

[00:00:00] [00:01:00] Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to The Fletcher Group Rural Center of Excellence's webinar series. Today's session is scheduled to run from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM Eastern Standard Time. My name is Michelle Day, and I am your moderator for the session, along with Janice Fulkerson and Erica Walker. A couple of brief housekeeping items

and then we'll begin. You entered today's session on mute and your video was off and will remain so for the entirety of the webinar. Your chat feature is located at the bottom right of your screen. Use the dropdown feature to communicate with either the panelists only or panelists and attendees. Please direct all questions regarding the webinar content to the Q and A section.

Be advised that this meeting is being recorded and will be available to you on our website once it has been transcribed. You can access our website at [00:02:00] [www.FletcherGroup.org](http://www.FletcherGroup.org). Also, at the conclusion of today's session, there will be a short survey regarding the webinar content. Your participation in that survey is greatly appreciated and will only take a few moments to complete. Our speaker today comes to us from Indiana University.

Dr. Joel Wong is a Professor of Counseling Psychology and Chair of the Department of Counseling Psychology at Indiana University. He is also a Fellow of the American Psychological Association. Dr. Wong's research interests are diverse and includes gratitude interventions and practices. He currently directs the Gratitude Interventions and Practices Lab. In addition to his research on gratitude, Dr. Wong is passionate about teaching and disseminating practical information about gratitude practices to both practitioners and lay people. Dr. Wong developed a six-week gratitude group program to help people cultivate [00:03:00] gratitude. This program has also been implemented as a group psychotherapeutic treatment for depression. His long-term vision is to help build communities of grateful people around the world. Dr. Fletcher, the floor is yours.

[00:03:15] **Dr. Ernie Fletcher:** Michelle, thank you and I want to welcome everyone to this webinar. We're, let me say thankful for everybody that's showing this today. You know, gratitude is a, an interesting subject and I'll go to the placebo effect.

You know, often when we do studies or not often, a requirement of doing studies is to rule out the placebo effect, but what you have there is a very powerful effect that's based on kind of belief and attitudes, toward the treatment that is being studied. And oftentimes that placebo has a tremendous impact.

Well, that means there is something going on within who we are and our total being that things like gratitude can have a significant physical impact as well. [00:04:00] You know, we're focused on recovery and recovery housing. The 12-step process is a, is an important part of that, and it's an evidence based really program.

The eighth and ninth step of that is to make a list of persons that have been harmed or that the individual has, has harmed in some way. I think the, the flip side of that is also looking at the

number of people that you're thankful for, that have had positive, meaningful impact on your life and, and reaching out and letting them know of your gratitude for them.

I, you know, I was raised in the Christian church, I'll say, and there was this one song I always remember. It's, you know, *Count Your Blessings, Name Them One by One*. And I think there's a tremendous impact in that. So we're very fortunate to have Dr. Wong. We had talked about this subject and then an article, I had seen that was published by Berkeley University and the [00:05:00] publication they call Greater Good. And it was an article that Dr. Wong and one of his colleagues had published and we read that, so we reached out to him. And Dr. Wong, I just want to say thank you for the work you're doing and for be willing to come here today. And I'm going to turn this over to you. I know you have an excellent presentation for us. Again, thank you and thanks to everyone that's joined us today.

[00:05:23] **Dr. Joel Wong:** All right. Thank you, Governor Fletcher. I appreciate it. It's a pleasure to be here. Oops. And I want to talk today about the transformative power of gratitude. One about, one of the fun things about the work I do is I straddle both the world of science and practice.

And so as a Counseling Psychologist, I, I do research interventions related to gratitude. I like to study gratitude. I like to conduct interventions, analyze data, and I also like to teach [00:06:00] about gratitude. I like to practice it. Um, and I'm very comfortable, um, in, in the realm of practice, so to, so I won't be able to cover everything today.

Uh, but I want you to know that I'm more than happy to continue these conversations uh, if you're interested in both the science and practice of gratitude, my email address is there and so you're more than welcome to, to contact me if you want more information. I'd like to start with this quote, uh, from Robert Emmons, one of the leading researchers in gratitude.

And I love this quote because it speaks to the heart and soul of gratitude. *When you're grateful, instead of taking things for granted, you take them as granted, as gifted to you.* And grateful people are those who are able to see their life in terms of gifts and blessings to them. Right. So I want be able to, um, give you an overview of what we're going to cover [00:07:00] today.

I will be, uh, presenting a definition of gratitude and talk a little bit about some of the research on gratitude, uh, and then some of the theorizing, the theories of how, how does gratitude work? These theories are, are also based on research. So it it, it, it posits different pathways to which gratitude impacts wellbeing.

