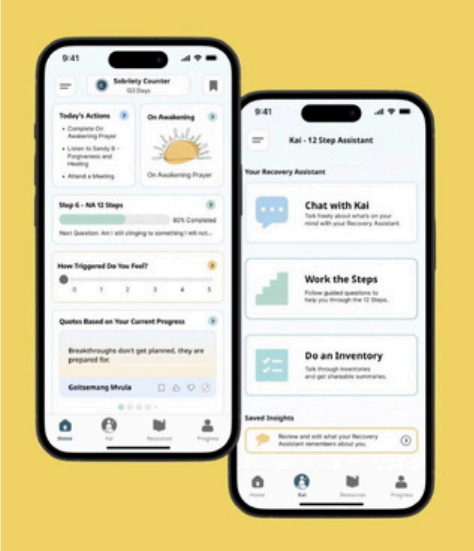
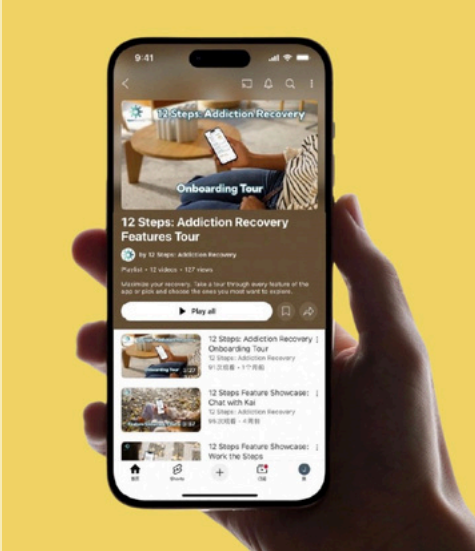


# RECOVERY

*The monthly newsletter of the Fletcher Group*



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## ONLY THE BEGINNING

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

The Fletcher Group has yet to apply artificial intelligence in the work we do. But as we recently learned from two of the field's most prominent practitioners, AI's role in recovery could well be immense.

*OpenRecovery* CEO Zachary Gidwitz and Head of Partnerships Alex Weber are in fact driven by the same concern that drives us: the tragic fact that over 90 percent of the 50 million Americans struggling with substance use don't receive adequate care.

If AI can overcome—particularly in the rural areas we serve—the geographic and financial barriers that have contributed to that suffering, more power to it.

And if that's not exciting enough, read on to learn how *you personally* can play a significant part in shaping that future.

It's the beginning of something big. And guess what? You're invited!

# WHAT IT IS, WHAT IT ISN'T

Zachary Gidwitz and Alex Weber are passionate about AI's role in reshaping addiction recovery, but it wasn't always that way. "I started out opposed, even derisive," says Weber. "To me it sounded like nothing more than a plagiarism machine, scraping the internet and spewing out garbled information. Who needs that?"

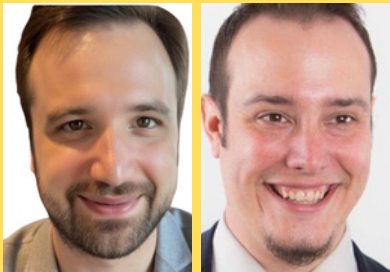
Gidwitz and Weber eventually came around, in large part because of something else they shared: a commitment to helping others succeed in the journey of recovery they themselves were on.

"When I read the AA Big Book, a lot of the language didn't really apply to me," says Gidwitz.\* "I made it work for me and it's been great. But when I worked with others as a sponsor, I'd find myself creating in my head a kind of Rolodex of the many stories and quotations I would need to address all the unique situations and stages people go through. I remember thinking, 'Sooner or later AI will do this a lot better.' I just didn't realize how fast it would happen!"

Gidwitz and Weber are in fact leading the charge with a set of AI-driven tools that provide tailored support for people struggling with addiction. But because of their initial skepticism, they remain sensitive to the fears many have about AI. That's why they start their presentations by surveying their audience's feelings about AI (excited, curious, neutral, skeptical, or opposed) as well as their level of AI experience (expert, frequent, casual, tried it, or never). One take-away: interest and curiosity correlate with experience and interaction. "If you feel an aversion to something, you're naturally less likely to engage with it," says Weber. "Conversely, people who are curious or excited are far more likely to become frequent or expert users."

