

Champions for Behavioral Health

The Brien Center is Berkshire County's largest provider of behavioral health and addiction services. They employ almost 500 people located at 25 sites across Berkshire County and their services provide support to nearly 10,000 individuals. The Brien Center's vision is to distinguish itself as a leader in Community Behavioral Health and to be recognized for the passion of their people and partners in providing a continuum of dynamic and innovative recovery services.

Jessica Kemp is the Office Based Addiction Treatment Nurse Manager at the Brien Center and shared her passion for working at the Brien Center. www.briencenter.org

What inspired you to enter the Behavioral Health field?

I have people in my personal life who struggled with mental health concerns and I also have struggled with depression and anxiety so I have experienced first hand the positive impact people in the behavior health field can have in someone's life. I wanted to be able to provide hope and guidance to people in their darkest points of life and help them find their joy again.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

I adore watching the transformation of someone who comes in at their lowest point, not sure what to do or how to do it, but they know what they are doing isn't working and seeing them emerge from that darkness to find hope and purpose again. I have seen people who have lost everything and everyone in their lives who have gone back to school, healed family relationships, regained custody of children, are employed full time and are active members of their communities. It really is a special thing to get to witness.

Please tell us about the programs/activities that you implement?

I am the Office Based Addiction Treatment (OBAT) Nurse Manager. In this role, I supervise an amazing team of nurses throughout the Berkshires to help patients get rapid access to medications and services for addiction. I am very proud of our rapid access to suboxone, available at our offices in Pittsfield, North Adams and Great Barrington. We see patients within 24-48 hours of initial contact to assess them and start them on Medications for Opioid Use Disorder as clinically appropriate. We connect patients with Recovery Coaches, therapy groups, Intensive Outpatient Program and other programs as needed.

Do you have any words of wisdom for someone wanting to enter the field?

I would encourage everyone entering into behavioral health to make sure that you have a support system. This is incredibly rewarding work, but it is hard work and you need to have good self care. I have seen staff burn out and leave the behavioral health field because they didn't have good work/life balance. You can't pour from an empty vessel, make sure you are taking good care of yourself so you can continue to be successful in your work.

Finally, is there anything you would like for the community to better understand about behavioral health?

I wish people better understood that mental health and addiction struggles can happen to everyone. People all around you are struggling with depression, anxiety, addiction, PTSD, bipolar, schizophrenia and other illnesses. There is no stereotypical person that this happens to. People need to be understanding and compassionate to people when they are struggling. There is hope, people can and do get better and lead wonderful lives.