And then I want to end with some practical interventions, and we can discuss how, how these interventions could apply to individuals who are struggling with substance use. So, I want to give you, uh, my definition of gratitude. Um, and I define gratitude as the awareness and appreciation of goodness in one's life, the attribution of such goodness to a benefactor, and consequently, an affectionate or positive response to one's benefactor.

Um, I, I [00:08:00] deliberately highlighted certain keywords in bold. And if you notice the constitute four A's Awareness, Appreciation, Attribution, and an Affectionate Response or a positive response to the benefactor. Um, I do want to make a very important points about the meaning of gratitude that, um, has sometimes caused a little bit of confusion. And that's if you,

if you think about how lay people today in a 21st century think about gratitude, uh, their understanding of gratitude might be, uh, focused only on the awareness and, and appreciation of goodness and less about the attribution of that goodness to a benefactor, an affectionate response. So for example, if you say, you know, I'm grateful for the sunshine, I'm grateful for the weather, I'm grateful for the trees and the fall weather.

All of these are great. Um, but [00:09:00] they, they focus only on the awareness and appreciation of goodness, and, and they don't quite include the attribution of goodness to a benefactor. Right. In contrast, the leading philosophers and psychologists and theologians across centuries have taken, um, a more, uh, inclusive definition of gratitude that not only includes awareness and appreciation, but also the recognition that it's an external source

of your goodness, which could be, uh, a person, a friend, a family member, uh, for some people, God or a high power or society, something outside of yourself. That has been a blessing to you. Right? So that's a, um, a potential area of confusion about how lay people think about gratitude as well as how theologians, philosophers, and, and leading psychologists think about gratitude.

Uh, I'd take kind of a pragmatic stance. I am not going to be faulting [00:10:00] anyone who focuses only on the awareness and appreciation of goodness. Uh, to me that's great. Uh, but whenever possible, I try to encourage people to also consider whom you might be grateful to, not just what you're grateful for. So think about that as, as

uh, as we consider the research. Alright. So I want to talk a bit about the science of gratitude. Um, trait gratitude and trait gratitude is just a fancy way of saying people who are more grateful, who are generally very higher grateful, who are generally, consistently grateful. People who are more consistently grateful tend to have lower risk of mental illness, better mental health.

I like this. Better sleep. Um, And this is really interesting, reduced drug use. And that's something that's particularly relevant to the work, uh, that you all do through better coping strategies. We also have, um, gratitude [00:11:00] experimental intervention research. So these types of studies that typically, um, studies where, uh, the researchers introduce a gratitude intervention and then they test

the impact of this gratitude intervention on health and wellbeing. And again, we see really nice effects, better mental health, reduce, uh, reductions in headaches. Um, I love this, an increase in time spent exercising. Um, uh, better, uh, body image. Uh, and in one of the studies I conducted for, uh, psychotherapy clients, of course, better mental.

Um, we talked a lot about how expressing gratitude can be good for, for one's, uh, personal health and wellbeing, but I want to flip the coin to, to consider the possibility that receiving gratitude is also a very positive thing. And so [00:12:00] gratitude works not just for the Expressor gratitude, but also for the Recipients of gratitude.

And that's, that's one aspect of gratitude research that people don't often pay attention to. In my view, it's really important. Receiving gratitude from colleagues. If you get expressions of gratitude to you, that's, uh, uh, increases people's self-efficacy and perceived social impact, which in turn improves your performance at work.

And here's why I think gratitude is so important when communicated to other people. Because we have, as human beings a desire to matter. We want to know that we matter in this world. One of the best definitions of mattering that I've seen is that when you feel like you matter, you tend to feel valued by others, and you tend to feel that you can add value

to other people. [00:13:00] And when you think about it, when we communicate gratitude to someone else, we are telling that person, we value you and you have added value to my life. Now, that's hugely important, particularly for people from marginalized backgrounds. People of color, people who are poor or low SES backgrounds, people with substance use and mental disorders.

And so, my challenge was to think about gratitude is not only to encourage people with substance use to increase or cultivate a practice of gratitude, but also to consider how we can express gratitude to them. We can express gratitude to a person who's struggling with substance use because they have probably something to teach us about life. And it's something we can learn from them.

And when we express gratitude to them, we are communicating to them that [00:14:00] they matter. So how does gratitude work? I want to present a couple of, um, theories that's backed up by research. What are the, one of the most fascinating cutting-edge area of research focuses on the neurological pathways of gratitude. And this is a study that, uh, several of my colleagues and I conducted, uh, where we randomly assigned, uh, clients who were undergoing psychotherapy, mental health psychotherapy to write, uh, three grateful letters

and get therapy. Or to just get therapy as usual, but with no gratitude letter writing. And we found that three months later, the therapy clients who wrote gratitude letters showed greater activation in the medial prefrontal cortex. This is an area of your brain associated with learning and decision making when they experience gratitude in [00:15:00] an F M R I scanner.

