

FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

NEWSLETTER



2019 YEAR IN REVIEW!

When I came to this work a year ago, it was from a background working in public health and substance misuse prevention. I was excited that leading a team to provide training and technical assistance for this project would be a good stretch for me both in new content and online training expertise. What I didn't anticipate is how much I would learn from the project, the staff and my team. I have never worked with people that are more real, passionate, knowledgeable, compassionate and strong. The leadership and staff on this project are so willing to bring their expertise, lived experience, and selves to meet the families where they are at. Long after this project ends, I will hear Cape Cod Children's Place Project Director Christina Russell's voice saying that everything we do should be considered for how it is "in service of the family."



In just this first year I have heard stories of parents regaining custody of their children, securing housing, gaining employment and making the choice every day to maintain their recovery. Families are feeling more prepared for their birth experience. They have the information and support they need to work collaboratively with DCF. Parents are supported during supervised visitation, transitions from higher levels of care, losing housing, leaving abusive partners. They are celebrated with for their accomplishments big and small.



To date, this project has served 226 clients! Considering that everyone served by the project is pregnant or has at least one child, and in many cases has several children, or an involved partner or parent, the number of people positively reached by your efforts is well over 500 and maybe more than 1000! Across all 7 sites, 269 group sessions have been held with more than 1500 participants. To have seen this project grow so exponentially in such a short time has been amazing!



The training and TA team would like to express our deep gratitude for each of you and for how hard you are working on behalf of the families you are serving. We want to acknowledge Debra Bercuvitz as the "fearless leader" at our helm whose expertise, vision and guidance have been invaluable.



Here's to continuing and expanding this work into 2020 and beyond. Best wishes for a happy, and healthy new year!



- Clare Grace Jones, Training/Technical Assistance Director for FIRST Steps Together



NOVEMBER 12TH PEER DAY

On November 13th the Training and TA Team held our 2nd peer workshop entitled, ***Staying True to You: Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Trauma for the Family Recovery Support Specialist (FRSS)*** at Blackstone Heritage Corridor Visitor's Center in Worcester MA. **We were excited to have every FRSS from across the state in attendance.** For this workshop we explored as a group the symptoms of compassion fatigue, how listening to the trauma of others impacts our lives, and the importance of self-care and peer support for each other. We capped off the day by honoring each FRSS with a statement of appreciation written by their supervisors and a special FIRST Steps Together journal.

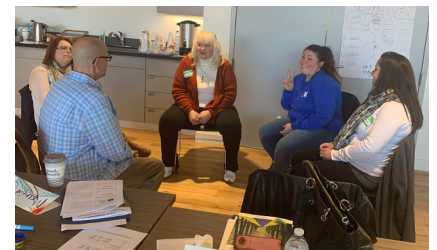
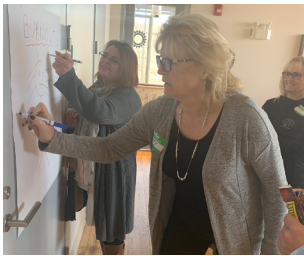


One of the goals of the State Opioid Response (SOR) funding is to develop the peer workforce. In addition to this, our project has taken it a step further and created a statewide peer learning community. Through this community we have been able to provide training and support for the peer staff, while their connection to each other has created a safety net for FIRST Steps Together participants, stretching across Massachusetts. As a way to further the connections, we are exploring partnerships with other programs such as Moms Do Care to bring a larger group of peer recovery staff across the state together.

What I love most about our peer days is how we all come together and learn from each other, make connections, feel supported and most importantly that our peer staff are shown gratitude for the hard work they do every day, not only for the families they serve, but also their own lives.

I am always honored and humbled to see all the knowledge, expertise and compassion each FRSS brings to their work and to each other.

- Erica Napolitan, Program Specialist



FIRST STEPS TOGETHER WEBSITE



FIRST Steps Together is now on Mass.gov! Right now it is just the language from the rack card along with contact information for each site. We are working on getting additional language approved! The address is

<https://www.mass.gov/first-steps-together>

PRACTICING SELF CARE

We often talk about self-care as part of this project, because it is an essential skill to develop and practice regularly when doing this work. During the holiday season, as commitments both at work and at home may feel especially stressful, it is even more important to take time for this practice. As stated in the [UB School of Social Work's Self Care Starter Kit](#), "**Self-care is not simply about limiting or addressing professional stressors. It is also about enhancing your overall well-being.**" Check out the toolkit they developed and the additional resources we have compiled below.

This Is What 'Self-Care' REALLY Means, Because It's Not All Salt Baths And Chocolate Cake

"Self-care is often a very unbeautiful thing.

It is making a spreadsheet of your debt and enforcing a morning routine and cooking yourself healthy meals and no longer just running from your problems and calling the distraction a solution.

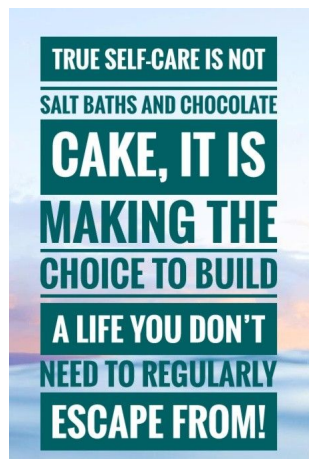
It is often doing the ugliest thing that you have to do, like sweat through another workout or tell a toxic friend you don't want to see them anymore or get a second job so you can have a savings account or figure out a way to accept yourself so that you're not constantly exhausted from trying to be everything, all the time and then needing to take deliberate, mandated breaks from living to do basic things like drop some oil into a bath and read Marie Claire and turn your phone off for the day.

