

HOPE
HOPE
HOPE
HOPE
& CHANGE

Imagine the Possibilities...



The Allegheny County Coalition for Recovery
www.coalitionforrecovery.org

About the Allegheny County Coalition for Recovery...

Consumers, family members, and providers created the Allegheny County Coalition for Recovery (ACCR) in response to service users who felt that they were not being heard by providers and seldom had opportunities to participate in the planning of their treatment.

ACCR strives to transform systems of care in Allegheny County to systems that are supportive of people who have mental health or substance use problems. Our mission is to increase awareness of behavioral health recovery and to promote the use of recovery principles and practices in behavioral health services.

To learn more about the Coalition and recovery, and how you can become involved, please visit www.coalitionforrecovery.org.



**“Though no one can go back and make a brand new start,
anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.”
– Carl Bard**

Regardless of what we are recovering from (mental illness, addiction, physical injury, loss of a loved one, isolation, victimization, etc.), we must come to the realization that while there may be circumstances beyond our control (over which we are powerless), we do have the power to manage our lives and make them meaningful and satisfying through our own choices and efforts. The idea of recovery is often a personal one, and the meaning of the word may vary between individuals, yet there are some basic elements of recovery that provide insight into its universal applicability.

One central element of recovery is the concept of change. Recovery is about doing things differently and recognizing the consequences of certain choices and behaviors. In order for change to occur, we must recognize the magnitude of the challenge we face and have the courage to confront it. We must come to believe that we have the capacity to influence the course of our lives and future circumstances. It is in this belief that we develop hope and can accept responsibility for change and how we function in the world.

As recovery is defined in this broad sense, it becomes a unifying concept that brings together people who are striving to reach their potential. It erases the distinctions between provider and patient, addiction and mental illness, young and old—and between differences in skin color, language, religion, and education. We all engage in the recovery process at some point. With this understanding, we become part of a recovery community and develop a sense of belonging. Ultimately, recovery is a spiritual journey that is manifest in a wide variety of forms, but is always driven by values that offer hope, autonomy, community and peace.

Allegheny County Coalition for Recovery

RECOVERY IS
Hope

A Journey

RECOVERY IS

“Each one has to find his peace from within. And peace to be real must be unaffected by outside circumstances.”

– Mohandas Gandhi

Many of us hear the word “recovery” used in a variety of ways and are not really sure what it means or how it applies to us. When we talk about recovery from an illness we usually think about a return to wellness or being cured. Sometimes the term “recovery” is used when we talk about persons with disabling injuries who regain all or part of their ability to function.

“Recovery” is also used to describe an ongoing process through which we learn to manage disabilities or permanent conditions such as spinal cord injuries, addictions, diabetes, and mental illnesses in a way that allows us to have a full and satisfying life. Sometimes we use the term when we talk about getting over some painful or damaging experience. Although we may have very different ideas about what recovery means, most of us would agree that recovery is a process of change that includes “resiliency,” or the ability to overcome adversity. As we become more resilient, the scope of our experience can expand and our lives become fuller and more satisfying.

In this booklet, recovery is viewed as a process, or a journey, through which people grow and change in ways that improve the quality of their lives. The recovery journey helps us overcome the adversities that face us in our lives. It is a journey that makes our lives meaningful and fulfilling. It is a journey we can take together.



“Take the first step, no more, no less, and the next will be revealed.”

– Ken Roberts

Principles supporting the recovery process provide useful tools for change, whether we have a substance use disorder, a mental illness, or a medical or physical problem, or are struggling to cope with issues of daily life. Saying that someone is recovered doesn't necessarily mean that he or she is cured. Recovery is about accepting our condition and learning to manage it, including any bumps in the road that might set us back temporarily. Learning how to avoid letting our condition limit or define us is part of recovery.

In recovery, we have hope because we can see possibilities and make healthy choices. In making these choices, we recognize that our personal decisions and behaviors contribute to the level of distress or well-being that we experience.

Recognizing that we must all engage in the same process as we strive to make our lives more fulfilling allows us to join as partners in offering and requesting support. It also gives us the power to make changes in our lives.

The key aspects of recovery include:

- Recognition
- Courage and choice
- Empowerment and belief
- Meaning and purpose
- Goals and dreams
- Support
- Unity
- Overcoming stigma
- Change

RECOVERY IS
For Everyone

Recognition

RECOVERY IS

“Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery.”

– Joanne Rowling

One of the first steps in recovery is the recognition that we have a problem or an issue in our lives that requires us to think differently and make changes. We also need to recognize the value of obtaining support from others in addressing the problem.

Believing in the possibility of change is also an important, and often, difficult step. Without this belief, we will likely continue the negative behaviors that prevent a fulfilling and productive life.

Recognizing that recovery is possible allows us to step out of the shadows and move toward the goals of building resiliency and promoting personal growth. Recovery can initiate and empower self-discovery, renewal, and transformation, but we cannot make these steps until we confront those things which hold us back.



“There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them.”

– Denis Waitley

When we hear the words challenge and courage, we often think of heroic acts of bravery. People in the military, fire fighters, and medical personnel all come to mind. However, change can also be very difficult. It takes courage to face the challenges of recovery.

