

FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

NEWSLETTER



SAMHSA'S FOUR DIMENSIONS OF RECOVERY: HEALTH, HOME, PURPOSE AND COMMUNITY

It seems like this summer flew by! For many, September means a return to school, structure and routines. During this time it is often helpful to “go back to the basics.” One of the foundational concepts of FIRST Steps Together is to prioritize the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) four major dimensions that support recovery. According to the [SAMHSA website](#), **“Recovery is a process of change through which people improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential.”** The four areas of focus are health, home, purpose and community. As a project we recognize that building recovery capital includes supporting progress in each of these four dimensions. Supporting each family's health, safe and stable home, sense of purpose and connection to the community is at the core of the services we offer. Throughout this newsletter you will find stories of these dimensions in action and will be able to see the real impact that building skills, strength and resilience in these areas has on people’s lives.

The experience of parenting is intertwined with each of these four domains. For the pregnant parents we serve, and those in early recovery, we focus on physical and emotional health. When we think of home, we think of family. Parenting gives us a greater sense of purpose and place in the world every day. And our community is comprised of the relationships that hold and nurture us and our children. In this way, these four dimensions not only reflect the foundation of building a stable recovery but also support the parenting relationship.



COMMUNITY

Having relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope.



HOME

Having a stable and safe place to live.



HEALTH

Overcoming or managing one’s disease(s) or symptoms and making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional well-being



PURPOSE

Conducting meaningful daily activities and having the independence, income, and resources to participate in society.

COMMUNITY:

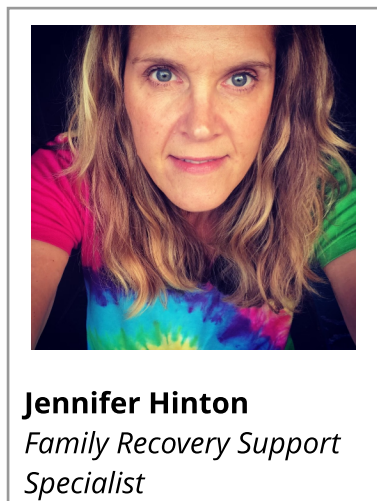
Having relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love and hope

Often for parents in early recovery, their active addiction has damaged close friendships or familial ties, leaving parents without a support system. FIRST Steps Together offers peer specialists to communicate that sense of unconditional support, care, and hope. With time, our program supports parents to shift their needs for social connection away from their FRSS and Clinician, and towards their community and other natural supports. One way we encourage these connections, is by offering groups. Our CHD Easthampton and Pittsfield sites have shared some successes they've had in building community connections.

Our positive parenting group offer unique opportunities for connection, specific to families juggling both parenting and recovery from substance use.

Our staff members are deeply invested in facilitating these groups and creating a safe and supportive environment for program participants to connect with each other and build community. Here are some reflections from our staff members about how important these groups are:

- Parenting is hard enough especially with a SUD. Adding another component to that is even harder. The stigma around the idea that "You're a parent and do drugs."
- People judge these parents even if they are in recovery. It's important for us not to judge them, they are being judged by everyone else.
- I want to inspire people especially parents to know that just because they have substance use history that they can still work on their recovery and be good parents at the same time.



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Our sites have found that groups have provided many opportunities for building social connections and friendships between our program participants, sometimes in the most unexpected ways. It's been a challenge particularly with virtual group formats, but we've seen that our desire for human connection, to get to know one another, to help one another, and to offer support and hope, seems to be more powerful than those things that keep us apart. Here are a few examples of unexpected connections that came from our recent virtual groups:

- There were two dads who joined a virtual group which we thought might be awkward or uncomfortable. Instead, one dad had a video game on in the background. A conversation started between the dads about gaming and they realized they had so much in common, they decided to meet up and game together.
- In another group there were two moms, who lived about 45 minutes apart. One mom was in need of baby clothes while the other had baby clothes to share. They decided to meet each other halfway to exchange these items.



RESOURCES TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY

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- It important to show empathy for others that are going through things. When I'm running a group, I stress the importance that everyone speak to each other in a kind way. I want group to be a safe place, somewhere that lets them know they're not alone on this journey of parenting as well as recovery.

Zoom has made it a challenge when running group to build connections especially if they have never met in person. I try and build connections by generally asking at check in how they are doing or how has the week been. I found that by doing this they share more personal things or struggles they might have experienced throughout the week. This opens the door for participants to relate to each other whether in their struggles or successes.