A world in which self-care has to be such a trendy topic is a world that is sick. Self-care should not be something we resort to because we are so absolutely exhausted that we need some reprieve from our own relentless internal pressure.

True self-care is not salt baths and chocolate cake, it is making the choice to build a life you don't need to regularly escape from.

And that often takes doing the thing you least want to do."

To read the full article, Brianna Wiest, ["This Is What 'Self-Care' REALLY Means, Because It's Not All Salt Baths And Chocolate Cake"](#)



How to Mother Yourself in Recovery— According to a Mom

Kate Bickell provides 7 ways to treat yourself with the same care and kindness you would a child in your care in her post, [How to Mother Yourself in Recovery— According to a Mom](#):

Sleep "Rest is essential in times of growth."

Nurture "We all deserve such careful attention, especially in times of healing or growth. Meet yourself in those early hours...Reflect, but in kindness."

Protect "Remember that, even as life tosses you responsibilities that shouldn't be yours to bear, your wellness has to come first."

Play "Be good to yourself. Get a sense of how good it is here...There's wonder in this world. No one deserves joy more than you."

Eat "Treat yourself and try to get adequate protein to combat mood swings"

Retreat "Most mothers take care to set boundaries around the media to which their young children are exposed. We protect them from stories that devalue their experiences, and from images that undermine healthy growth."

Bond "Take greater time loving yourself, too"

GRATITUDE WITH DEBRA



Moving FIRST Steps Together from an idea to a full-scale, 7 site project with 22 peer staff and 15 clinicians that has served more than 225 people in approximately one year, has been a monumental undertaking. There are many thank yous in order.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provided the funding for the State Opioid Response (SOR) Grant which funds FIRST Steps Together. Secretary Marylou Sudders of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and Commissioner Monica Bharel of the Department of Public Health are both strongly committed to serving the needs of families affected by opioid use. Amy Sorensen-Alawad and her team at the Bureau of Substance

Addiction Services helped to bring this funding to Massachusetts, advocated for FIRST Steps Together, and administer a complicated array of SOR programs.

Our program lives in the Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition (BFHN) led by Craig Andrade, Alison Mehlman, and Aaron Beitman. Karin Downs, Christine Silva, and Emma Posner of BFHN all generously volunteer their time to help guide the project. Darline Duncan, our new fiscal manager, works with a whole crew in Administration and Finance to make sure that agencies have contracts and funds.

The training and technical assistance team has been at the center of successfully launching this ambitious initiative. Clare Grace, Adrienne, Erica, Maureen, and Sophia bring an incredible amount of knowledge, organization, listening skills, and responsive creativity to help support every component of FIRST Steps Together.

Thank you to each person who works in a FIRST Steps Together program for bringing your dedication, expertise, and heart to work with you every day. And last but not least, I would like to thank the families who entrust us with your hopes and fears as we walk beside you on your recovery and parenting journeys.

UPCOMING TRAININGS AND EVENTS

FIRST Steps Together Trainings:

In Person Training in Worcester

- 1/9, All FIRST Steps Together Training

Learning Community Calls, 1 - 2 via zoom

- 1/16, The State of the Project
- 2/20, Sustainability Planning/Pre-planning

Webinars, 1st Tuesday, 1-2:30, via zoom

- 1/7, Working with DCF in navigating removal and kinship placement
- 1/28, Accessing and Maximizing Benefits (rescheduled from December)
- 2/4, Pregnancy and Medicated Assisted Treatment

1/10, [Building Resiliency Through Psychological First Aid & Self-Care](#), Needham, [Justice Resource Institute](#)

3/9, [Annual 2020 Breastfeeding Conference](#), Boxboro, [Boston Association for Childbirth Education and Nursing Mothers' Council](#)

4/18, [2nd Annual Conference on Trauma and Embodiment](#), Cambridge, [Justice Resource Institute](#)

4/29/20 [Understanding Bias: White Fragility and How to Overcome It at Work](#), Natick, [Wayside Youth & Family Support Network](#)



The [Bureau of Substance Addiction Services](#) and [AdCare](#) have multiple trainings coming up that may be of interest. Please find their calendar [here](#).

SUCCESS SPOTLIGHT



A panel of FIRST Steps Together staff from across the state presented about the program at the Perinatal-Neonatal Quality Improvement Network of Massachusetts (PNQIN) Fall Summit held in Norwood, Massachusetts on November 21, 2019.

Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) Project Director Debra Bercovitz facilitated the panel which included Family Recovery Support Specialist (FRSS) Kristin Moore from Bay State Family Services in Quincy, as well as FRSS Amanda Kelly and Clinician Shalonda Nicholson-Mabry, both from Square One in Springfield.

The panel highlighted aspects of the project such as outreach and engagement, collaboration with other support systems, Plan of Safe Care/DCF portfolios, groups, working as a peer and how the FIRST Steps Together model provides support for both parenting and recovery. Each panelist talked about their insights and experiences and shared successful strategies for addressing barriers or overcoming challenges in doing this work.

Thank you to Debra, Kristin, Amanda and Shalonda for representing and presenting on behalf of FIRST Steps Together at the PNQIN Fall Summit!



— HAPPY NEW YEAR —

For more information:
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MINDFULNESS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

From [Zero to Three, Getting Started with Mindfulness: A Toolkit for Early Childhood Organizations](#), is a toolkit on mindfulness practice for use with clients, ourselves, and work groups. In this toolkit, learn more about the case for implementing mindfulness techniques into your daily work and organizational culture, try hands-on strategies for doing so, and learn more from organizations that have begun this journey. It includes information and methods to practice mindfulness.

GETTING STARTED WITH MINDFULNESS:
A TOOLKIT FOR EARLY
CHILDHOOD ORGANIZATIONS



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ZERO TO THREE