



National Recovery Month proclaims, affirms recovery is always possible

By Melanie Dallas, LPC

Each year, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) designates September as National Recovery Month. During the month, we recognize the millions of individuals living in recovery with mental illness and substance use disorders, and equally important, the process of change each undertook – and the courage they displayed in doing so – in order to overcome their challenges and seek recovery.

While it is true that an individual with mental illness or a substance use disorder may not be “cured,” it is always possible to recover – to achieve a healthy, self-directed life in which one’s illness does not interfere with day-to-day living. Helping individuals recover, and learn to live in recovery, is the very purpose of the services Highland Rivers Health provides.

SAMSHA defines recovery as a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential. The agency has developed several guiding principles that are critical to supporting the recovery process in individuals, families and communities, which I’ve summarized below. While these principles show there are many dimensions of recovery, the individual seeking recovery is always at the center.

Recovery emerges from hope: The belief that recovery is real provides the essential and motivating message of a better future – that people can and do overcome the challenges, barriers and obstacles that confront them. Hope is the catalyst of the recovery process.

Recovery is person-driven: Self-determination and direction are the foundations for recovery as individuals define their own life goals and their unique paths towards those goals.

Recovery occurs via many pathways: Individuals are unique with distinct needs, strengths, preferences and goals that inform their pathway to recovery. Recovery pathways are highly personalized and may include clinical treatment, use of medications, family support, faith-based approaches, peer support and more.

Recovery is holistic: Recovery encompasses an individual’s whole life – mind, body, spirit and community – and includes self-care, family, housing, employment, education, clinical treatment for mental and substance use disorders, primary healthcare, faith, creativity, social networks, community participation and more.

Recovery is supported by peers and allies: Mutual support groups, sharing knowledge and skills, and social learning all play an invaluable role in recovery. Peers provide each other with a

vital sense of belonging, while professionals provide clinical treatment and other services that support individuals in their chosen recovery paths.

Recovery is supported through relationships and social networks: The presence and involvement of people (family members, peers, providers, faith groups, community members, and other allies) who believe in the individual's ability to recover, and offer hope, support and encouragement, form vital support networks.

Recovery is culturally-based and influenced: Culture in all of its diverse representations – including values, traditions and beliefs – is key in determining a person's unique pathway to recovery.

Recovery is supported by addressing trauma: Trauma – physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, war and disaster – is often associated with substance use, mental health problems and related issues. Services and supports should be trauma-informed to foster safety and trust, and promote choice, empowerment and collaboration.

Recovery involves individual, family, and community strengths and responsibility: Individuals, families and communities have strengths and resources that serve as a foundation for recovery. Individuals have responsibility for self-care and journeys of recovery. Families have responsibilities to support their loved ones, while communities have responsibilities to provide resources to address discrimination and foster inclusion and recovery.

Recovery is based on respect: Societal acceptance and appreciation for people affected by mental health and substance use problems – including protecting their rights and eliminating discrimination – are crucial for recovery. Communities must acknowledge that recovery often requires great courage. Self-acceptance, developing a positive and meaningful sense of identity, and regaining belief in one's self are vital.

While there is a lot there to consider, the most important thing to remember is that **recovery is always possible.**

For more information about National Recovery Month, visit www.recoverymonth.gov.