

CENTER FOR RURAL PA PUBLIC HEARING
OPIOID ABUSE TREATMENT AND RECOVERY SERVICES

York, PA

August 18, 2015

Presenter: Shawn Anne McNichol MA, CAADC, CCDPD, CRS

Employer: The RASE Project

Position Title: Recovery Programs Specialist

Good afternoon. My name is Shawn McNichol. I am a woman in long term recovery. This means that I have not consumed a mood altering substance (whether it be prescribed or non-prescribed) in over 24 years.

I have also been in long-term employment in the behavioral health field since 1992. Presently, I serve as the Recovery Programs Specialist for The RASE Project.

The RASE Project is an independent, non-profit “Recovery Community Organization”, which is comprised entirely of staff and volunteers from the Recovery Community and it exists to serve the Recovery Community. The Recovery Community is defined as any person in, or seeking recovery, their families, close friends and other loved ones. Our mission is ***“to assist all those individuals with a substance use issue, problem, or concern by fostering progress, enriching lives, and ultimately enhancing the recovery process.”***

The RASE Project was designed to provide a voice and body for the anonymous recovering population. For decades there has been a strong advocacy movement for persons struggling with mental health issues; the RASE Project does the same for persons in recovery from the disease of addiction. We provide advocacy for persons being discriminated against due to the disease of addiction. Toward this end The RASE Project provides a range of services throughout the South Central Pennsylvania region. My focus today is to talk about one of these services: our Recovery Specialist Program.

First, let me briefly share some definitions of Recovery and Recovery Support Services. According to Lowinson and others recovery consists of “gaining information, increasing self-awareness, developing skills for sober living, and following a program of change (Lowinson et al., 1992, p. 533).

As defined in the President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (NFCMH), recovery is “the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their

communities. For some individuals, recovery is the ability to live fulfilling and productive life despite a disability. For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms (NFCMH, 2003, p.5).

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has identified four major dimensions that support a life in recovery:

- **Health**—overcoming or managing one’s disease(s) or symptoms—for example, abstaining from use of alcohol, illicit drugs, and non-prescribed medications if one has an addiction problem—and making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional well-being;
- **Home**—having a stable and safe place to live that is supportive of recovery;
- **Purpose**—conducting meaningful daily activities, such as a job, school, volunteerism, family caretaking, or creative endeavors, and the independence, income, and resources to participate in society; and
- **Community**—having relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope.

Finally, the PA Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) defines Recovery Support Services (RSS) as non-clinical services that assist individuals and families to recover from alcohol and other drug problems. These services complement the treatment, outreach, engagement and other strategies and interventions to assist people in recovery in gaining the skills and resources needed to initiate, maintain, and sustain long-term recovery. **RSS are not a substitute for necessary clinical services.**

The RASE Project’s Recovery Specialist Program (RSP) is designed for individuals in alcohol and/or drug treatment who are also in need of one-on-one recovery coaching to assist them to overcome the obstacles that keep them from succeeding in the recovery process. The RSP is targeted for individuals who chronically relapse and struggle to complete treatment, to stay in treatment, and remain in sustained recovery. Participants in the RSP are matched with a peer Recovery Specialist in long-term recovery who meets with them regularly, accompanies them in their environments, assists them to navigate through life's difficulties, and shares the skills necessary to live successfully and remain in sustained recovery.

All services offered through the RSP are directed at improving and increasing participants' recovery capital, level of life functioning, and ability to sustain recovery. The RSP supports participants through the earliest stages of recovery initiation to the more complex processes of recovery stabilization and maintenance within the home community of each participant and family. A critical aspect of that process involves connecting recovering individuals and families to local recovery support groups and communities of recovery, as well as nurturing and development of such supports where they do not yet exist.

We recognize that the process of recovery is highly personal and can occur via many pathways. It may include clinical treatment, medications, faith-based approaches, peer support, family support, self-care, and other approaches. Recovery is characterized by continual growth and improvement in one's health and wellness that may involve setbacks. Because setbacks are a natural part of life, resilience becomes a key component of recovery.

In particular, individuals in recovery from substance abuse disorders often must contend with stigma associated with their addiction, and in some cases with their criminal history. This can become an especially difficult obstacle to overcome in seeking stable housing and gainful employment. The RASE Recovery Support Staff draw upon their own experiential expertise. They work in collaboration with the individual in recovery, and with clinical staff and other agency personnel involved in providing and coordinating treatment and other social services.

All programs offered at The RASE Project are based on the Strengths-Based model of Case Management Services. It is through this model, the Recovery Support Staff assist the participants to examine and identify their own strengths and assets as the vehicle for resource acquisition and goal attainment. The Recovery Support Staff help the Participant identify his or her strengths and assets, supports the Participant in defining goals, and helps identify ways the Participant's strengths can be used to reach these goals. The strengths-based perspective calls upon the utilization of the Participant's existing strengths and resources to shape a recovery plan that will transcend their treatment tenure and provide ongoing community-based support after completion of The RASE services.

It is my belief, and the belief of The RASE Project, that “we do together, what we cannot do alone” and therefore, together, as individuals, families, communities, agencies, organizations, towns, municipalities, counties, we can thwart the negative impact that heroin and other substance related disorders has had within our homes and communities. The plan is to keep doing the next right thing individually and collectively until we recognize progress; and then, to just keep doing the next right thing.

Thank you to the Center for Rural PA for conducting this series of hearings. And thank you for opportunity to present information about the important role of Recovery Support Services in addressing the current Opioid Epidemic.