So, what this really means in, in English is that perhaps, gratitude activities like writing a letter, gratitude can train your brain to become more sensitive to subsequent experiences of gratitude. And the amazing thing is that this impact lasts several months. So, as you become exposed to gratitude activities, something's going on in your brain that makes you more able to detect

goodness in your life. That's, to me, exciting. So, there's a neurological pathway. There's also what I call a self-regulatory pathway. And that's really a fancy way of saying that gratitude is not something that simply promotes goodness. It also inhibits bad behavior, bad thoughts, bad emotions. Here how the theory works.

When people turn their attention to what's positive in their [00:16:00] lives, they're better able to regulate and control and manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. In a nutshell, they're better able to exercise self-control. And this is back up by a series of studies. Gratitude interventions have been shown to reduce, not just increase, but reduce people's negative thoughts, negative emotions, aggressive behavior,

uncivil workplace behaviors, and potentially substance use. I, I put a question mark here, uh, because this is a proposal that was, that was written by a scholar about how gratitude can be, uh, truly effective for substance use. Uh, but this is not based on an actual, uh, research study. But, but it won't be surprising for me if future research shows that gratitude is able to inhibit the use of substance use.

Okay. So, I've also, um, posited a social [00:17:00] pathways, uh, social pathways of gratitude. And that's to me one of the areas of gratitude research that I'm most passionate about. And that's my, my belief that gratitude is not just something that changes what goes up, what, what changes, what's, what's happening in your brain, or, uh, helps you to better regulate your emotions and behavior behaviors, but gratitude and engenders socially oriented behaviors.

And, um, if you give me, if you give me that half an hour, I could probably show you the research, uh, supporting this. But my firm belief is that gratitude is a social emotion and a socially oriented character strength, and therefore gratitude improves social support seeking behavior. When you're more grateful, you're more willing to seek help, and that's important for people with substance use.

Number two, gratitude improves [00:18:00] pro-social behaviors and that that refers to being kind to others and displaying altruistic behavior. Number three, gratitude helps you to initiate relationship and enhancement behaviors. And that is, if you are grateful, you're more likely to develop closer relationship with others.

And number four, gratitude helps you to participate in mastery oriented social activities. Like, you know, you become a leader, you become a volunteer, you do things that involve social activities, but involves some level of skill. And number five, gratitude reduces problematic interpersonal behaviors.

That's what get us, gets us into trouble. Things that we say that are inappropriate or aggressive or hurtful to others. There's research showing that grateful people, gratitude interventions, reduces these types of problems. So I want to talk a bit about, um, just a few [00:19:00] gratitude interventions for us to consider.

By far, the most common gratitude intervention that's been studied and shown to be effective is gratitude journaling. If you've never done this before, I would encourage you to try this. I have been doing this, uh, for the last couple of years. And here's what I would say. Gratitude journaling, daily gratitude journaling is the single best investment that I have made in my own wellbeing and mental health.

The single best investments. Um, And it's free. It's free of charge, just five minutes a day. And the way I sell it to, to, to my friends is that, you know, I asked them, Do you take vitamins? Yes. Many of us take vitamins. You know, you pop a pill, uh, every day I say, *This is vitamin G*. Take it every single day.

Five minutes. Five minutes a day. Gratitude journaling every day. Write down three things you're grateful for, and [00:20:00] explain why you are grateful. And you can even do it in a group. Um, I've tried this with, uh, a group of people where we do group-based gratitude journaling, eight or 10 of us, and you can do it for free.

There are a lot of apps that allow you to do group-based gratitude journaling. Uh, one that I've tried that works really well is the Slack app, and that can be used for free. Second intervention to try, um, gratitude letter writing. Write a letter of gratitude to someone in your life whom you have not properly thanked.

And this is a, to me, a great activity for people who are recovering from substance use because I can assure you anyone who has struggled with and is recovering from substance use, has people who have invested in their lives. Who have supported them, and who have helped them to change through this process.

So lots of people you can be thankful for. But the important thing is that you can't just write the letter. You have to [00:21:00] mail or read the letter to the recipients. Why? Because I think it fosters a closer relationship with a person and the recipient, and that creates an upward spiral of benefits. When you express gratitude to another person, that person responds positively back to you.

Therefore, you develop a closer relationship and it goes on. So here's an example of, uh, what a typical gratitude letter writing, uh, instruction would be, you know. Write a letter gratitude to someone you have not properly thanked. Make sure you're specific, make sure you're concrete. Make sure you write about how this person has impacted your life and how you feel towards that person.

I want to share a little story about that was, uh, shared with me about someone who wrote a letter of gratitude to his father. And this is someone who did not have the best relationship with his father. It was someone who, the father was, someone who was kind of angry and frustrated and just not the best [00:22:00] father.

