

RECOVERY

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



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NEVER STOP LEARNING



The Fletcher Group Rural
Center of Excellence

by Founder and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ernie Fletcher

One blessing of being a grandparent (as I am) is witnessing the endless curiosity of children. They may not be crazy about homework, but they never tire of asking for the who, what, why, when and where of everything around them.

That marvelous inquisitiveness can fade with age, but really shouldn't, say economists and educators. That's because lifelong learning is now, more than ever, essential to "keeping up." That's particularly true in our field where increasing overdose rates, Covid, and changes in the SUD environment (from stimulants and prescription drugs to fentanyl, for example) continue to test our resilience.

The question is how to keep learning, especially in rural areas where professional training may be lacking. Here's one answer: Our new Rural Recovery Housing Learning Center where we've applied the latest micro-learning techniques to scores of online classes designed just for you. (Pages 2, 3, and 4 of this newsletter highlight three of the classes.)

So instead of saying "one day," make today that day at recovery-housing.org where, with just a few keystrokes, you can quickly add new skills and knowledge to help not only you but all the people you serve.

UNDERSTANDING THE RECOVERY ECOSYSTEM

One of the more popular—and in our opinion one of the more important—courses offered through our Rural Recovery Housing Learning Center is the "Recovery Ecosystems" class taught by Fletcher Group Outreach and Engagement Specialist Gene Detherage. Students gain a quick but solid understanding of the complex network of resources needed to provide a recovery home's complete Continuum of Care.

The recovery ecosystem model of recovery housing we promote naturally begins with safe, supportive housing—a fundamental human need without which lasting recovery is difficult, if not impossible. Quality recovery housing also serves as the nexus for all the other components of the recovery ecosystem, including peer and social support, educational and training opportunities, employment opportunities, transportation supports, child care supports, leisure and recreational opportunities, and access to quality healthcare and mental health services.

Peer and Social Supports include mutual self-help meetings involving recovery community organizations, faith communities, family, friends and co-workers.

Educational and Training Opportunities may include evaluations, free or low-barrier skills training programs, higher education, and access to loan and grant programs with **Employment Opportunities** including the expungement of criminal justice records, fair-chance employment in a recovery-friendly workplace and employee assistance programs.



Transportation Supports include public transit, transportation to recovery supports, ride-to-work programs, employer-assisted transportation, and vehicle purchase programs.

Child Care Supports include child care in provider settings, reunification programs, supportive social service programs and flexible school policies.

Leisure and Recreational Opportunities include recovery-focused and recovery-friendly events.

Naturally, the complete Continuum of Care needed for lasting recovery also includes **Access to Adequate Healthcare**, not only to meet normal health needs but also mental healthcare and other specialized needs.



To join Gene's Recovery Ecosystem class or one of the others we offer, go to www.recovery-housing.org

MASTERING THE PEER SUPPORT MODEL

Another of the more popular courses offered through our online Learning Center is the class titled, “Creating a Supportive Internal Community,” also taught by Fletcher Group Outreach and Engagement Specialist Gene Detherage, which explains in detail the peer-driven social model of recovery.

“It’s all about the environment,” says Detherage as he describes how the right “culture of recovery” can enable people to reclaim their independence and autonomy by taking responsibility for their actions within a mutually-respectful community of kindred spirits. Detherage points out that the traditional 28-day treatment program may be insufficient for those who need to grow at their own rate without the threat of an approaching deadline.

Detherage believes a successful peer-driven program requires six key elements:

- **A Physical Environment** that’s open, safe, warm and inclusive so that people can develop together a sense of connection and belonging as well as the life skills needed for long-term recovery.
- **Disciplined Roles** that promote accountability and teamwork through set schedules and routines, structured meetings, the assignment of household chores, and collectively agreed upon strategies for navigating the demands of everyday life.
- **Lived Experience** that uniquely qualifies recovery veterans to help new arrivals overcome the debilitating feelings of isolation, mistrust, hopelessness, and shame they once felt themselves.
- **The Right Approach** is needed by everyone—staff and residents alike. It’s a holistic, “whole-person” approach that, on the one hand, views addiction as a disease and, on the other, considers alcohol and drug use as only part of the problem. Here, too, lived experience can make a huge difference by encouraging residents to “own” their recovery.
- **Clear Policies and Procedures** encourage the resident to be accountable and assume responsibility for both themselves and their environment, including the security of the residence. Regularly scheduled meetings create a sense of community and help residents feel more invested in both themselves and their colleagues. Making decisions together about how to maintain the proper culture of recovery also helps residents build essential life skills.



The Larger Community

Though the recovery journey is unique to each person, all have one thing in common: the need for community. That’s why it’s so important that residents attend meetings on time; work with others to maintain a healthy, clean, home-like environment; and develop solid relationships with their sponsors, all of which will help them transition successfully to life outside.

Detherage’s class also addresses house governance principles and guidelines; leadership roles; rules for community meetings, language and behavior; employment training; how to become an effective advocate and champion; and conflict management (including the “Drama Triangle” comprised of victim, persecutor and rescuer).

To join this class or one of our others, go to www.recovery-housing.org

THE JOURNEY FROM NIMBY TO YIMBY

NIMBY stands for "Not In My BackYard"—the kind of public sentiment that can kill a recovery house before it begins. YIMBY ("YES-In-My-BackYard!") is the opposite—a community-wide embrace of what you're doing and what you stand for.

The trick, of course, is how to get from NIMBY to YIMBY. And that's the subject of another class of ours titled, "Understanding and Responding to NIMBYISM in Rural Communities."

The key, according to Tony White, the Fletcher Group's National Outreach and Engagement Specialist, is understanding what's really going on. It's important to remember, he says, that substance use disorders are the only diseases in America that have been criminalized to the point of creating a radical divide in public opinion.

It began in the late 60's and continued through the 80's with different iterations of America's traumatic "War On Drugs"—traumatic not only for those who became addicted and incarcerated but for their families and communities as well, many of which were minorities. The stigma born then still lives all around us, in TV shows, movies, news reports, and even video games. When stigma becomes that deeply ingrained, says White, it becomes almost impossible to extricate. And because politicians still get elected on vows of "law and order," the ongoing criminalization of what is really a disease continues to stigmatize, criminalize, and marginalize millions of Americans.

NIMBYism is sometimes clearly articulated, as in, "You're bringing drugs and crime into my neighborhood!" or "My property value will go down!" But NIMBYism can also thrive silently, particularly in rural communities where everyone knows everyone and opponents of NIMBYism can themselves be stigmatized.

The Key Is Education

White believes education is our most powerful tool. Even those who initially oppose recovery housing can support it once they understand the conditions that lead to addiction. Part of your job as a recovery home advocate, then, is to become an outspoken champion of recovery within your community.



Start by listening to those in recovery. Their personal stories can be fraught with an almost unbearable weight but can also be unimaginably inspiring. Through those stories you'll gain a deeper understanding of who they are, where they've come from, and the challenges they face, all of which will give you the strength to step up, lift your voice, and correct misinformation whenever you hear it.

It's also important to build relationships with other advocates and participate together in public meetings where you can stress the economic, social, and spiritual benefits of recovery, thereby turning NIMBY into YIMBY through empathy, understanding, and education.

To join this class or one of our others, go to www.recovery-housing.org