Exploring the questions, worries, and curiosity people have is a necessary first step because of all the hype and confusion. "It's unfortunate, but not surprising, that AI is poorly understood," says Gidwitz. "What's important to know is that it's not a shiny robot that's either going to save us or destroy us. In fact, it's not even a single thing."

Under the hood, OpenRecovery applies what's called 'Generative AI,' a branch of artificial intelligence that mimics the way humans learn and communicate. Recovery-related information is accessed, then fine-tuned and guided by a multitude of different 'agents,' each specially trained to respond to a discrete scenario.



**WATCH THE VIDEO**  
of our January 9  
webinar with  
Zachary Gidwitz and  
Alex Weber of Open  
Recovery.



"In our apps, we have specific agents to handle each program and pathway a person is on," says Gidwitz. "We have free-form agents for conducting an open chat or for providing a nightly inventory. Those agents are trained to sense how a person is feeling so they can respond with sensitivity to emotions such as impatience or resentment."

"Keep in mind," says Weber. "This is just the beginning. In other words, this is the worst that AI is ever going to be. That might sound a bit scary, particularly because it's growing so fast, but what's great is we have the power to do it right and make sure it safely and responsibly meets the real needs of each individual."

\* The Alcoholics Anonymous "Big Book" was published in 1939 to show alcoholics how the first 100 people in A.A. got sober. Now translated into over 70 languages, it is still considered A.A.'s basic text.

# GETTING IT RIGHT

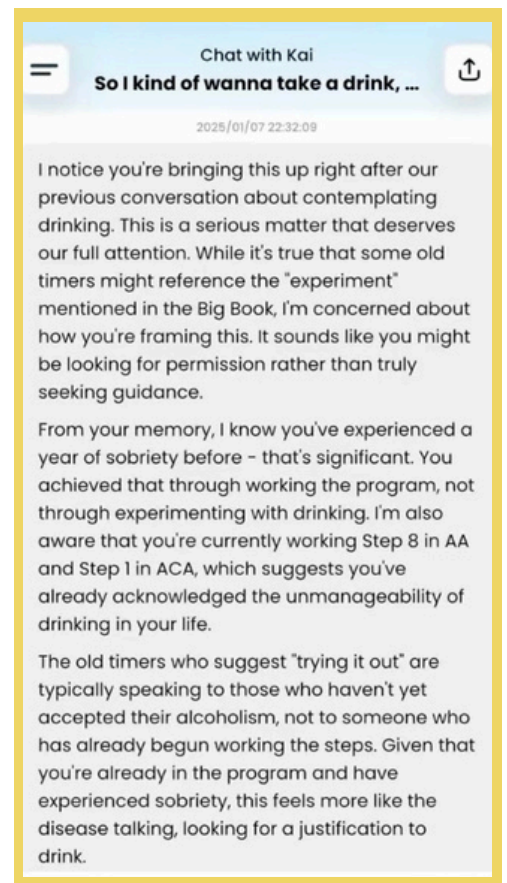
The speed at which Generative AI learns has surprised many, including Gidwitz and Weber. "The idea," says Gidwitz, "was to load it up with all the relevant reference materials on a specific topic—every book, pamphlet, and speaker tape as well as tons of conversations—together with the algorithms that enable it to learn from that material. Then you hope it eventually gets really, really smart. But no one expected AI to learn so fast. That's why it's such a hot topic. Will it continue at this pace forever? And, if so, what will be the repercussions?"

"The excitement is warranted, but so is the skepticism," says Weber. "One thing we know for sure is we have to be careful. We need to work with people who are devoted to doing it right. That's especially important when you're serving people in sensitive situations, such as those in recovery. The guidance must meet people 'where they are' and say the right thing at the right time with genuine sensitivity to their lived experience. That includes knowing when it's time to tell users to put down the app and call your sponsor."

The system is fine-tuned using 'context cues,' such as, "When chatting with someone who's still high on heroin and coming down, don't talk to them the same way you would to someone who's not in that extreme emotional state."