But this guy chose to write the letter focusing on what his father had done for him and what he appreciated about in his life. And, and he remember giving, uh, his father this letter or this

card, and the father, who's this really gruff, emotionally stunted man, read the letter and started crying and hugged him.

And so here you have a 35-year-old man and a 63-year-old man standing together, hugging and crying. And this is what this this guy said about his father. My dad didn't change. He was still angry and a bully, but our relationship did. For the next 20 years, we became closer. And what should not have surprised me but did is that my memories of my childhood changed as well.

I was much less resentful and much more forgiving. And that's the power of gratitude. It [00:23:00] changes us when we express gratitude in the other person, and it also changes the recipients, and it changes the relationship between the expressor and the recipient. All right. Number three. Another intervention that you can try is what I call redemptive gratitude. And that's the experience of gratitude arising from, uh, the positive aspects of a stressful experience.

A redemptive gratitude doesn't mean that we ignore or pretend that we, we don't experience pain or suffering, but it means that in the midst of pain and suffering, we can find things to be grateful for. I think this can be really helpful for anyone who is recovering from, uh, the pain and the struggles of substance use and abuse because it's a very painful thing.

It's a very stressful experience, but in the midst of stress there are things we can find to be great that we can, we can [00:24:00] consider, for which we can be grateful. Let me give you a couple of examples. Perhaps you have someone who received social supports in the midst of stressful situations, who became closer to others, who develop character strengths or wisdom, who develop a more positive outlook in life, or maybe the stressful situation provided a new opportunity that would not have been available

but for the stressful experience, a new door that closed, a door that closed resulted in a new window that opened. Or perhaps the experience was stressful that the person averted a potentially disastrous or even a deadly outcome. For many people who are recovering from substance abuse, they might experience that sense that, wow, I know of a lot of people who overdose and died.

And I could be, I couldn't be one of them, but I am living today. That's reason to be grateful [00:25:00] for. So, this, this is something that you can do, uh, as, as kind of a journaling activity where you can give instructions with someone to write about it. Write about something stressful, and then write about what you're grateful for.

Or you can also have a group discussion where you get a group of people together and they share their experiences of redemptive gratitude. And I've done that before and it's really, really powerful when a group of people come together and share their experiences of redemptive gratitude. So, number one, uh, Gratitude Journaling.

Number two, Gratitude Letter Writing. Number three, Redemptive Gratitude. Number four, The Gratitude Group Program is a program I developed a couple of years ago. It's a six week educational group program to help people cultivate gratitude. I have a curriculum for it and every session focuses on the different facets of gratitude.

[00:26:00] Um, there's, uh, a lot of skills. I provide lots of principles and practical strategies that, uh, people can use. I have 100 gratitude prompts, so if you don't know what to be grateful for, you have a list of a hundred prompts to help you think about what to be grateful for. Then we get group members to practice expressing gratitude to each other.

Um, I have developed a set of seven foundational principles to help people cultivate gratitude and 21 practical, uh, strategies to help people become more grateful. I can't cover this today. That would take another four hours, but I want to just share two practical strategies that you could use. Uh, and that's part of, these are skills that we teach them in, we teach people in this gratitude group program that I developed.

The first is Positive Mental Subtraction. And this is not very intuitive, but research shows [00:27:00] that if you imagine that something positive in your life or something good in your life, or someone really good in your life never existed, and you subtract that from your life, and imagine what your life would be like without that good person or the good thing, all of a sudden we become much more grateful for that thing or that person.

That's the way our minds work. Um, the principle of Temporal Scarcities, another practical strategy, and it's very counterintuitive. But I want you to imagine that, uh, one of your loved ones or yourself have only one month left to live. Imagine that, uh, the city you're living in is going to be gone in a month's time or a family member that you have is just going to disappear from your life in a month's time.

When you start thinking about how [00:28:00] time is limited, we, none of us, none of us can say with absolute certainty when we're going to die. And we need to live our lives as if today could be the last day of our lives. And if we do that, all of a sudden we become much more grateful for the things in our lives and the people in our lives.

All right, number five. This is my last, um, uh, intervention. Gratitude Support Groups. Um, I have created a lighter version of the Gratitude Group program, and these groups, uh, meets virtually via Zoom. Um, it's, it's real interesting that Governor Fletcher, uh, mentioned AA groups because I developed this gratitude support groups modeled after the AA groups.

Um, and, and, and the way this is done is that we have a group of about eight people to meet about once a week for six weeks. [00:29:00] And you can meet for longer than six weeks, but at the minimum you meet for six weeks and you share about what you're grateful for. Uh, unlike the Gratitude Group program, which has a curriculum, this one, this, this, this version of the group doesn't have a curriculum, but instead we have, uh, a theme that we focus on every week.



