

NJAMHAA NEWS

Spring 2020

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This Issue
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CFFS' RECOVERY CENTER FOSTERS MANY INSPIRING SUCCESS STORIES

When Linda Mur, PhD, LCADC, now Associate Vice President of Adult Behavioral Health and Substance Use Disorder Services, joined the Center for Family Services (CFFS) in 2005, peer recovery services did not exist at the agency. In 2012, CFFS hired John Thompson to serve as Director of the Living Proof Recovery Center, which has grown exponentially since then, along with other peer services, including the Support Team for Addiction Recovery (STAR) and the Opioid Overdose Recovery Program (OORP), which CFFS calls LifeLineED, and other programs under a

contract with the Department of Children and Families. In addition, CFFS recently received a contract to work with the Salem County Correctional Facility. With these services now Medicaid reimbursable, Dr. Mur anticipates even more growth in outpatient programs and an increase in hospitals hiring their own peer staff.

The Center began with five employees and three volunteers. Now there are 54 staff under Thompson, who was promoted to Senior Director and also oversees the opioid response programs.

The Living Proof Recovery Center provides assistance with accessing resources for treatment and developing recovery plans; wellness classes and support groups; peer mentoring and coaching; educational assistance; social and recreational activities; and a sense of community. The center also offers workshops on building self-esteem, preparation for obtaining graduate equivalency diplomas, developing job skills and building resumés.

Thompson is one of the many success stories at the Center. He is in his 27th year of recovery and

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NJAMHAA SENDS **I f i n i t e Gratitude**

TO ALL OF OUR MEMBERS FOR THEIR UNWAVERING
DEDICATION AND ADAPTABILITY DURING
THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC.



Illustrating the Value of Behavioral Health Services

Are you testing for the right substances?

We can help you understand.

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Kratom • Cannabinoids/THC • Synthetic Opioids
Synthetic Stimulants (Bath Salts) • Synthetic Cannabinoids
Antipsychotics • Antidepressant • ETG/Alcohol
Amphetamines • Oxymorphones • Psychotropics
Barbiturates • Hypnotics • Cocaine • Codeine • Diazepam
Tramadol • Heroin • Oxycodone • Ecstasy • OxyContin
Dextromethorphan • Morphine • Muscle Relaxants
Clonazepam • Salvia • PCP • Hallucinogens • Tobacco
Steroids • Methamphetamine • Percocet • Demerol
Xanax • Norfentanyl • Valium • Klonopin • Suboxone
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From the Desk of Debra L. Wentz, PhD President and CEO

While NJAMHAA members contend with multiple challenges year round, the current COVID-19 crisis far exceeds anything they previously encountered. Our members and their staff continue to inspire me – even more than they have over the years. I am truly awed by those on the frontlines and how they have been responding to this changed world and unprecedented crisis. All our members are staying in touch with their clients, whether it is through telephone, videoconferencing, or in person at facilities or in the community.

All are demonstrating their dedication to serving the most vulnerable individuals and their families. They are working incredibly long hours, placing themselves at risk and making personal sacrifices

– often without enough personal protective equipment (PPE), which is desperately needed to ensure safety. Not only is their physical health at risk, but also their mental health as their work can exact an emotional toll at any time and especially during this more intensely stressful and challenging time.

NJAMHAA knows how much of a challenge it has been to deliver services, remain solvent and address clients' and staff's fear and apprehension, which are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. The added stress of the coronavirus crisis is resulting in exacerbated mental illnesses, substance use disorders and

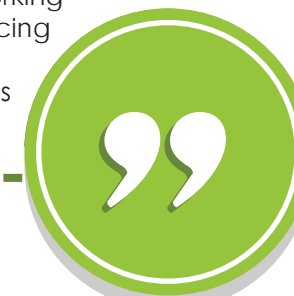
trauma, making our members' services and sustainability even more critical. NJAMHAA has taken the lead in advocating on the state and federal levels for funding, other resources including PPE and relaxation of telehealth and other regulations. NJAMHAA will continue to tackle these new challenges nonstop by advocating for, supporting and, most of all, applauding our members because they are our heroes.

I also applaud our own NJAMHAA staff members, who have been going far above and beyond to address members' concerns and needs, which include technical assistance and support relating to policies, advocacy, information technology and other issues.

Doing everything we can, and more, to support members during the coronavirus crisis, NJAMHAA is already looking to the future and is exploring strategies to continually strengthen our members. Always please remember that NJAMHAA, your trade association, is here for you during good times and not-so-good times!

Warmest wishes,

President and CEO, NJAMHAA



"I am truly awed by those on the frontlines. Always please remember that NJAMHAA is here for you."

Debra L. Wentz, PhD,
President and CEO, NJAMHAA



CFFS' RECOVERY CENTER FOSTERS MANY

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Pictured left to right: John Thompson, Linda Mur and Kim Govak

earned a Master of Science in Human Services and a Bachelor of Psychology degree. While building up the Center, he incorporated a focus not only on adults, but also on youth to address mental health challenges and help prevent substance use, as well as to offer support for those who were using drugs. He started a youth program, which he aimed to be co-ed; however, only girls participated consistently, so the program was named Girls Empowering Themselves. Thompson is still on a mission to create a similar group for male youth. "This will require me to work seven days a week and I can do that. It's a passion," he said.