- Jennifer Hinton, Family Recovery Support Specialist

The [Massachusetts Peer Recovery Support Centers \(PRSC\)](#) provide individuals in recovery from substance use disorder, as well as families and loved ones affected by addiction, an opportunity to both offer and receive support. These recovery-oriented sanctuaries, anchored in the heart of their communities, support multiple pathways, provide hope, and promote wellness.

[Ted talk: How Isolation Fuels Opioid Addiction | Rachel Wurzman](#)



"Addiction is a neurological disorder that creates compulsions beyond a person's control, and disrupts a person's ability to enjoy social interaction down to the cellular level." Neuroscientist Rachel Wurzman discusses her findings that drug addiction and loneliness are not only connected but are controlled by the same part of the brain. "Social isolation contributes to addiction and relapse, but social connectivity can actually help recovery."

[Understanding Support Networks in Recovery](#)

"Support networks must be made a critical component of a ... recovery plan in order to prevent relapse and maintain and improve emotional, mental and spiritual health. Understanding how support networks can benefit a recovery program and what types of networks are available is essential for people who are battling the disease of addiction."

Recovery Communities:

SMART Recovery smartrecovery.org/

Narcotics Anonymous na.org/

Alcoholics Anonymous aa.org/

All Recovery allrecovery.com/



HOME:

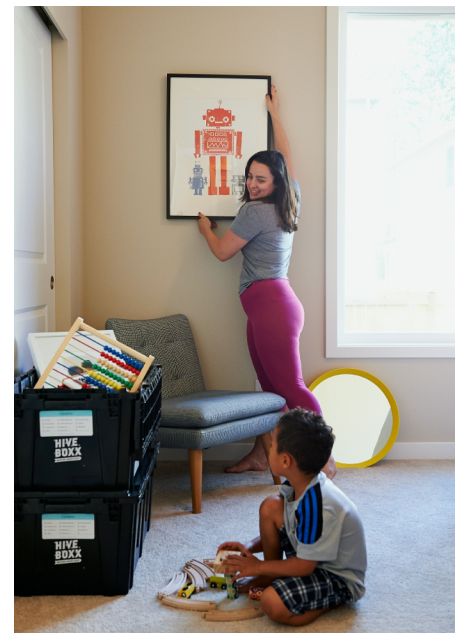
Having a stable and safe place to live

Home is more than just physical housing. Often living arrangements don't feel stable or safe. Families can be stuck in housing situations that are not conducive to their wellbeing or recovery, or don't offer the kind of life they wish they could give their kids. Parents may be forced to stay out of necessity, financial strain, the need for family or other support, or simply the shortage of accessible and affordable independent housing. Given how challenging it can be to find families stable and safe housing, we were excited to hear about a Jewish Family & Children's Services (JF&CS) highlight related to housing this summer:

A FRSS and Clinician team had been jointly serving a mom, Rachel (name changed to protect parent's privacy), since she gave birth one year ago. At the start of services Rachel was reeling as a brand new mom, early in her recovery, whose partner had unexpectedly relapsed and been arrested for criminal activity. Rachel was forced to move in with her own mom, for both housing and help with her baby, although they had a strained relationship. Rachel's mom's boyfriend was seemingly upset about their moving in and how much time Rachel's mom was giving to help with the baby. In retaliation, he made false allegations to Child Welfare Services and it was then that Rachel knew that she couldn't stay in that home without risking her recovery and the ability to parent her baby, both of which she'd worked so hard for. She didn't feel ready to move out or to face raising her son as a single parent, but she knew it was what she had to do.

Her FRSS helped Rachel to ensure that she had her housing applications in order and kept in regular contact with the appropriate housing authorities to maintain her place on the waitlists. When a space finally opened, Rachel's application was initially denied due to her criminal history. With the help of her JF&CS Clinician, Rachel was able to appeal the decision and was successfully granted an accommodation due to her substance use disorder and all of the progress she'd made including positive steps she'd taken to maintain her recovery and parent her child. Rachel's FRSS and Clinician worked together sourcing all the home furnishings she needed: furniture, dishes, and household items, etc.

Rachel continues to meet weekly with one of her two JF&CS staff members and has never missed an appointment. She has joined a Parenting Journey in Recovery group and has not missed one session. She maintains a close relationship with her baby's father's family and appreciates their ongoing involvement and support. She is doing the impossible, daily, maintaining her recovery and being an amazing mom to her son. Last week when meeting with her FIRST Steps Together providers, Rachel reflected "I did not know I could do this, but with your help, the church, and family, I realized I am strong. My son makes every day a joy."



