



Champions for Behavioral Health

ServiceNet is a non-profit mental health and human services organization with over 100 programs across western Massachusetts—working with individuals and families to help them live their lives to the fullest.

David Crawley is the Outreach Coordinator for Living in Recovery, a peer-led, peer-driven support center in Pittsfield, which is hosted by ServiceNet.

What inspired you to enter the Behavioral Health field?

As a person in recovery from alcohol and other substance use, it took me a while to find my way, and once I got my own life together, I wanted to give back. What helped me most was the encouragement I got from those who had gone through this before me. Their support gave me the courage and willingness to change. And it's now my time to share with others the wisdom I have gained.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

The most rewarding part is seeing people move beyond their fear of the unknown. We all come to this from different places, but the unknowns are universal. How will we cope without our familiar substances to fall back on? How will we make the changes we need to in our relationships, and then learn how to live with those changes? And how will we maintain our recovery over time? It's a lot. It requires looking within, going deep, and doing the work. For people like me, who started using substances early, there are a lot of life skills that need to be learned. When members are struggling, we practice "what if" scenarios so they are better prepared to stay on course as roadblocks arise.

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

As Outreach Coordinator, I am responsible for building and working with our member outreach team. We visit the local detox unit, inpatient treatment program, and other providers and community stakeholders to educate them about our center. And we often hold a support meeting where members of the team share how peer support has helped in their own growth and recovery. We also have information tables at community events.

At the center, I support members in learning skills for building their recovery capital, forming friendships, and making community connections. This is done through support meetings that embrace all pathways to recovery as well as by offering social and recreational opportunities. Members teach others some of their own skills, lead activities, or join committees to help plan programs, special events, trips, and training.

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

I would say it is important to keep an open mind, be yourself and know your limitations but do not get stuck because of them. Seek out support and supervision, do not take things personally. Keep in mind that those struggling with addiction have many layers to be healed, so it's important to show up for the mess of it all, and to always be as real as you can be.

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

People who are addicted to substances are not bad people. They are struggling with a disorder, and they need help, not moral judgments. Experimenting with substances is one thing; doing it over and over, even when you know it's hurting you is another. But recovery is possible: going from feeling unlovable and irresponsible to lovable and reliable. And the rewards are awesome!