One of the most often misunderstood concepts in recovery is that of personal choice and responsibility. No one chooses to have a problem that limits what they can do, but sometimes things happen and we feel stuck. If we stay stuck long enough, we begin to think that we can't change or that we can't handle change. It is at that point that we tend to give up. Choice and responsibility relate to the role we take in our own recovery.

In recovery, we begin to see a way out. By taking responsibility for our health and making good choices, we begin to respond to life's challenges differently. We begin to understand that we are not victims, and that we can shape our lives through the choices we make. Even when we have an illness, we have the power to make decisions that optimize our well-being and meet our needs.

RECOVERY IS
Courage and Choice



RECOVERY IS Empowerment and Belief

RECOVERY IS

“Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires courage.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

There are many things in our lives over which we are powerless. The weather, other people, our physical characteristics, and our genetic makeup are just a few of the things that we cannot control. Although we cannot choose the cards life deals us, we do have choices about how we play them. Acceptance of our powerlessness over an illness should not be taken to mean that we are unable to manage that illness or have no voice in the choices to be made regarding that illness. Recovery involves taking control of our lives by making choices that minimize the negative impact of our illnesses and challenges.

Recognizing that we have value and believing in a purpose greater than ourselves are both important aspects of recovery. At times throughout our lives we may lose both the ability to believe and the desire to hope. When this happens, it is easy to despair and lose faith in our value as human beings. If we do not believe in the possibility of change, we have little hope of achieving it. To move toward recovery, we need to regain that lost ability and desire. New hope can come from the miracles we can see around us every day if we choose to look, including the presence of others who have experienced recovery.



“Purpose isn’t your objective or intention—something toward which you are always striving. Purpose is something bigger. It is the picture you have of yourself—the kind of person you want to be or the kind of life you want to lead.”

– Kenneth H. Blanchard

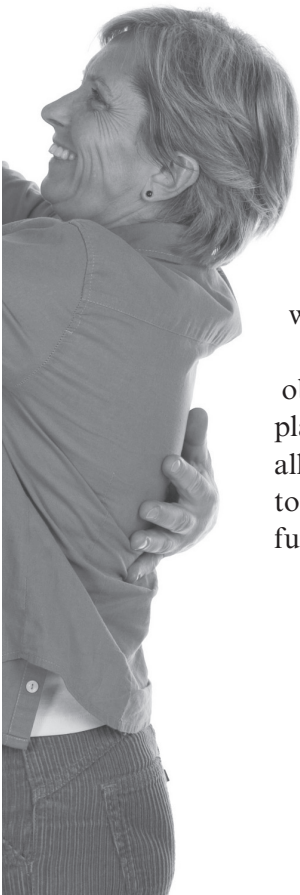
In recovery, success may not be determined by what we accomplish, but by how much effort we put into changing. However challenging, recovery is worth the effort. Recovery is about exerting ourselves to make changes and ultimately reaching our potential. At times our energy may be low and the journey may look long. It is important that we do not despair, but take one day, or even one moment, at a time. We must also remember that we are not alone. As we strive to grow and discover our hidden gifts, we open up the possibility to living life to its fullest and reaching our greatest potential.

The quality of our lives is determined largely by the degree to which we find meaning and purpose. Even the most difficult circumstances may be endured if we have faith

that our suffering is not in vain. In most cases, our relationships with others are a large element of what gives our lives relevance.

For many, these relationships extend beyond those with whom we are most intimately involved, and even beyond the immediate community in which we live and struggle.

Recovery supports a recognition or belief that we are all connected to one another in many important ways, and that there are values and obligations that are part of that connection. Our place in this larger community of humanity allows us to engage in acts of kindness and leads us to a humble understanding that we are all fundamentally the same despite our differences.



RECOVERY IS *Meaning and Purpose*

RECOVERY IS Goals and Dreams

RECOVERY IS

“Life takes on meaning when you become motivated, set goals and charge after them in an unstoppable manner.”

– Les Brown

What is possible? You will never know unless you try.

We may have to dig deep within ourselves to find what is meaningful to us and to identify our personal goals. Meaningful activity can bring us out of the depths of isolation, despair, and depression. It can give us hope, provide friendship, and add meaning to our lives. Our important relationships can often be the source of meaningful activities. Other meaningful activities may include employment, education, hobbies, exercise, volunteer work, engaging in the community, and participating in support groups.

Many people find value in focusing on good nutrition, health and wellness, and spirituality. Nurturing our dreams, finding suitable housing, feeling a sense of belonging – these are all a very real part of the recovery process.



“The greatest gift you can give somebody is your own personal development. I used to say, ‘If you will take care of me, I will take care of you.’ Now I say, ‘I will take care of me for you, if you will take care of you for me’.”

– Jim Rohn

The great thing about recovery is that we are not alone! There are many people in the community cheering us on and ready to lend a hand. Developing a supportive network of people that shares our joy, hardships, and challenges is key to recovery. This group can include family, friends, or anyone who is willing to support us in a way that promotes our recovery.

