

# Five tips for being a recovery ally

by Alison Jones Webb

**B**eing a recovery ally is a journey, a lifelong commitment to take actions that support people in recovery. There are many ways to show your support. Here are some tips that I have learned from my friends and colleagues in recovery.

## 1. Listen

There's nothing like talking to a person in recovery who is open and willing to discuss their experiences. Ron Springel of the Maine Association of Recovery Residences suggests getting to know people face-to-face. "It's really hard if you haven't had addiction to understand the power that addiction has." Most of our friends and neighbors who are in recovery are eager to talk about their own recovery and to answer open-ended questions like, "What is your recovery journey like?" or, "What do you like most about being in recovery?"

## 2. Learn

Make a point of learning about the pathways of recovery. A great place to start is by watching two documentaries: *The Anonymous People*, about recovery, and *Generation Found*, about youth recovery.

Maine's recovery community centers are the best places to learn about local recovery resources (see page 16 to learn where to find the centers)

Many 12-step meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous are open, which means anyone can attend. There are hundreds of meetings in Maine. A list of AA meetings is at the Central Services Office website

The Recovery Research Institute is

the one of the best online resources to answer just about any question about recovery.

## 3. Show up

Tom Coderre, Northeast Regional Administrator for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, suggests becoming involved in a local task force or coalition that already has a strategy they are implementing rather than starting something new. "Allies can bring new energy, thoughts, and experiences to the group," Tom says.

Attending community events like recovery rallies and community meetings to discuss addiction and recovery is a great way to show your support.

## 4. Find your talent and use it

Employers can hire people in recovery and create a safe space for employees to disclose their recovery status.

Teachers can speak in positive terms about the possibility of recovery and the hope that a healthy lifestyle offers.

Faith leaders can create a safe place for members of the congregation to talk about recovery.

Community members can volunteer at local recovery community centers.

Community members can become recovery coaches. Recovery community centers and other organizations in Maine offer recovery coach trainings, which aren't just for people in recovery. According to Phil Valentine, Executive Director

of the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery, the organization that designed the recovery coach curriculum used in Maine, "If you're lit up, if you're fire is stoked internally, it doesn't matter whether you're in recovery or not. It's really just the ability to love and care and sit with somebody and have your spirit warm theirs."

People in leadership positions, including policy makers, can examine the role that discrimination against people with substance use disorder plays in organizations and systems – like health care, employment, and housing – and work to make system-wide and structural changes.

## 5. Speak up

We can all call out stigma. Philip Rutherford, Executive Director of Faces and Voices of Recovery, the national advocacy organization for people in recovery, says that, like fighting racism, one of the best ways to fight the stigma of substance use disorder and recovery is to call it out, one-on-one, person-to-person when you hear it. When you hear someone using insulting or offensive language about people with substance use disorder, or people in recovery, speak up. Rutherford suggests saying, "When you say that, it can have a negative effect on people trying to change their life. Is this what you meant? Tell me more about why you feel that way."



*Alison Jones Webb is a public health professional who has worked in the field of substance use prevention, treatment and recovery in Maine for over 15 years.*