I used to worry about tomorrow
even as I excelled today.
Thoughts of continuing alone
would often cloud and muddy the way.
And then I found those,
who often matched my every step
a few even shed a tear,
in the times that I wept.
No matter where I was
someone was always there for me,
walking arm and arm
and making me believe...
that isolation and loneliness
was a thing of the past
you’re here with me now
and there’s no first or last.
You said that you’d walk with me
as long as I live and try,
you said you’d always be there to help and give without a “why?”
And that it didn’t matter if I fell and where I came from
as long as I got up and tried again,
we’d walk together, forever, inside this blessed continuum.
Expressions in Recovery Mission

Our mission is to promote hope, faith and a belief that together in this journey of healing and growth, of recovery and resilience anything we strive to achieve is possible.

To facilitate this mission, this newsletter—your newsletter was created. This forum was created by and for those in recovery to give a voice to our concerns, hopes and talents.

Rules for Submission

Art, poetry, prose, true or fictional stories are welcome. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide hope, faith and information. In keeping with the spirit of this endeavor all contributions must be free from profanity and vulgarity.

Section Descriptions

Adversity & Determination
The Turning Point
Understanding
Truth and Support
Love
Life and Purpose
The Last word

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Do you know someone doing extraordinary things in your community?
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Volume 16, 2015

Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 888-545-2600
Mental Health Crisis Line 215-685-6440
Domestic Violence 866-723-3014
Protective Services 877-401-8835
Phila. Community Center 215-223-7700
Editor's Note

In court, cases are won by a preponderance of the evidence, the revealing of unfairness and infringements, and finally an affirmation of an individual’s life and rights. The evidence is clear that so many of us have been the victims of ignorance, unsolicited violence, abuse, abandonment and disregard.

It is common knowledge that all of us deserve more and retain the God-given rights to a fulfilling life and purpose. We have come to realize that when care comes, it cannot be finite for us to flourish as long as we live and breathe.

In these pages of Expression in Recovery, we talk to those who have risen. We talk to those who still walk tall and proud, and acknowledge that they are part of a family; a family that they found inside this wonderful continuum of care that holds out its hand each and every day and never ends.

Gil Gadson
HERE AND NOW

Encouraged
I feel encouraged. The support system I have is extensive. I can always depend on it, and it's constantly helping me in my growth. In this continuum, I am able to see my dreams, and to believe and know that they are attainable. There was a time that I had no vision of the future or sense of direction. With determination coupled with constantly available help, I feel secure in the fact that I will achieve my goals which will make my dreams come to life. Recovery like this, lets me wake up every day stronger and confident of what I can do...I'm not alone.

JESSE FIELDS

A New Day
In recovery, I never knew that help, support and my accomplishments would make me have a bright view of my future. Being on drugs before had me hopeless; feeling as if they would be my life. I didn’t know then that I was just numbing myself because I couldn’t see where I could go or what I could accomplish. Having low self-esteem made it even harder. Being surrounded by those that understand, have found their way through, and who offer a continuum of help has made all the difference in the world. This is a continuous environment of help that will never end. My thoughts before were that I have a disability and couldn’t function well. I’ve gotten so much love and many resources that I feel enlightened, and it has helped me dig my way out of the darkness which was my life. I’m starting college soon, and I feel on top of the world.

SIERRA ALNISA

I had a Fear of leaving my program until I was told that I could always come back for help if I should fall, and to encourage others on this path that I am on. Knowing that this thing I got, that changed my life, will never end, gives me the courage to keep on going. I was told that this is called a continuum... I like that; it sounds like it will be forever and I don’t have to ever be afraid again.

CARL SIMMONS
WITH EVERY STEP.

Each and every thing I do is connected to recovery. I get up with gratitude; I go about my day feeling blessed and empowered. I share my triumphs as well as my heartaches regularly. I volunteer and give back every chance I get, and I believe and live all of this every day with confidence because all along for the first time in my life, I am not alone. When I was out in the world, there were many times where it was just me and my misery. The few times in my life when I was somewhat content, I was mostly alone. Today, there is always someone to call, to work with and to count on... someone to be with, something to do, feel a part of, feel cared for and just feeling like I matter. Recovery now has become beautiful for me, and I’ve been told that this is the beginning of the rest of my life, and I can choose how I feel. I have choices, I have friends, I have places to go, and I don’t have to do any of this alone...ever.

