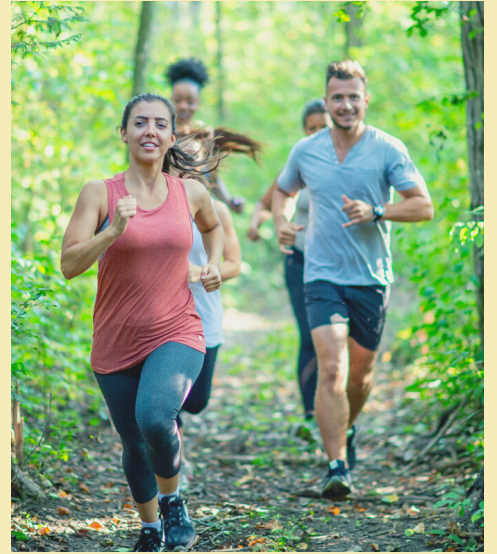


# RECOVERY

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



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## IN IT TOGETHER

*by Founder and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ernie Fletcher*

As governor of Kentucky, I witnessed with my own eyes the power of the social model of recovery—how acceptance and support in a nurturing, loving environment can open the door to lasting recovery.

Though trained as a physician and thoroughly acquainted with the medical model, I've come to appreciate the tremendous role peer support can play in recovery. Only in the presence of kindred spirits can we access on the deepest levels the fears and feelings that have held us back and the hopes and dreams that can pull us forward.

The challenges facing social model programs primarily consist of gaps—gaps in funding, gaps in research, and gaps in acceptance. The Fletcher Group works to fill those gaps so that rural families and communities have the tools to stay strong in the face of a nationwide substance use epidemic.



# THE SOCIAL RECOVERY MODEL

Driven by the need for an affordable alcohol-free living environment, the social model of recovery began in California as a grassroots movement built on the “helper therapy” principle of Alcoholics Anonymous. Though the term “social model” didn’t emerge until the 1970s, when conferences and publications first used the term to refer to sober living houses, the basic elements were in practice as early as the 1940s, including recognition of experiential knowledge as the basis of authority and an emphasis on peer-to-peer rather than practitioner-client learning.\*

The resident-driven therapeutic dynamic has stood the test of time with numerous studies showing similar or better outcomes than more expensive, clinically-oriented programs.\*\* The model now dominates the industry with recovery housing residents coast to coast using personal experience to help each other.

## Peer To Peer To Peer

Sometimes referred to as “mutual aid,” peer support encourages the inter-personal sharing of information and experiences, the exchange of practical help, and daily interactions that build personal responsibility and self-efficacy.

Relying on themselves, rather than others, to articulate their feelings, needs, and aspirations enables residents to not only avoid addictive substances. Participants also develop what the Betty Ford Institute calls “citizenship”—the ability to live one’s life with regard and respect for others. Recognizing one’s effect on others remains a key tenet across all social model programs.

As residents collectively address day-to-day challenges such as house management, chores, conflicts, and personal crises, peer-to-peer accountability also builds the life skills needed for “life outside.” Drawing counsel from those who share a similar personal history—and the challenges that go with it—can also reduce stigma and the shame that goes with it.

## It Takes Time

Acute problems and short-term treatments go hand-in-hand, but recovery is different. The social model deserves at least some credit for helping the public, as well as residents, understand that recovery is a lifelong process that may include many setbacks, including re-use.



The social recovery model promotes group participation through shared meals, exercise, and facility maintenance. Structured education includes community meetings and mutual-help 12-step programs facilitated by peer mentors who serve as role models.

## No Short Cuts

Social model proponents know that recovery is hard work requiring enormous courage and resilience. Taking an inventory of one’s life in front of others is not easy, nor is taking ownership of the pain we have caused. Harder still is making amends with those we’ve hurt while accepting our inability to change the past or control what we cannot. With the heartfelt help of others, however, all the hard work still holds the promise of a life lived with meaning, purpose and a shared belief in a better day.

\*Wittman & Polcin 2014; Borkman et al. 1998, O’Briant & Lennard 1973

\*\*Kaskutas et al. 2008; Kaskutas, Ammon & Weisner 2003-2004; Borkman et al. 1998; Polcin et al. 2010

# A MODEL THAT WORKS

The "Recovery Ecosystem" model promoted by the Fletcher Group RCOE combines evidence-based best practices and safe, sober recovery housing with the peer-support social model. It's enabled by effective public-private partnerships involving myriad stakeholders, from federal and state programs to nonprofits and universities.

## Our History

Our Recovery Ecosystem model originated with the Recovery Kentucky program launched by our founder, Dr. Ernie Fletcher, when governor. The program's 18 facilities have helped thousands of Kentuckians recover from addiction while saving millions of taxpayer dollars. It was so successful that SAMHSA's 2019 "Evidence-Based Resource Guide" highlighted it as a federal model for Evidence-Based Best Practices.

## Peer-Driven

The Fletcher Group model provides residents with a safe and comfortable place to live during the first critical stages of recovery for up to 24 months. Treatment programs may be administered by professionals with peer mentor engagement with residents.