So every week we focus on the different aspect of our lives for which, um, we can be grateful for. But like the Gratitude Group program, every session ends with mutual expressions of gratitude. And group members also participate in group-based journaling, where you can see what each other writes in, in your gratitude journal.

Um, so I want to give you a, a sense of what I think works really well, uh, when you have a group of people coming together to share, uh, experiences of gratitude. And, and gratitude expressions become so much more powerful when it's practiced in groups as opposed to doing it [00:30:00] privately. Because you can disclose gratitude, right?

Which is, I think, far better than thinking about gratitude. You're disclosing and sharing it with others. I'm telling other people what I'm grateful for. Number two, you can express gratitude to someone in a group. Number three, you receive gratitude from another person. Number four. You are witnessing the expression of gratitude.

And number five, if you are a witness to expressions of gratitude, you can actually respond positively to those expressions of gratitude by praising the expressor and the recipients. So, I have a little diagram here that explains how this works. So you have Person A who expresses gratitude to Person B in a group.

And very often for someone to receive an expression of gratitude, they're often surprised and moved. And if you were a skillful group [00:31:00] facilitator, you would turn to Person B and say, Person B what is your reaction to what Person A has just said to you? And very often, Person B expresses gratitude back to a for A's expression of gratitude.

It's kind of a really fun thing. You express gratitude for the expression of gratitude. Now in the meantime, the rest of the group members who are watching this process experience the, the emotion of elevation. And elevation simply means that you are moved, you're inspired, uh, as you watch this expression of gratitude.

Now, we've done this, I've, I've run these groups several times and is not uncommon at all for group members who are watching this expression of gratitude to actually tear up and cry. They're not the ones who are expressing gratitude, but they're so moved by the experience, they just start crying. And then if I'm, if I'm a group facilitator, I would turn to one of the group members and ask them, [00:32:00] What is it like for you to witness this expression of gratitude?

And what often happens is that Person C, who is a witness, praises A for the expression of gratitude and also praises B, Person B, for the act of kindness that elicited A's expression of gratitude. This to me, my friends, is the power of Group-based Gratitude Experiences. All right, so why do I love these gratitude support groups?

It's because it's very inclusive. It's for anyone who wants to be grateful. It fosters social connections, it focus on the path focuses on the positive, not on the negatives. It's non-

stigmatizing, so we're not here to talk about how bad you were. We're here to talk about what's good in your lives. It's free of charge.

I have made a goal that Gratitude Support Groups will always be offered free of [00:33:00] charge. It can be facilitated by lay people, or do I want to get some training for these lay people? If you want, if you want to do a Gratitude Support Group and you want to facilitate a group, I want you to be able to experience the group under me first, and it's low cost. I, I said low cost, but really, I want to admit it's free and scalable. Uh, and I've run some, several of these groups and, and, uh, at Indiana University, we currently have, right now, as we speak, this semester, we have six Gratitude Support Groups that are running. And I'm really, really excited about these groups because I see it as a free, scalable program modeled after the AA program that can make an impact on people's lives.

So, I want to end, uh, with just a little tip for all of us. If you're, if you're listening to this presentation, you're saying, You know what? I want to cultivate more gratitude in my life. I want to be a more grateful person. Right? I have one tip for you, and [00:34:00] it's a really simple question to ask yourself. Do you believe that life has been unfair to you or has it been fair to you, or has life been overly generous to you?

If you believe that life has been unfair to you, you're probably going to be someone who is grumpy, frustrated, and resentful. I know a lot of these people. I've seen a lot of them. Right? You, you're going to be, you're going to be, um, pretty stressed out most of the time. The vast majority of people would say that life has been fair to you, fair to me.

And if you, if you say that life has been fair to me, you probably experience a moderate amount of gratitude. And my challenge is this, it is the people who say that life has been overly generous to me, that are the most grateful. So this one question I ask will probably tell me how grateful you are as a person.[00:35:00]

So I call this the Abundance Mindset, which is that if you believe that life has been overly generous to you, you have a sense of abundance in your life. Now, how do you develop this? I want to offer you five things to reflect on. Reflect on experiences that tell us that we're lucky, a fortunate, or blessed. Reflect on instances where we've received opportunities that others have not. Think about experiences that you have that are not just good, but surprisingly good. Number four, think of experiences of grace. Grace is the experience of receiving something that you don't deserve or perhaps you don't fully deserve.

And number five, think of situations in which you narrowly avoided a disaster. That's something I think is, is very applicable to, to many people who are recovering from substance misuse. Right? And so this cultivation of [00:36:00] an abundance mindset to me is the secret sauce for becoming a more grateful person. So I just want to, I just want to conclude by saying that, you know, this is deeply personal to me.