KEVIN SIMMS
FEATURE STORIES

Every Step of the Way
Most people don’t know my story. They don’t know that I used drugs for over 35 years or that I’ve been on planes, handcuffed and shackled from waist to feet…flying to jail. They don’t know that I used to suffer from anxiety attacks – getting them up to three times a day. But most of all, they don’t know that eight years ago you couldn’t have gotten me to believe I could be where I am today, had any real hope or plan, or believe anyone cared.

I needed something of substance, I needed to believe in something and for someone or something to believe in me, and take a walk with me. I met Nathaniel “Nate” Green who started an innovative program in Philadelphia called, “Hands of Diversity.” Like me, he’s originally from what we call, “in the street,” so we had an instant rapport. He was down to earth, direct and had a clear flawless purpose and plan that was, and is, productive in transforming men and women who seek a clean, productive and better life.

He started challenging me to use my skills and God-given talents which awakened my spirit, and he set me on the path of real recovery. I started attending therapeutic groups at Northeast Treatment Center (known as “The Net”) three times a week, soon becoming a member of their ground breaking and award-winning Consumer Council. I became their newsletter editor which opened the door to a meeting at DBHIDS, which I left as the new Editor of Expressions in Recovery.

All during my journey and to this day, there were constant mentors, role models, opportunities, trainings both old and new, conventions, workshops, symposiums, speaking engagements, facilitations, conferences, celebrations, scholarship-backed trips out of state for conferences and workshops, and a role model in the way she treats people and is always so even tempered.

In actuality, all of the staff at The Well has had some sort of input in my development on my road to recovery. As a result, my gratitude runs deep, and one of the reasons for that is because I can always look forward to their involvement and help with the hope and promise of bigger and better accomplishments. I know they will always have my back.

GENEVA O’CONNOR

Inside the Continuum
One of the most important aspects of this continuum, besides the fact that it can go on forever, is that progress can be assessed, measured, looked at and used to chart progress, encourage further growth, ascertain what is needed to grow, and then share it all indefinitely. One thing that I love is the concept of alumni. Those that have successfully completed the initial and basic program of treatment still return regularly, getting together with those like themselves, new participants, and those close to completing a course of treatment that inspires them. Alumni show in no uncertain terms what can be done, the beauty of accomplishment and the limitless possibilities as they all move toward the future – possibly becoming coworkers, supporters, mentors and very often...friends for life. I wouldn’t want to work inside any other system that has an end or expiration date…I’d rather help who I help inside; an ongoing continuum.

JOHN LATEVI

The Well
I’m a participant at a place called, “The Well.” The staff here has been of immense help over the past seven years, and I am still part of their program. I have a Recovery Coach named, Thomas Tillman, that I want to first and foremost thank. He has been instrumental in a number of my endeavors and most of all – helping me in my quest to return to school and search for employment – not to mention his always solid advice which I can count on. Also, the Program Director, Tanya Doyle, is always accessible, a sounding board, and a role model in the way she treats people and is always so even tempered.

In actuality, all of the staff at The Well has had some sort of input in my development on my road to recovery. As a result, my gratitude runs deep, and one of the reasons for that is because I can always look forward to their involvement and help with the hope and promise of bigger and better accomplishments. I know they will always have my back.

GIL GADSON
From Participant to Partner

In June of 2011, I walked into Girard Medical Center, broken and stripped of everything I ever had that meant anything. My marriage was done, my son had been taken from me legally and otherwise, my truck, my possessions and my house were gone. I had been evicted and only managed to save a few paltry possessions because of my mother. There was nowhere left for me to go as far as I was concerned but up; I couldn’t get any lower.

I was willing to do anything to get back some semblance of life, so I opened myself up to help. I met a man who had been down a similar road. He was, and is, a Peer Specialist among many other things. I will never forget what he did, the impact it has had, and the infusion of life he injected me with has never died or dissipated.