RESOURCES TO SUPPORT HOME

Massachusetts Resources:

Apply for SNAP benefits (food stamps)

mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-snap-benefits-food-stamps

Apply for emergency family shelter

mass.gov/how-to/find-emergency-family-shelter

Homeless shelters (for people not eligible for EA Shelter)

masslegalservices.org/content/non-ea-shelter-lists

CHAMP (Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Programs)

publichousingapplication.ocd.state.ma.us/

Federal Section 8 housing choice voucher centralized waiting list

section8listmass.org/

DHCD Section 8 application link

mass.gov/service-details/rental-assistance-applications-documentation

MassHousing list

masshousing.com/en/renters/housing-list



RESOURCES TO SUPPORT HOUSING

- **The Conversation:** [Millions of renters face eviction and homelessness: 3 essential reads about the CDC's expiring moratorium](#)
- **The Conversation/National Low Income Housing Coalition:** [New Research: Many Tenants, Landlords Remain Unaware of Emergency Rental Assistance](#)
- **US Interagency Council on Homelessness:** [Comprehensive Step-by-Step Guide for People At Risk of Eviction](#). The American Rescue Plan offers unprecedented assistance to prevent renters from losing their homes.
- **US Interagency Council on Homelessness:** [Tool to Help Families Experiencing Homelessness Claim Child Tax Credits](#)
- **HRSA/Consumer Financial Protection Bureau:** CFPB has a [Rental Assistance Finder](#) to connect renters and landlords to state and local organizations distributing federal rental assistance.



INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals Webinar, **[Futures Without Violence: Intimate Partner Violence Support in the Virtual Home Visiting Setting](#)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has made intimate partner violence more common—and often more severe. Screening for IPV can pose challenges under any circumstances, especially during virtual service delivery. This webinar discusses the impact of the pandemic on intimate partner violence, introduces and reviews the CUES intervention, and provides scripts that can be used with families.

HEALTH:

Overcoming or managing one's disease(s) or symptoms and making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional well-being

The FIRST Steps Together sites work to support parents in recovery from substance use, which goes far beyond efforts to reduce harm and work towards minimizing or abstaining from problematic alcohol or drug use. The definition above speaks to the importance of empowering participants so that they can make informed choices for their physical and emotional health. There are so many examples of this across our sites, but one particular initiative that has really been a success is the Smoking Cessation Group run by two Family Recovery Support Specialists (FRSS) at our Making Opportunity Count (MOC) site.

MOC recently held a tobacco cessation group for their FIRST Steps Together families. It was a 4 week, closed group facilitated by two FRSS staff, who shared openly about some of their own struggles with managing their tobacco use. We sat down with one of the group co-facilitators, William Burrell, who talked with us about how the program was structured and shared tips for others who may want to provide tobacco cessation resources to the families they serve.

Tell us a little about the group:

We started each group with an icebreaker. This gave a chance for participants to bring out similarities, shared experiences, reflect on how they got started and get specific about the reasons they wanted to quit.

The group ran for 4 weeks and we covered topics from the chemicals found in cigarettes (including formaldehyde and arsenic!), the benefits of quitting, the health risks of vaping, to the cost of tobacco use, which included using a calculator so people could see how much money they would save in a week or a month if they quit smoking. One group member reflected, "That was pretty eye opening, to see how much money each person could save and think about what that could cover for example, a monthly car payment."

The group also covered the stages of change and each member had the opportunity to set weekly and longer term goals.

We shared quitting aids and programs, including a text program and one specific for pregnant women. We did a lot of research to find out what programs participants could tap into for help. For example, one participant really wanted flavored gum. The state program in Massachusetts doesn't provide that, but we found her one that did! (see below for resources)

During the last session we helped group members each set up a long term/harm reduction plan. For example, one person set a goal to fully quit, another participant set a goal of trying to quit in the next 3 months. We also gave everyone a little bag with things to help them in their attempt to quit, including candy and Quitline information. At the end of the group we provided everyone with a certificate.

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RESOURCES TO SUPPORT HEALTH

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Can you share a success story?

Everyone in the group either quit or reduced their use. One participant was motivated to quit because she was pregnant, and wanted to save money. During the class she reduced her use to 5-6 cigarettes per day and made a plan each week to reduce and then challenged herself to do more. She shared a struggle the first week when she gave into a craving and smoked with her boyfriend, but we kept checking in on what motivated her. She identified that she smokes when she's bored and out of habit (like when in the car or with others who smoke). Being able to identify this helped her plan ahead. For example, having a coffee in her hand already when standing around at a meeting. This mom was able to fully quit and just had her baby!