There will be times on our journey to wellness when we feel alone, discouraged, and hopeless. It is during these periods that we need to be able to turn to our support network and learn from someone who has had a similar experience. By taking the next step and building that support group, you can discover the wonders of life in recovery.



RECOVERY IS
Support

Unity

RECOVERY IS

“Ultimately, recovery is a spiritual journey that is manifest in a wide variety of forms, but is always driven by values that offer hope, autonomy, community and peace.

– Allegheny County Coalition for Recovery

The recovery process transcends our individual differences and brings us together through a common experience. Differences in race, ethnicity, age, religion, gender, and experience significantly impact how we think about ourselves. They are important to recognize and should not be ignored in our relationships. Too often, though, while embracing one group that we feel we would like to be a part of, we let differences separate us from others. Going through a recovery process helps us to understand that, despite our differences, we are all very similar as we strive for more fulfilling lives. The recovery experience itself serves to unify us and allows us to join a larger community.

The recovery process is highly individualized, and no one approach is right for everyone. Despite this, there are many similarities among individual efforts, and it is through these shared experiences that we come to see our common humanity.



“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome.”

– Booker T. Washington

In everyone’s life there are challenges and obstacles to overcome, but the magnitude of these challenges is greater for some than for others. The challenges are even more significant when we face stigma and discrimination based on our health status, often an issue of significant concern for persons with mental health or substance use disorders.

It may not be surprising that stigma exists for those with behavioral health disorders. Mental illnesses and addictions effect our behavior, causing changes in judgment, attitude, values, self control, citizenship, and mannerisms that others may find offensive or hurtful. Even though these changes are not chosen, we are often blamed for our condition, even by those we love and from whom we need support. In many cases, these behaviors bring us into conflict with the criminal justice system. These are the only illnesses that are often punished rather than treated.

Due to the stigma surrounding those in recovery, opportunities and resources are sometimes limited, compared to those available for persons with other types of disabilities. The lack of educational and employment opportunities (despite the Americans with Disabilities Act) makes our path to independence more perilous.

The failure of others to confront their own vulnerabilities with regard to mental health and substance use creates a culture of fear. Recovery provides an opportunity for us all to overcome our prejudices and insecurities. By understanding recovery, we recognize that we have more in common with each other than we thought. By embracing recovery, we can shed the burden of fear, distrust, and hatred and join together.

RECOVERY IS
Overcoming
Stigma

Change

RECOVERY IS

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”

– Helen Keller

Recovery is the process that allows us to make changes in our lives. Through change, we develop hope, knowing that life need not be stagnant and believing that tomorrow can be better than today. Recovery is about developing a maturity that enables us to make wise choices, maintain an open mind, and develop the courage to face uncertainty. In recovery, we become more resilient as we successfully confront and overcome adversity.

There are several practices that can be used to support our efforts to change so that we are better able to live the lives we want. These practices include:

- Honestly assessing oneself.
- Keeping focused on the present.
- Keeping an open mind.
- Taking small achievable steps toward change.
- Having a willingness to work and make sacrifices.
- Seeking assistance when needed.
- Refusing to give up.
- Refusing to be a victim.



“When you’ve reached the end of all the light that you know,
and you must step out into the darkness of the unknown, faith is
knowing that one of two things will happen: either you will have
something solid to stand on, or you will be taught how to fly!”

– Unknown

There are many things in our lives that separate us from one another, and most of us feel more comfortable when we are around others who seem to share our values and view of the world. Despite our differences, we are all engaged in the challenges of living meaningful and productive lives as well as being accepted by the communities and the people to which we are drawn.

This booklet is an attempt to show that there is common ground for this struggle and that we can all be part of a greater community striving to recover from many different challenges and obstacles.

Our goal is the same—to achieve a sense of peace and happiness. Through our efforts to change and grow, we become more resilient and better able to reach the potential that lies within all of us and to live the life that lies before us...imagine the possibilities!



RECOVERY IS
Possible



This booklet was developed by the Allegheny County Coalition for Recovery (www.coalitionforrecovery.org) with support from the following organizations:

Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health — the County’s public office responsible for providing Allegheny County residents with a coordinated, community-focused system of high quality and cost-effective mental health and substance abuse services, including prevention, crisis intervention, treatment, service coordination, and community support services. The Office of Behavioral Health is committed to developing services that support principles of recovery and resiliency.

Community Care Behavioral Health Organization — a recovery-oriented, non-profit behavioral health managed care company headquartered in Pittsburgh, manages behavioral health benefits for nearly one million members. Community Care’s mission is to improve the health and well-being of the community through the delivery of effective and accessible behavioral health services. Community Care embraces the importance of creating an environment that provides hope, empowerment, and choice.

Staunton Farm Foundation — dedicated to improving the lives of people who live with mental illness, the Foundation works to enhance mental health treatment and support by advancing best practices through grant-making to non-profit organizations in the 10 southwestern Pennsylvania counties of Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland.

For more information about this booklet and recovery resources, contact the Coalition at www.coalitionforrecovery.org or call 412-325-0369.

©2008 Allegheny County Coalition for Recovery



A Decade of Progress
1997 - 2007

