



Fletcher Group Partner Success Story

NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

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A SMART START

In the midst of what some call "the epicenter of the opioid epidemic" the Fellowship Recovery Community Organization of Broward County serves all comers in south Florida with a 160-bed men's facility in Margate, a 27-bed women's facility in Fort Lauderdale, and a wide range of complementary supports services "so that no one has to navigate recovery alone." That commitment to putting power, hope, and healing within reach of everyone recently prompted Fellowship RCO to implement its first SMART Recovery Life Skills Curriculum (SLS).



A DEEPER DIVE

"I'm a 'walk-in-the-solution' type person," says Recovery Center Program Director Michelle Walker. "Instead of wasting time complaining or beating myself up, I like to figure things out. I love SLS because it takes the same direct approach: 'Let's solve this. What are your problems? And how are you dealing, or not dealing, with them?' Problem-solving with like-minded people in an SLS meeting is like working with a professional therapist in the sense that pat answers don't cut it. SLS helps you go deeper to really understand yourself. And I love that!"

A TEAM EFFORT

Unlike more traditional 12-Step programs, SLS meetings encourage cross-talk, thereby creating a more open, intimate, engaging, even teamlike atmosphere that many find both exhilarating and empowering. "I remember a person struggling to describe his feelings," says Walker. "We worked together, not to tell him how he felt, but just to help him find the right words. In another case, a person who was worried about how other people see him allowed us to help him differentiate between thoughts and feelings. In both cases, the person felt less alone even as the rest of us learned from him."

A PERFECT FIT

You'd think that providing nearly 30,000 nights of free housing over the past 20 years would be enough, but Fellowship RCO has a "no stone unturned" approach to serving those in need. That's why, despite initial skepticism regarding its purely secular approach, new CEO Sara Barkley not only agreed with the Fletcher Group to implement SLS but also attended every meeting of its initial rollout. "SLS perfectly complements what we offer and has already helped us attract and retain people we might otherwise have missed."





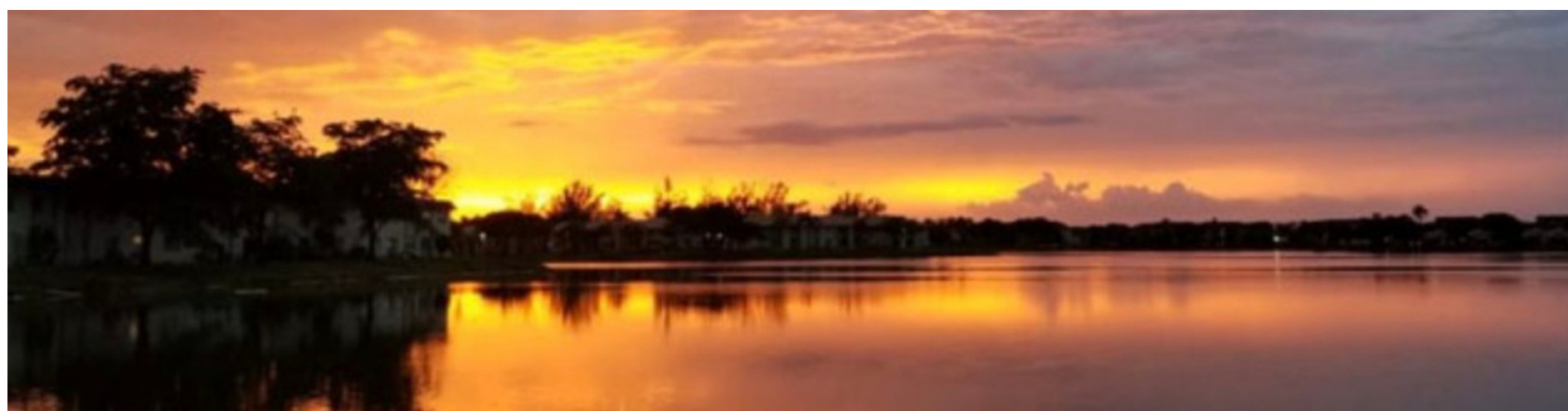
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PROOF IN THE PUDDING

"SLS came to my life when I really needed it," says Walker. "I don't know where my husband and I would be without it. The beauty of it is that, if you keep showing up and using the tools, the new practices and insights become part of you." One example is the calming effect of learning to distinguish between what can and can't be controlled. "It helps me let go, relax, and stop beating myself up over things that are actually beyond my control.,"" says Walker. "We've seen the powerful effect of that in others, too, when they're finally free of the compulsion to control and be perfect."



THE RIGHT TOOLS

SLS offers a wide range of tools and exercises for discussion during meetings, such as Creating a Change Plan, Defining Your Values, Disputing Unhelpful Beliefs, Exploring New Pursuits and Passions, Setting Goals, Practicing Self-Compassion, and Setting Healthy Boundaries. One tool in particular was critically important to Walker. "The ABC Exercise helped me the same way I've seen it help others who are dealing with cravings. The ability to identify underlying feelings and consider the consequences can be a real game-changer, even a life saver."

YET TO COME

In terms of implementation, Fellowship RCO's key insight has been that SLS poses no threat to the practice or success of existing programs. As a consequence, leadership is relaxing its strict 12-Step adherence and will soon institute permanent in-person SLS meetings. That effort will include the internal training of additional facilitators as well as community education to attract new participants and overcome any stigma or skepticism regarding SLS's secular nature and what might strike some as a departure from faith-based traditions.

THE DABBLER

"I never want to stop learning," says Michelle Walker whose "dabbling," as she calls it, has included meditation, Reiki, gardening, service, multiple recovery programs, a recovery book club, and now SLS as both student and facilitator. Embodying the SMART philosophy of continuous growth and practical problem-solving, Walker has become an SLS fan because of the way it's helped herself and others, including her husband, also in recovery, who's benefitted as much as Walker has from the SLS tools and insights she has shared with him.

