

Recovery specialists focus on successful outcomes

Apricity notes recognition month, funding challenge

By Dan Roherty
NEENAH NEWS

Apricity, the area's main nonprofit treatment and recovery organization, is celebrating successes toward a healthier community through its multilayered programming while launching an annual fundraiser to keep those services at the ready.

Apricity chief executive Michelle Devine Giese, who was a program participant seeking recovery from alcoholism before her 28-plus years of sobriety, said National Recovery Month allows the organization to focus on the people living better lives after getting the professional help they needed.

"I love that they started Recovery Month (in 1989) because I do think there is so much about addiction, but let's celebrate all the people who are in recovery and doing great things," she said. "You might be sitting next to them at work and you don't even know."

Devine Giese said Apricity worked with more than 1,000 people last year, mostly in Winnebago and Outagamie counties, while serving a wider Fox Valley region.

"More people are receiving services but for shorter amounts of time, and a lot of that is due to funding," she said, which relates to the annual awareness initiative.

A matching gift challenge totaling \$35,000 will support Apricity's four core treatment and recovery programs thanks to The Boldt Group, U.S. Venture and an anonymous donor. All donations

throughout September will be matched up to \$35,000.

The organization's sober living program generally runs at a deficit and often needs support outside of available grants, as do general day-to-day operations.

Apricity connects with 10 hospitals from as far as Shawano, Waupaca and Berlin primarily through Ascension and The daCare facilities, providing recovery coaches who can be there within an hour to talk to patients in need.

"It might just be a conversation or it might be, 'I need help,' or 'I need a place to stay,' and just helping them navigate where they are going to go next and stay connected," she said. "They will call the person the next day and check on them and they can stay connected to them for up to 18 months."

Formed with the 2018 merger of Step Industries and The Mooring Programs, Apricity has its job training center and three sober living homes in Neenah. Treatment centers – Mooring House for men and Casa Clara for women – are in Appleton, with another job training center in Milwaukee.

Devine Giese said the region's support agencies often work together with their leaders serving on boards of related nonprofits such as Solutions, COTS and the St. Joseph Food Program.

"That's one thing that is really great about the Fox Valley. Generally nonprofits will work together rather than competing,

and that doesn't happen everywhere in the United States," she said.

Devine Giese brings familiarity and empathy to both her leadership role and in personal contact with those seeking help.

"I have been able to have conversations with the people in our program and go, 'I was in your spot, I sat in that chair, I did this work,'" she said.

"I'm still in recovery and paying attention to it every day. But I've also been able to be a face in the public and not ashamed to say, 'I'm an alcoholic and this is what an alcoholic looks like.'"

Alcohol addiction continues to be a major focus of recovery programs at Apricity and elsewhere while not getting the same current media attention as opioids and other drug use.

"The commonality is: Something has you looking for that escape. Something happened or you grew up in a certain way," Devine Giese said. "There's a reason why drugs or alcohol became so prevalent in your life. Let's look at why."

"That's the thing we need to help because otherwise if that's always there it's never going to get healed and there's never going to be that long-term help or healing with it. So let's figure out that."

The programs change the lives of individuals afflicted with substance use disorders, such as a former client who told Apricity, "Since being in recovery, I've become responsible, formed positive relationships, maintained employment and live an overall better life. I could never have imagined that I would be living this life today. I am grateful to Apricity for helping me along the way."

The alcohol and other drug abuse

(AODA) certified treatment and recovery program offers inpatient and transitional residential treatment, support services, sober living and job readiness training. Staff provide community outreach and education, train recovery coaches and support patients in regional emergency departments and several behavioral health clinics.

National Recovery Month awareness programs were launched 35 years ago to educate the public that substance use treatment and mental health services help people live healthy, rewarding lives. While society's acceptance of addiction as a disease has advanced greatly since that time, Devine Giese said shame still plays a role in keeping people away from treatment.

"I think it has moved a long way now, but I think it still has a long way to go," she said. "There are so many people who don't find recovery because of the stigma or the family members don't talk about what they're struggling with, with their loved one because of the stigma."

"Sometimes when celebrities come out it can be good and bad because then if something happens and they go back to using, that is also reflected and gets a lot of attention – sometimes that gets more attention than talking about their recovery."

In addition to highlighting client success stories on social media and other marketing initiatives, the program will highlight stories from community figures such as law enforcement and community advocates.

To donate, send a gift to Apricity, 1010 Strohmeier Drive, ATTN: Recovery Month, Neenah, WI 54956.



Giese