Kim Govak, NCPRSS, CPRS, CRSP, Program Director at the Center, is another success story. In fact, she and Thompson received *Courage and Compassion Awards* from NJAMHAA within the past few years.

Govak was treated in CFFS' intensive outpatient program and in March 2020, she celebrated 14 years of recovery. "Our positive

experiences become our recovery toolkit. They give us motivation and confidence to achieve more, including earning college degrees. It's resilience and it's hope and we see it over and over again," said Govak, who became part of the CFFS staff in 2015.

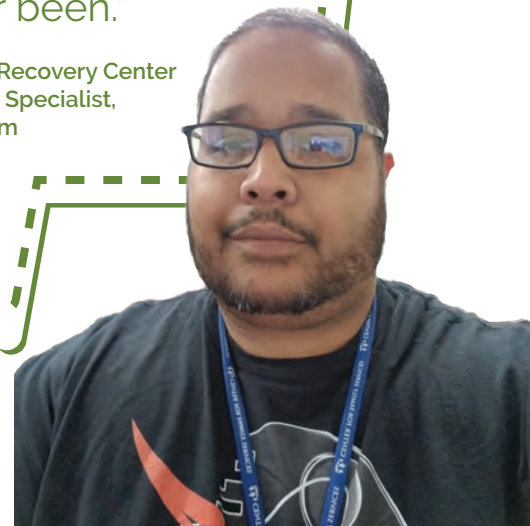
While they are inspiring examples in their own right, Govak and Thompson highlighted Lucius Stringfield and Elia Hopkins as two prime examples of the Center's success stories.

Now 34 years old, Stringfield started using lighter drugs such as pot when he was about 13. He stopped applying himself in school, just barely graduated high school and dropped out of college during the first week. He started using heroin at 20 and ultimately became "homeless, hopeless, helpless and suicidal." Eventually, he realized that heroin was "the catalyst" to all his problems and he went into rehab. "I gave myself 100% to never using again and used the resources I had available, such as my therapist, a psychiatrist, going to church regularly and seeking out a case manager. That's where the Center for Family Services stepped in," he said. After two years of abstinence, Stringfield learned about the Recovery Corps



"God has truly blessed me with the people who came into my life and offered the services I was given. Now I do the same every day and I am the happiest I've ever been."

– Lucius Stringfield, Living Proof Recovery Center Graduate and Peer Support Specialist, CFFS STAR Program



INSPIRING SUCCESS STORIES

program at CFFS and Americorps at the Living Proof Recovery Center. For the next six months, he spent five hours a week in a classroom setting and 10 hours a week volunteering at the Center.

When Stringfield was two weeks away from graduation, he secured a job with CFFS' STAR program. "I help other addicts in the first year of recovery through daily life, offering emotional and moral support and guiding them through one of life's most difficult journeys. I am also back in college so that one day, I can be a drug and alcohol recovery counselor," he said. "God has truly blessed me with the people who came into my life and offered the services I was given. Now I do the same every day and I am the happiest I've ever been."

Although she was not aware of it during her youth, Hopkins had a mental illness back then and found relief by using marijuana beginning at age 13 and hard drugs at 15, which she used for 17 years.

"The idea of getting help never occurred to me. I was functional until I started using heroin. My life was out of control within six months," she said. Her mother took her to a support group, which encouraged her to get treatment, which she received for both mental illness and substance use. She has not used any drugs since October 13, 2015.

Hopkins learned about CFFS from her mother, who participated in a Families Anonymous group, and she began volunteering there.

"I fell in love with the concept of peer-to-peer recovery. I bought into the whole idea. I never thought it would lead to me personally, beyond helping others," Hopkins said.



She then received Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery training and was subsequently hired by CFFS' OORP.

"I love being on the front lines. It's my passion," Hopkins said. However, she has two kids and the required hours presented a challenge, so she took a full-time position as the program's Administrative Assistant. Hopkins was ultimately promoted to Administrative Assistant for all of CFFS' 10 recovery support programs, and she looks forward to taking on clinical roles in the future. She recently earned an Associate's degree in Addictions Counseling and will soon start studies at Thomas Edison State College for a degree in Psychology.

"I am grateful for my job and my personal network, which helps me when I get overwhelmed. If I had peer services when I was younger and didn't even know recovery existed, my life would've been different. All the mistakes I made weren't in vain. I regret the stuff I did, but if I didn't go through it, I wouldn't be where I am and able to help others," Hopkins said. "To have someone there who knows what's happening when you wake up from an overdose makes all the difference. It helps people open up. We make sure people know that recovery is possible for everybody."



"We make sure people know that recovery is possible for everybody."

– Elia Hopkins, Living Proof Recovery Center Graduate and Administrative Assistant for CFFS' Recovery Support Programs

NJAMHAA's Mission

To promote the value of its members as the highest quality behavioral healthcare providers for the residents of New Jersey through advocacy and professional development

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NJAMHAA News Journal

Continuously Promoting the Highest Quality Care for the People of New Jersey



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