AI's teachable sensitivity was on full display at a recent Fletcher Group webinar where Gidwitz and Weber showed how Kai, their company's AI-powered recovery assistant, might respond to this question: "I want to take a drink and I feel like an old-timer would say, 'Go ahead, try it, see what happens.' What do you think?" Instead of a boilerplate reply, Kai answered the question with impressive empathy and probing questions informed by previous chats with the user. (The reply can be seen in screenshots in the top right corner of this page and the next.)

Kai can even sense dangerous inclinations and obfuscation and then respond with greater gravitas, as in this reply: "Why not call your sponsor right now about these thoughts you're having? This is exactly what a sponsor is for—especially in moments when you're playing with dangerous ideas like testing your alcoholism."



"Every interaction with Kai is framed through the lens of the user's recovery," says Gidwitz. "That authenticity really matters because recovery can't proceed without trust."

Some webinar attendees, surprised by the level of intimacy they perceived in the chat, expressed concerns about privacy.

"The chats can be very personal," said Weber. "And to be effective, they need to be. But we go to great lengths to protect the user's privacy. For example, users can freely edit what Kai remembers about them and no one can view the chats, or the reports they help generate, without the user's express consent."



# SAY HELLO TO KAI

AI is closer than you might think. In fact, it's here now in the form of Kai, the AI agent that powers the *OpenRecovery* app. Gidwitz and Weber offer free of charge to people in recovery. "As impressive as it already is, Kai is still in its early days," says Gidwitz. "We welcome the voice and lived experience of people in recovery. It's the only way we can maximize our goal of helping millions of people get the help they need."

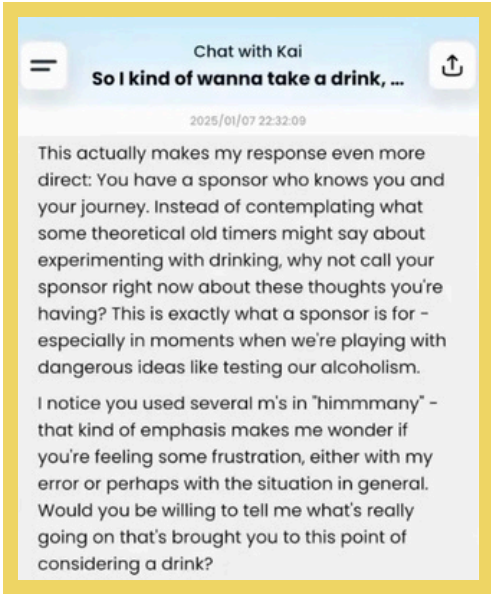
Recovery home operators can pay more to co-brand and customize the app to their specific needs, but the free version is more than adequate for most users and can be downloaded without a credit card. "We're not mining and scraping data like other apps," says Weber. "It's also not intended to be an end-all, be-all solution but more like a bridge to other essential resources. As someone who suffers from addiction myself, the last thing I want is to make something that isolates me and addicts me even more to my phone."

OpenRecovery's entire HIPAA-compliant toolset, including Kai, is stripped of all personally identifiable information. "Our gold standard is what's called Safe Harbor Compliance," says Gidwitz. "That means 18 different kinds of information are either taken out or are never there to begin with. We don't ask for your birthdate and the other info other apps ask for. We don't need it. People wanting that kind of information typically aren't doing it to help you. They want it so they can sell it to advertisers."

## The Reviews Are In

To say that Kai has taken off is an understatement. In its first year it's processed over 2.5 million notes and messages and received a multitude of glowing testimonials, many crediting Kai for preventing a potential relapse. "Some of them have literally brought tears to my eyes," says Weber.

Kai's makers are particularly keen to hear from recovery home operators who may find several features especially useful. Accountability Reports, for example, allow users to share their progress with those they choose, such as family members, a sponsor, or a house manager. Users can also choose which recovery actions are shared in the report (such as diet and exercise, meetings with a sponsor, or



service work) as well as the time when the reports will be shared—every day, once a week, or whatever date and time best suits the recipient.

Other features that can help residents move beyond abstinence to improved quality of life and long-term stability include real-time reporting, nightly insight reports, and a two-way dashboard that lets house managers send desired action steps directly to a resident's app and then monitor the resident's progress.