I don't just study the signs of gratitude. The reason what I'm passionate, passionate about this is that I have seen its transformative power in my life. Uh, about a month ago, I challenged

myself and say, For one week I'm going to be writing every single day and asking myself in ways is my life uniquely blessed?

Cause I wanted to cultivate an Abundance Mindset. And every single day I thought about experiences in my life that talked about how I'm blessed, or fortunate, or experienced grace, or, uh, experienced something surprisingly good were narrowly avoided disaster. And I thought I would be able to come out with one or two things, but I was, I was [00:37:00] surprised. I could come up with more and more things as I reflected on my life of how it's been blessed. So that's all I have for you today. I have, um, some free, um, resources for you on Google Drive that you're, you are welcome to access and I'll be happy to take more questions later.

[00:37:20] **Janice Fulkerson:** Thank you Dr. Wong. That was inspiring. Um, we have today with us, uh, Mindy Street. Mindy Street has some experience in starting a gratitude, or participating in a gratitude group. We're going to ask Mindy to, um, unmute, uh, and join us on the screen. And then after Mindy talks for a few minutes and share some of her experiences, we're going to take questions and answers and we do.

Some for you Dr. Wong. And for those of you, uh, following the chat, I put the link to those resources that Dr. Wong mentioned in the chat. Mindy, thanks for [00:38:00] joining us today.

**Mindy Street:** Um, thank you for having me. Um, I am a little nervous, but I'm so happy to be here. Um, my name is Mindy. I am one year, three months, and six days sober.

[00:38:14] Um, it's so crazy. It feels like it's been so much longer than that, but you know, to my family and the people in my life, it's just, just a drop in the bucket. And, um, I have to remind myself that. Um, so just a little bit of back information so you can really understand why gratitude is such an important part of my life today.

Um, I've been, I've struggled with addiction for, for 12 years on and off. And, um, I've, I've gotten sober before and, um, maintained some time in sobriety. But I think that, um, where addicts are so used to like constant stimulation, once, um, we come back into normal life isn't always stimulating and that [00:39:00] can sometimes be perceived as, um, like something's missing.

And I think that's what happened with me. I wasn't being, um, I wasn't reminding myself every day all the blessings that were in my life. I mean, I started to mend relationships with my children and my parents, and I didn't. I took that for granted. So, um, about two years ago, I was, um, in the grips of addiction.

I was staying in hotel rooms. Estranged for my children. Um, just. Probably the lowest point in my life. And, um, 35 years old, I find out that I'm pregnant. And, um, to me, in that moment, I couldn't think of anything worse that could have happened to me. Like in my mind, that was the worst thing that could po [00:40:00] possibly happen to me.

And I, I, um, struggled to get clean. Um, And it wasn't until a friend reached out to me and asked me, um, if I was willing to go to the Chrysalis House, um, and, you know, um, I was like, You know what, I'm really going to try this again. And so, um, it's crazy how your perception changes because you know, um, Robbie is, uh, my son's name, turned out to be like the best thing that ever happened to me.

Um, he gave me the motivation to try again, and I've just been, um, so blessed. Um, so in sobriety now, um, I have all three of my kids back. Um, I work at DV8 Kitchen and I'm going back to school. And all this has happened in just, you know, a little over a year's time. And I [00:41:00] constantly have to, I like to, you know, look at all the blessings that are in my life and, um, you know, that keeps me satisfied.

You know, cause day to day it can seem, you know, we get complacent, but when I'm constantly reflecting on the things that I have to be grateful for, you know, I've. I don't ever think about throwing that away for anything. And I really enjoyed, um, Dr. Wong's presentation. I was taking notes the whole time because I can, I can, um, look at those things that he talked about in my life.

Like, um, being grateful does inhibit bad behavior. When I'm taking a look at all the things in my life I have today, you know, having my kids. Um, it, it definitely keeps me from making bad decisions. It, um, my gratitude in my day, my day is that [00:42:00] DV8 every morning as a group, we share gratitude and, um, on the days that we're running behind and we don't get to do that. You can definitely tell the difference in the room, you know, and attitudes and patience. And whenever we, whenever we share our gratitude, everybody is just more patient with each other. We. We really appreciate each other. And so, um, we have started a little gratitude group here. Um, and the way that we do it is a lot like the second group that Dr. Wong had talked about. Um, we take turns bringing different things to the group. Like yesterday we talked about, um, blessings in disguise and you know, sometimes we can be going through a tough situation, but when, um, we come out on the other side, we can see, you know, how much of a, a blessing that really was in our [00:43:00] life.

And, um, we always, um, reflect on three blessings. That's something that I like to journal about every day, is like three blessings that I have in my life. And it really just keeps me satisfied. It keeps me, um, humble. Um, we do things like, um, action. I think that gratitude is about action. I think it's something you show, right? You show you're grateful. So, um, where we're trying to organize something now, um, like a coat drive or, um, getting some blankets together just to, to take to some people that need to stay warm because I can remember times when, um, you know, That I was out there cold and so I don't want to take for granted that I have a home and that, you know, we're all warm and, and, uh, like I said, it really keeps, keeps my heart full.