## Community Support

In keeping with social recovery best practices, the Recovery Ecosystem model promotes active participation in group living to drive individual change and goal attainment. Structured education includes community meetings and mutual-help 12-step programs facilitated by peer mentors who have the added value of serving as personal role models.

## Partnership Makes It Happen

Sharing fears and dreams is part of the individual recovery process. But successful recovery for millions of Americans requires another form of sharing—that of resources and funding among a wide range of federal, state and private-sector stakeholders. The Fletcher Group's unique ability to form partnerships from diverse and often underutilized programs allows the model to reduce recidivism and rebuild lives while maximizing taxpayer dollars.\*

## Ten Years Of Documented Success

Detailed documentation of outcomes is essential to earning the trust and support of stakeholders. It also plays a key role in winning tax credits and other governmental assistance. That's why the Recovery Kentucky program, upon which our Recovery Ecosystem model is based, has documented its results in an annual report for the past ten



years—longer and more comprehensively, as far as we can tell, than any other recovery program and with outcomes equal to or exceeding the most effective programs in the nation. (To see this year's annual report, go to <https://www.fletchergroup.org/annual-reports/>.)

## Breaking The Cycle

Recovery Kentucky has been remarkably effective in returning those with a substance use disorder to their communities as productive, self-sufficient, tax-paying, and law-abiding members of society. It's proven that long-term recovery is possible and that individual lives can be rebuilt, employment obtained, and families reunited as part of the effort to ensure the health and well-being of rural America.

\* Based on the outcomes of the Recovery Kentucky program whose annual report can be viewed at <https://www.fletchergroup.org/annual-reports/>

## HOW IT CAN WORK FOR YOU

Outreach and Engagement Specialists at the Fletcher Group RCOE provide Technical Assistance to a multitude of rural recovery homes interested in the social model of recovery. One example is the fast-growing program in West Virginia run by Pastor Matt Johnson who recalls, with a chuckle, his first contact with the Fletcher Group's Karen Coburn. "I'm not sure she knew what she was getting into," says Johnson, "but from that moment on we've been moving at warp speed—much quicker than anyone could have expected. It's amazing. The doors keep opening, the opportunities keep coming, and we just keep jumping in!"

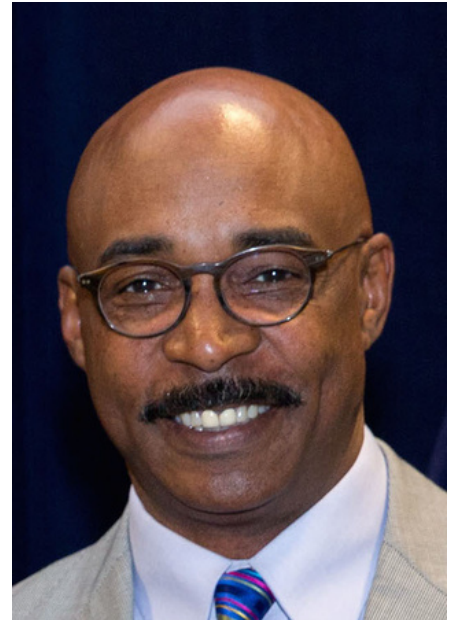
Johnson knew his community needed recovery housing, "but I didn't know where to begin till I met Karen," he says. The path has been clear ever since. "We already have a property lined up and want to open a house for men and a house for women as soon as possible. We envision a larger facility down the road and we're also talking with West Virginia University about a sober living house for students. It's exciting. And, yes, we're busy!"

Johnson recalls, with the same good humor, his first meeting with Fletcher Group Founder and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Ernie Fletcher. "I'll never forget him saying, 'Matt, your dream is too small. Think big!' I don't know how he knew, but for me that's been a driving force all my life. I've always wanted to be able to take a bigger risk and dream a bigger dream. So Ernie saying that was a lightning bolt moment. I knew instinctively that I was working with the right people and doing the right thing."

Tony White, the Fletcher Group's National Outreach and Engagement Specialist, proceeded to train Johnson's three House Managers—Josh Weigner, Jodi Switzer, and Patrick Vaughn—in social model best practices, including peer support, environment management, and culture development. All four—White, Weigner, Switzer, and Vaughn—shared a passion driven by their own personal experience in long-term recovery.

"Our training sessions with Tony were supposed to be an hour long," recalls Johnson. "But they were usually much longer because they were so rich in valuable information and insight. We loved hearing of Tony's experiences and really appreciated the way he shared and drew us out as we worked to develop the culture and partnerships our community needed."

Johnson has no history of substance use himself, but has learned to honor and defer to the lived experience of



TONY WHITE

those who have, including members of his own staff. "I'm not the expert," says Johnson. "My job is to channel and highlight their experience in a way that helps others. I like to say that what we're doing is not work *for* people in recovery. It's work *with* people in recovery. That's an important distinction underpinning everything we do."

"I really wouldn't have known where to start without the Fletcher Group's direction, encouragement, and connections," says Johnson. "Thanks to their experience and proven record of success, I have so much more credibility than I would have on my own when presenting our vision to others. We simply wouldn't be where we are without Karen, Tony, and the Fletcher Group."