What tips do you have for others?

- Meet people where they are at-Everyone is different, lived experience speaks profoundly to making that connection
- Make the connection to recovery and the stages of change
- Be realistic- Know it will be challenging and they can do it

[The Massachusetts Tobacco Cessation and Prevention Program \(MTCP\)](#)

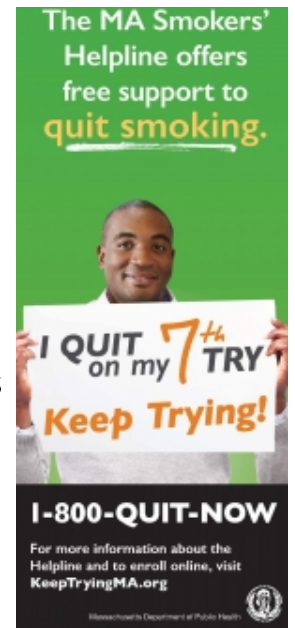
is dedicated to reducing the health and economic burdens of tobacco use. They offer the following resources:

The [Massachusetts Make Smoking History](#) site has information for youth and adults on how to reduce or quit smoking and other tobacco products. There are videos, a confidential helpline, and advice for how to get free medications to help you quit.

[The Massachusetts Smokers' Helpline](#) offers free counseling and resources to help you reduce or quit smoking: **1-800-QUIT-NOW** (1-800-784-8689)

Spanish:1-800-8-Dejalo (1-800-833-5256)

TTY:1-800-833-1477



[Getting Started with Tobacco Awareness Groups](#)

This booklet includes handouts and worksheets designed for use by clinical staff and participants in substance use treatment settings to increase participants' engagement and self-reflection by helping them discover new awareness and understanding about their relationship to nicotine and tobacco use.

Tobacco, Addictions, Policy and Education (TAPE) Project, funded by the Massachusetts Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS)



Getting Started with
Tobacco Awareness
Groups



PURPOSE:

Conducting meaningful daily activities and having the independence, income and resources to participate in society

One of the primary goals of FIRST Steps Together is to support families to have an independent and fulfilling life. This may mean supporting daily activities that feel useful, enjoyable, and necessary to grow. Or this may mean building a skill set around financial needs and resources to continue moving towards independence and self-sufficiency.

At FIRST Steps Together on Cape Cod, the goal of fostering purpose among ourselves and our participants is woven into everything that we do. Our team takes pride in being responsible stewards of resources for families. Not only have these families overcome great adversity just to get to our virtual doorstep, but they have also faced unequal barriers throughout their journeys. As such, with great intention, we believe promoting our participants' independence and skills is crucial.



It's all about relationships!

FIRST Steps Together on Cape Cod carefully crafts relationships between and among staff members, with the intention of modeling safe and healthy relationships that participants can experience for themselves, and perhaps then extend to their children. These relationships can offer a foundation from which to practice skills in communication, empathy, relationship building, problem solving, distress tolerance and negotiation that would serve them in many facets of their lives. If a participant can increase their ability to trust in themselves and regulate their emotions, they might then increase their parenting skills and better understand their child's emotional and mental development. When parents are able to enhance their own independence and ability to engage in society in a productive way, the hope is they can support their children to do the same.

WRAP Around Services

A framework that lends itself well to weaving this commitment to purpose in our relationships and intensive community-based interventions is called W.R.A.P- Wellness, Recovery, Assistance, and Parenting. These areas of focus help our team and participants to develop common lenses and language to view and understand things. With this structure, our team will help to underscore an area of improvement that a participant might themselves not have had the wherewithal to give themselves credit for. With this structure, we can also help to raise a participant's awareness of all the realms that they deserve to be supported in! When contending with internalized stigma and oppression, such structures can make that which feels unreachable within their reach. This experiential learning process cannot be understated for how it translates to empower those who have walked a life of struggle, to stand confidently and independently.



Billie Starks
Clinician

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RESOURCES TO SUPPORT PURPOSE

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Community and Consistency

Examples of how relationships meet WRAP to be the catalyst for purpose can be found at our monthly staff meetings and support groups. The infrastructure of safe relationship and WRAP can be seen supporting the development and maintenance of our team. **Our team works together on a theme for training, practice, and discussion. These themes are woven into individual and group supervision formats and are discussed in case presentations.**

Additionally, we utilize our monthly themes directly in our group offerings or in our family engagement events. We want our families to know that we are a consistent and cohesive team, that they can rely on for support, fun, growth and development, and in their times of need.