Um, let's see. Um, The Positive Subtraction. I really related to that a lot as well because like I said, I'm going [00:44:00] to school full-time, I work fulltime. I have three kids full-time, and I can get overwhelmed. And um, you know, sometimes I would want to pull my hair out. But when I think about what my life would be like if I hadn't gotten clean, you know, I would take the worst day here with them over, you know, the best day out there.

So, um, that definitely. Um, definitely resonated with me. I love all the programs that you've set up. I would love to be able to, um, read up on some of the material that you have for the meetings and, um, I think that's all I have.

[00:44:38] **Janice Fulkerson:** Mindy, I just want to say thank you to you and, um, I don't know if you're following the chat now, but the encouragement and the appreciation and the love in the chat for you is making me cry.

So, uh, I think you and I both need a few Kleenexes right now, so well done Mindy, thank you for sharing [00:45:00] your story, um, and um, your inspiration with the team. Gratitude is uh, amazing. Um, and, uh, there's a lot of appreciation for your transparency and honesty and there, uh, inspiring many in the chat. Um, thanks for being here.

Um, I look forward to more from you, Mindy. Um, Quest. There are a few questions, um, for, uh, both of you. Um, and, uh, I'll, uh, refer to Dr. Wong first. In the recovery, uh, or in the gratitude groups. Uh, there's a question about how to start one, um, and, and, uh, how to keep 'em going. Um, so part one and part two. Um, and then, uh, I'll, uh, there's another one about encouraging someone, uh, to let go of the bitterness and resentment and to further embrace gratitude.

So kind of 1, [00:46:00] 2, 3, uh, a theme there of questions Dr. Wong.

[00:46:04] **Dr. Joel Wong:** Um, let's try to take, um, each question one by one. Um, so I've said I have two versions of the gratitude groups. One is a, a more educational version, which has a curriculum and a lot of, uh, tips and worksheets. And then the other is a more scaled down version where there isn't a curriculum, but there's a theme and, you know, get together and there's more sharing and talking.

Um, I probably would have to, um, conduct some training sessions. Um, you know, if you all are interested in either of these two versions, uh, the, the more intense version, the Gratitude Group Program, um, I typically require, um, therapists or people with mental health training to be able to conduct those programs.

Um, whereas for the Gratitude Support Groups, Um, I, my intention is for [00:47:00] this to be easy enough that it can be run by a lay person. Uh, but my, one of the best ways to be able to start a group is I would say, um, you know, the next time I lead a group, uh, gratitude group, you come joining join and, and be part of this group of six weeks with me.

And as I've said, I don't charge for being part of a gratitude group, um, uh, being part of a Gratitude Support Group. Um, so, uh, you know, you go through that and then, um, you might have to go through some, a little bit of training and then I'm happy to have you all, um, facilitate those with your own community.

Um, that's something that I, I definitely want to see, uh, made readily available to everyone. Uh, did I answer that, that first set of questions?

[00:47:50] **Janice Fulkerson:** You did.

[00:47:50] **Dr. Ernie Fletcher:** Dr. Wong, I want to interject here a little bit cause I think this is, we talked about a little pre-conference, but. I think given [00:48:00] the ch uh, the chats that have been going on, which have been outstanding and really appreciate both presentations here, I think we have a Learning Management System and we would be glad to start taking and putting some of those materials on to help folks, uh, understand how to do that and direct them to you as well.

I just saw that in, and Janice, uh, Karen run that, but, uh, we do have that educational resource and I, uh, think developing some gratitude resources in that, it sounds like it would be, uh, greatly appreciated by people. So I'll turn it back to you, Dr. Wong.

[00:48:37] **Dr. Joel Wong:** All right. Thank you. And there's, uh, another question about how to encourage someone.

[00:48:42] **Janice Fulkerson:** Yeah. Are there, um, like I was thinking about the list of questions to generate gratitude. Um, would that, for example, be one of the tactics, uh, to continue to encourage, um, [00:49:00] uh, gratitude, um, and help people move to more of a, more of a, a gratitude and grace, as you talked about, position?

[00:49:11] **Dr. Joel Wong:** Yeah, sure. Um, I, I'm seeing also this question from Joseph about how to encourage someone in recovery who won't let go of bitterness and resentment and, you know, keeping him drunk. I want to, I want to share something about what not to do. Um, one thing that I have learned that is unhelpful. And I'm very tempted to say that to a family member.