In the very beginning, he saw my talents, he saw my potential and he encouraged them. He brought me into his office one day early on and asked me “what my dreams were.” When I told him I wanted to do what he did, he didn’t waste a second or bat an eye. I’m an artist and this man immediately painted the most beautiful picture of what I could do...he was so sure and told me that he not only believed I could but he believed that I should and most of all he said that I would achieve my dreams and that he’d do everything in his power to help me.

Dreams do come true. I am now his colleague, his friend and his brother. He told me that two of his proudest moments with me were when he was attending a training that I was facilitating, and another time we unexpectedly met up at a facility where we both were speaking and decided to tag-team and rock the house...which we did.

Each time we see each other, emotions run high, but they are all happy emotions because we now infuse each other. He still takes an interest in what I’m doing; never hesitating to tell me how proud he still is, and how much he loves the fact that we are now colleagues, brothers and mentors.

That picture that he painted, showing me the continuum, with it’s never ending support, camaraderie, care and definite possibilities is absolutely true, real and ongoing. I’m alive again and the sky is the limit.

ERIC SOLLENBERGER

EXPRESSIONS IN RECOVERY

How We Feel...
The road we traveled
brought us here,
and we have traveled far.
We came to heal and face our fears
and this we’re doing thus far.
We write to share our heart and hope
and show that hope is real.
Our higher power said to share...
so this is how we feel.

Never Let Me Fall
I’ve fallen a few times but managed to get up.
I’ve learned there are more important things than having a full cup;
I have people now who walk with me.
Each and every day, no matter what, they talk to me
but what I love more than anything at all
is that they refuse to ever let me fall.
And if I topple over
there are gentle waiting hands,
wanting to listen, with no commands or demands.
They only want to walk with me as far as I’m willing to go.
They said this is forever and they want me to know
that life can be hard and cruel...
but life itself will never stop so we’ll walk this thing together until
we reach the top.
Can You Imagine

how I felt last year, sitting pool side in Orlando thinking back to when I was lost in the hood, doing drugs, clearly out of my mind, hopeless and having no thought or vision of the future? Here I was twiddling my toes in clear water, the sun on my face, surrounded by nothing but potential colleagues, friends, mentors, brothers and sisters. I started thinking that somehow I’ve got to capture and speak about the tangible opportunities now available and possible for those who dare to dream. I thought of how I was returning to my full-time job as a Family Peer Specialist/Recovery Coach, Group Facilitator and Editor/Author/Writer. I thought of how I’m also a Motivational Speaker who travels to different cities now being paid to share my experience and perspective. I thought of how my, and many others dreams are being realized one by one, each and every day because of the continuum—and that’s what inspired this issue in this year of celebrations.

Were there hard days? Absolutely! Were there times that I was tired and the thought of giving up and giving in crossed my mind? Again, absolutely! But what kept and keeps me going, and keeps me involved, is this extraordinary continuum and that continues to feed and nourish me. It brings people in my life like our extraordinarily gracious Commissioner, Dr. Arthur Evans, who still warms my heart every time I see him with a bear-hug, and an eye-to-eye thank you for the work that I’m doing and have done. This man with such awesome responsibilities always takes the time to give others a bit of his heart, his attention and care. And there are countless others such as the members of the DBHIDS Communications Department. My day-to-day job is for The Mental Health Association (MHASP). The Program Director at MHASP, Ms. Tanya Doyle, has increased and added to my professional skills one hundredfold. She is a consummate professional in every right who is also an angel on earth managing a staff that is the envy of all. The people I just spoke of are the ones I work with daily to compose and create this publication. How blessed am I to have these rare souls in my life and god-willing, they will be there for the foreseeable future. I am not the only one. Here in Philadelphia, a mighty continuum has been created that is the envy of many. We are copied, mimicked, modeled and admired all over the U.S. as we fearlessly innovate, initiate and boldly go forward hand-in-hand in this warm, family-oriented, holistic, evidence-driven and shared continuum. Recovery flourishes because the factors that make it possible never end.

GIL GADSON,
EDITOR