At FIRST Steps Together on Cape Cod, we feel fortunate to bear witness to our participants, their development of purpose, and their completion of our program.

Previous monthly themes include:

- Strengthening Families Framework
- Optimism and Perseverance
- Assistance
- Parenting, Engagement and Wellness

We ask these questions:

- What are our initial reflections and reactions to the material?
- What are your main takeaways?
- How might this benefit the families you work with?

TIPS ON FINDING YOUR PURPOSE

FIND YOUR COMMUNITY

"Finding your purpose in life is often about discovering where you fit in. When we meet our 'people,' we feel like we are home: relaxed and at ease, able to truly be ourselves. Your community can often help you discover how to find your purpose, or to live your purpose once you've found it.



To find your community, follow your passions. Join a volunteer group. Take a class to develop a skill you enjoy. Seek out support online. Find others who enjoy the same music, books or plays. The saying 'You are who your friends are' is true – and when you find the right community, it's a good thing."

Tony Robbins, [How to Find Your Purpose: 12 ways to reveal the truth about what gives your life meaning](#)

START A DAILY GRATITUDE LIST

"It does not matter how much good stuff enters your life if you just take it all for granted. The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh once wrote, 'so many conditions of happiness are available – more than enough for you to be happy right now.' The purpose of committing to a gratitude list practice is one of you always being aware of the good things in your life – this only needs to take a couple of minutes each day. The fact that you are able to see how good your life is fills you with a sense of purpose, giving you the energy to obtain even more, as well."



Addiction Helpline, [12 Tips for Finding Your Sense of Purpose in Recovery](#)

SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH



[From NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals:](#)

[National Recovery Month](#) is a national observance held every September to educate Americans that substance use treatment and mental health services can enable those with a mental health and/or substance use disorder to live a healthy and rewarding life.

The 2021 National Recovery Month theme, "[Recovery is For Everyone: Every Person, Every Family, Every Community](#)," reminds people in recovery and those who support them that no one is alone in the journey through recovery. [Faces & Voices of Recovery](#) has created a new [Recovery Month website](#) that will host all Recovery Month events and assets that make this celebration possible. Download [shareable graphics](#) and more on the [Recovery Month website](#).

We've been hearing from our FIRST Steps Together sites about different ways staff are celebrating across the project. Here are some ideas that have been shared:

- Purple is the color of Recovery Month. Some sites have shared ideas about how to incorporate this color into the office workplace. For example, one site offers ribbons at the front desk for staff and visitors to pin onto their shirts. Another site has purchased purple masks for all their staff to wear in the office and on home visits. We heard from another site that they're thinking about crafting and making tie dye bags that include the color purple.
- One site is planning a speakers series where people with lived experience in recovery tell their stories. They're thinking about inviting other speakers to talk about how best to support families of people struggling with addiction, how to use language to advocate for person-first and strengths-based care, and others who can speak to the importance of building a recovery community.
- Some sites are hosting celebrations with family activities and food. Others are honoring those that have passed due to the disease of addiction. One site will be holding a vigil for those who have died from overdose. Another idea was to paint rocks with words of hope for staff and program participants to decorate and carry with them.

CLAS CORNER

The ATTC (Addiction Technology Transfer Center) Network is a great resource for addictions treatment and recovery professions. Of particular note to share, is a large library of training and resources around Building Health Equity and Inclusion. The landing page for these resources, which can be found here [CLAS Resources | Addiction Technology Transfer Center \(ATTC\) Network attcnetwork.org](https://www.attcnetwork.org) includes a product tour video that gives a brief overview of the CLAS Standards and a great overview of the variety of resources they have available to put those standards into action, including a section designed especially for clinicians.



***FIRST Steps Together** is a home visiting program that offers community based and/or virtual services, delivered by a parent in recovery with training to support both recovery and parenting journeys. We also offer groups, care coordination, and the option of working with a mental health counselor. FIRST Steps Together is open to any person 18 years old or older, who has used opioids and/or stimulants, and who is pregnant or expecting a child, or has at least one child who is 5 years old or younger. Participants do not have to have custody of their children or be actively parenting.*

For more information about our program, including contact information for each program site, please visit

mass.gov/FIRST-Steps-Together

Recent FIRST Steps Together Newsletters:

[March/April 2021: Groups](#)

[January/February 2021: Goal Setting](#)

[November/December 2020: Holiday Resources](#)

[September/October 2020: Working with Dads](#)

[July/August 2020: Supporting New Parents](#)

[May/June 2020: Forging Partnerships](#)

FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

SEPTEMBER

2021

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Caring for Generations
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Jewish Family & Children's Service