It's, but we should avoid telling someone, You should be grateful. That doesn't work. Even if it's true. Uh, shoulds and musts are one of the most unhelpful words. If you are a therapist, uh, you probably know that's a word that that just is not very helpful. People don't want to feel that they're being nagged [00:50:00] at or pressured.

Um, but if I'm, look, if I'm, uh, you know, dealing with someone who is not, uh, really into gratitude and not particularly excited and has lots of resentments, um, you know, I'll take a softer approach and I'll do two things. The first is that I will model gratitude for them. So instead of telling them to be grateful, I will express gratitude to them so that they, they get to experience the power of gratitude for themselves.

And even people who have had, who are have, I don't know, who are grumpy and who are, who don't live really good lives, there are probably things in their lives for which you can be grateful for, and you can express gratitude to that person. You can also model gratitude by having that person observe you express gratitude to other people so that they get to watch the transformative power of gratitude as a witness.

And that's how we sell them on gratitude. Not by preaching to them but inviting them to be [00:51:00] participants. And if you have a support group, you know, a gratitude support group like the one that Mindy has, invite 'em to come and just say, you know, why don't you just come along and take a look? You don't have to do anything.

You don't have to participate, but just come in and observe what goes on. And to me that observation that, uh, exposure to role models might be a way, uh, to bring them into the fold of the power of gratitude. Yes. Um, now there comments on the, uh, in the chats, um, which is, uh, must and shoulds, um, are, are, are not good phrases to use.

We, we don't want people to, to use the word must and shoulds. Um, and I always tell people, I tell clients, right, Instead of using a must or a should in your life, replace that with preferences. I prefer to do this or I prefer to not to do that.

[00:51:53] **Janice Fulkerson:** Thank you, Dr. Wong. Is there, um, um, a question that you would like to pose of [00:52:00] gratitude maybe from your gratitude list that you would like people to answer in the chat for you to generate a little gratitude, um, in the chat today?

[00:52:09] **Dr. Joel Wong:** Do you want me to pose a question for real quick folks?

[00:52:11] **Janice Fulkerson:** I do. Yeah, let's do that.

[00:52:14] **Dr. Joel Wong:** Of course. Um, here is a question that I've been really, uh, excited about. When you think about what's good in your life, what's good isn't just something positive that happened, but what is good is also something bad that could have happened but didn't. Have you thought about that? Or something bad that happened, but it could be a lot worse. So that's my question to, to all of us. What is something bad that could have happened that didn't in your life? Or something bad that did happen, but it could be way worse?

[00:52:56] **Janice Fulkerson:** Ooh, uh, Dr. Wong. [00:53:00] I'll pose, uh, I'll answer that question live and then encourage everyone to respond to that in the chat so we can look at what some of those are. I was out with family Saturday night and the battery in my truck turned out to be six years old, and it went dead late in the evening when it was dark and cold.

What, That was not a good experience. However, it happened in front of my son's house after I dropped off the grandkids. So what could have been really worse was for it to happen while we were out at the movies with the grandkids and it didn't. So that's an example of something bad that happened that could have been way worse. Oh, uh yep. Question could have been a disaster.[00:54:00]

[00:54:03] **Dr. Joel Wong:** Yeah. I have an acronym for this type this question. I call it the CBAD Question cause I call it Could Have Been a Disaster. But something, you know, the experience of grace that something someone, some out there prevented things from becoming way worse than you would think.

[00:54:20] **Janice Fulkerson:** Yeah. We've got an early cancer diagnosis that was caught early. Yep. A medical condition that restored a relationship. A dog bite on Halloween, but only got a finger. Fantastic. Great.

Um, thank you Dr. Wong for being here today. Um, thank you Mindy, also for your testimony and for being here today. Um, there's a lot of good [00:55:00] conversation in the chat. We've answered all the questions. I'll, uh, uh, let people know that if you are interested in more information from The, Fletcher Group about gratitude.

This, uh, webinar will be posted in approximately two weeks out on our website. Um, next month we'll be talking about Faith-based Organizations and uh, recovery housing. Um, and the partnerships that can, can be developed. Um, and then technical assistance can also be found at FletcherGroup.org. If anyone is interested in more information, um, you're welcome to reach out to us via our website. Um, and that concludes, um, our, um, webinar for today and look for more information on our webinar for next month, and if you're interested, sign up for our newsletter at FletcherGroup.org. And please stay on long enough to fill out our survey [00:56:00] today. Thank you.

[00:56:01] **Dr. Ernie Fletcher:** And Dr. Wong this is Ernie. Really appreciate, excellent presentation. We'll promote the recording of this as I think it's a subject that's not often covered and you've done a brilliant job of it, so thank you. And, Mindy we really appreciate that testimony. Very inspiring. Thank you.

[00:56:25] **Dr. Joel Wong:** You're welcome. And thank you for, , the privilege of being able to share, um, my work with all of you. I really, really appreciate that.