders was 35% higher after the storm compared to rates recorded a year before the storm.

For this reason, the Fletcher Group continues to focus on developing Best Practices in recovery housing, services, and treatment that can meet both current and future needs.

We follow CDC guidelines carefully to identify how recovery residences can best support and protect residents.

One example: We are currently providing iPads to numerous Recovery Centers (see story on page 3) so that residents can better communicate with loved ones. We are also working to identify and facilitate critical online resources such as virtual 12-Step meetings that those with Opioid Use Disorders can attend using the iPads. TeleHealth for those in need of medication is another option made possible by the iPads.

People Need People

Here at the Fletcher Group we've curtailed travel and personal meetings, but employees continue to work hard, holding online meetings, developing resource materials, and honing our Webinar and online training skills.

But physical distancing can be nerve-racking. The human need to connect is hard-wired deep within us. Our greatest challenge may be sustaining unnatural separation without feeling anxious or depressed.

One thing we should never do is confuse physical distancing with emotional disconnection. Doing so can cause severe harm to children, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations, including individuals with a Substance Use Disorder. Now, more than ever, we need to be deliberate in our efforts to stay connected by phone, video, and social media.

Focused as we are on the pandemic, we also need to remember the importance of maintaining healthy routines. We all need to make a conscious effort to plan and develop programs and activities that promote a sense of wellbeing.

Exercise is essential. Fortunately, CDC guidelines clearly state that being outside, in and of itself, is not a health risk. That means that now is a great time for families to walk and play and bike together.

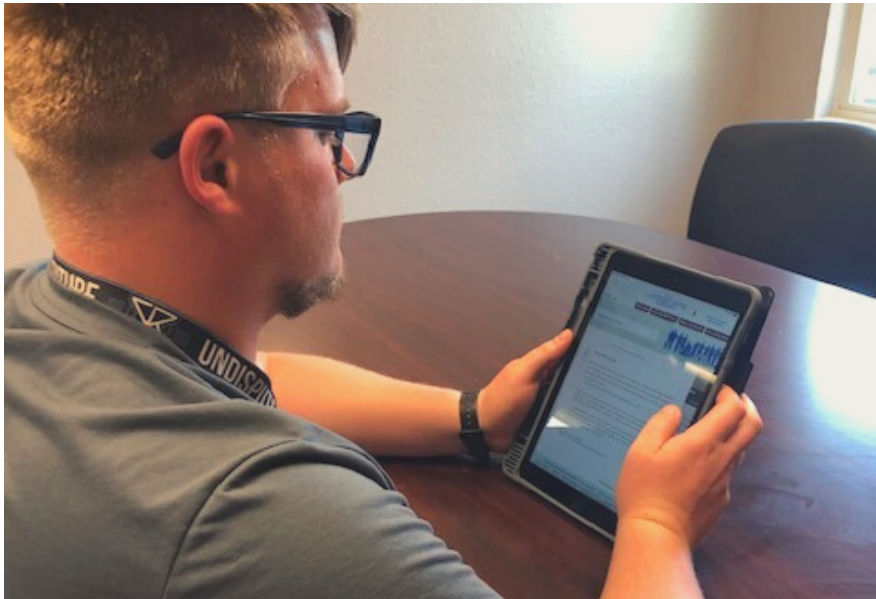
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Take care also to get a good night's sleep and maintain daily hygiene. Psychologists say that taking care of our bodies ties us to the physical and social world that makes us feel alive. Even the most mundane activities can contribute to a sense of wellbeing.

Meaningful Connection

Change is upon us—that's for sure. In the days before physical distancing, Terrence Deacon, Professor of Biological Anthropology at UC Berkeley, attended a workshop where “people were bowing or touching elbows. We didn't know what to do, but we knew we had to avoid shaking hands.”

If creating meaningful connection in innovative ways is the new thing, our company should do well. That is, after all, what the Fletcher Group and its partners have been about from day one.



Estep's observation is confirmed by an Owensboro resident who's already using the iPads: "My recovery through the 12-Step program would be on hold right now because I wouldn't be able to talk face-to-face with my sponsor. But now I can. I can also connect to online AA meetings, see people from outside Owensboro and hear what they're going through. It's not in person, but seeing the other person's reactions really makes a difference."

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

by Fletcher Group CEO Dave Johnson

Physical distancing can be especially hard on those recovering from drug addiction. Now, thanks to a donation of 28 iPads arranged by the Fletcher Group, residents of 14 Recovery Kentucky facilities can communicate online, virtually face-to-face, with family members, healthcare providers, sponsors, online educators, and potential employers.

"It's more than we could have hoped for," says Anita Prater, Director of the Brighton Recovery Center in Florence. "Residents can now continue their 12-Step work without interruption and also enjoy valuable face-time with their families. Both would now be impossible without the iPads."

Fletcher Group Criminal Justice Specialist John Rees turned to familiar faces to fund the donation. Aramark Correctional Services and OmniProphis have long served the Kentucky Department of Corrections, Aramark by providing food services and OmniProphis by providing online training and cell phone security.

Rees worked closely with Aramark and OmniProphis as Kentucky's Commissioner of Corrections under then-governor Ernie Fletcher when he and Fletcher worked together to launch the Recovery Kentucky program. Years later, in 2017, the nonprofit Fletcher Group was established to extend the Recovery Kentucky model nationwide.

"Most tasks involved in recovery are traditionally done in person," says Sarah Atkins, who serves as both Director of the Owensboro Regional Recovery Center and Program Specialist for the Fletcher Group. "The 12-Step program in particular relies on working very closely with others. That kind of thing would normally stop at a time like this when visitors are

barred from entering our buildings. But with the iPads our clients can continue their Recovery program without any real interruption."

"We have clients using the iPads to talk with their families via Zoom," says Mathew Wise, Director of The Healing Place in Campbellsville, "and using them to do their 12-Step work as well."

"The iPads also help protect the mental health of our clients and their families," says Melissa Estep, Program Director at Sky Hope Recovery Center in Somerset. "With visitations on hold, you worry about the emotions that come with isolation—irritability, discontent, restlessness. But the iPads help reduce that anxiety. And seeing someone face-to-face is powerful. You get a stronger sense of togetherness, that we're in this together and that we'll get through it and be okay."

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It's more than we could have hoped for.

Atkins foresees other benefits down the road, particularly for TeleHealth. "The iPads will allow clients to continue their regular, non-emergency medical appointments without having to expose themselves to the virus."

"Absolutely!" says Prater. "We're already working to set up TeleHealth functionality."

"There are a multitude of ways we can use them," says Estep. "People can work towards their GEDs, get skills training, and search for jobs and other resources they'll need as they approach the end of their program. We might even use Skype and Zoom to report to probation and parole officers, conduct Child Protective Services meetings, and maybe even appear in court."

Atkins is appreciative of Aramark Correctional Services, OmniProphis, and the Fletcher Group. "We're grateful for this chance to better serve our clients and continue meeting their needs during this challenging time."

"We couldn't be more grateful," says Estep. "Besides all the other great things the iPads do, they send the message that our clients matter and that people they've never even met are pulling for them!"