



Fletcher Group Partner Success Story

SMART IN KENTUCKY

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A GENEROUS OFFER

Fred Cowan and Valinda Woodard, owner/operators of Courage House in Christian County, Kentucky, had never heard of the SMART Recovery Life Skills Curriculum (SLS) when Fletcher Group Regional Director Erica Walker recommended it. But they immediately agreed to try it, not only because of the confidence they'd developed from months of working with Walker, but also because of significant incentives: training, materials, and equipment at no cost plus a \$1,200 stipend for implementing the program and evaluating the results.



Foundation

EASY DOES IT!

"SMART makes it all so easy," says Valinda. "Our residents, for example, could participate in the online meetings with the camera on or off. They could even mute the microphone and just use the chat box. That kind of flexibility really helps reduce the stress of trying something new. But in our case, seeing the facilitator's face made it more personal and engaging. But none of it—the training, the camera, the workbooks, and the stipend—would have been possible without the support of the Elevance Health Foundation and their innovative partnership with the Fletcher Group."

CLIENT BUY-IN

Some Courage House residents were initially wary of SMART's secular approach. "We assured them there was no conflict with higher-power programs like AA," says Valinda. "But it wasn't until the fourth or fifth meeting that they all started buying in. By that time, the SMART facilitator had found the perfect balance of guidance and interaction and the light bulbs began coming on. We started hearing residents say, 'Wow, this is great!' and 'When's the next meeting?' By the end everyone was getting so much out of it that even the early doubters were saying, 'I'm really going to miss this.'"

BASED ON TRUST

Entrepreneurship runs in the blood of Courage House Founder Fred Cowan, a former UK and professional basketball player, business owner, and Job Corps manager. Fred wasn't fully prepared to run a recovery home, however, and consequently relied heavily on the Fletcher Group for guidance. "We'd been working several months with Erica when she suggested SMART SLS," says Fred. "We knew she wouldn't suggest something unless it was truly valuable and we were right to trust her."





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SO MANY BENEFITS

"We didn't fully realize how important life skills are to recovery until we started using SLS," says Valinda. "We know now because we've seen our residents learn, step-by-step and meeting-by-meeting, how to resist triggers, reduce stress, regulate difficult emotions, and resolve conflicts—all the day-to-day problem-solving and decision-making skills they'll need to keep a job, sustain relationships, and meet the challenges of the outside world. We call it a 'second chance' but, to be honest, what are your odds of success without those basic life skills?"



THE KEY INSIGHT

Of SMART's four stated goals—to help people build motivation, manage thoughts and feelings, cope with urges, and lead a balanced life—it's the third that resonates the most with Valinda. "My key takeaway was the insight that it takes seven minutes to work through an urge. If you can divert your attention with music, a walk, or talking with someone, the urge becomes controllable. Just knowing that is so valuable. After all, if you're not able to handle urges, you're not going to get very far in recovery, right? From my perspective, that's the door opener that makes everything else possible."

CONTINUING ED

Valinda hasn't yet become an SLS facilitator so a current resident who gained certification while incarcerated will likely lead SLS meetings going forward. "We plan to do it in both spring and fall so that everyone who comes here can benefit," says Valinda. "The meetings help remind those who've been here for a while how far they've come. And for new arrivals, SLS can be a real eye opener, enabling them to gain, perhaps for the first time, some real clarity and objectivity about who they are, how they got here, the challenges unique to each person, and how to move forward from here."

UNWAVERING SUPPORT

"Fred and Valinda are fantastic folk," says Fletcher Group Regional Director Erica Walker. "They've taken advantage of every tool and resource we've offered, including the Smart Recovery Successful Life Skills program." The feeling is mutual. "We wouldn't be where we are today without Erica, and I mean that literally," says Valinda. "She helped us pick the geographic area and has been there every step of the way since." "Knowledge is key," says Fred Cowan. "That's what we needed most and what Erica's given us, time and time again."

