
2024

FOCUS GROUP REPORT:

Substance Use Disorder:
Recovery, Stigma, and
Community

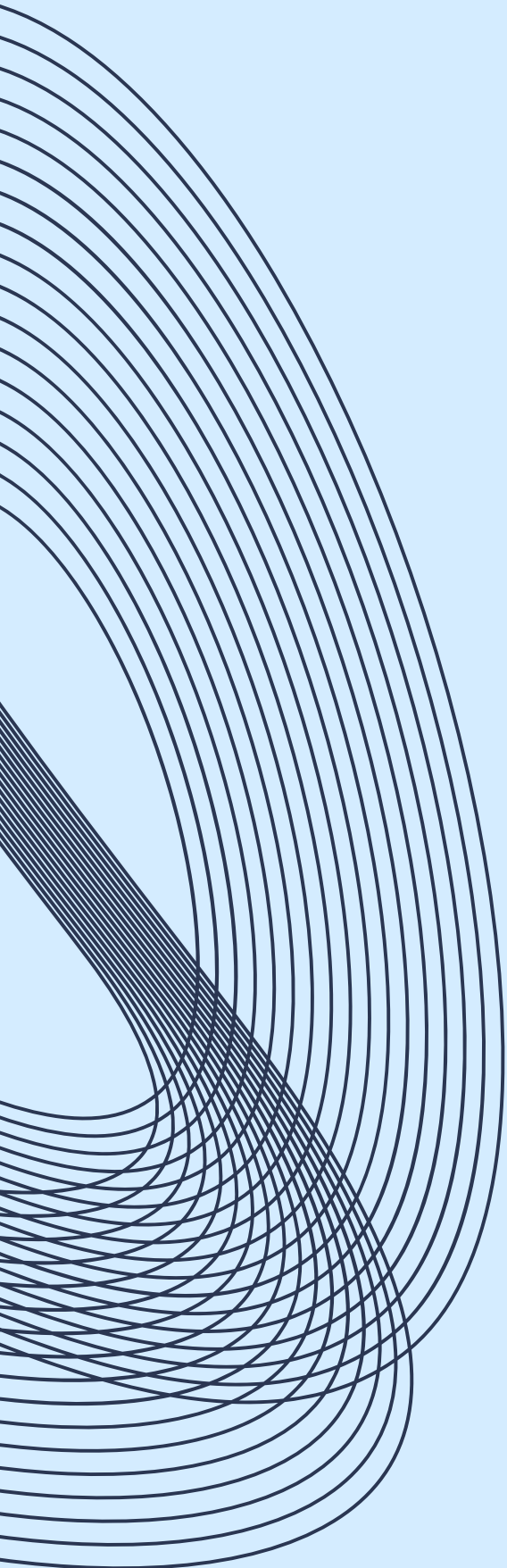


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Thank you to all of the individuals who participated in our focus groups and for sharing your stories with us.

Thank you SSAR, Northwest Community Health Innovation Region (CHIR) and District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) for providing funding for this research.

If you would like to learn more about this work, please email us at dnorkoli@dhd10.org

REPORT SUMMARY

About the Grant

Funding from SSAR, Northwest Community Health Innovation Region (CHIR), and District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) allowed staff to conduct focus groups in Manistee, Cadillac/Wexford, Grand Traverse for individuals in recovery and a key informant interview in Lake with a pregnant mother with SUD.

The purpose of this report is to summarize and analyze the Manistee focus group and Lake key informant interview findings to assess the next steps to help individuals within our community.

FOCUS GROUP

Overview

The purpose of a focus group is to hear from individuals in the community to learn first hand from their experiences. This helps provide insight to barriers they may face, resources they may need, and how to best support them within the community.

The focus group took place in Manistee, Cadillac/Wexford, Grand Traverse for individuals in recovery. For the purpose of this focus group, a person in recovery is defined as being in the process of change to improve their health and wellness, live a self directed life, and strive to reach their full potential. From SAMHA's working definition of recovery.

There was also a key informant interview conducted with an individual in recovery from Lake County who had substance use disorder during pregnancy.



METHODOLOGY

Planning and Recruitment

Direct recruiting with the help of internal contacts was used to help assemble the focus groups. Each focus group was limited to 10 participants.

Individuals were recruited based on their history of SUD. For the key informant interview, pregnant mothers who were pregnant in the past year with SUD were recruited, however the individual interviewed had been outside of this range at 18 month post partum due to lack of willing participants outside of this range.

Funding for the focus group and key informant interview came from SSAR, Northwest Community Health Innovation Region (CHIR), and District Health Department #10 (DHD#10)

METHODOLOGY

Data Cleaning and Analysis Process

Both the focus group and key information interview was recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Word Transcribe function.

Clean Transcripts

The text was reviewed for any errors to ensure accuracy, clarity, and consistency. Any formatting errors were corrected and any identifiable information was removed including names of individuals and professionals.

Highlight Important Quotes

Once the transcript was cleaned, quotes were pulled out that were important to capture any main topic areas for each question asked.

Finding Themes

Themes were found for each question that was asked to the individuals. Quotes are also highlighted for each of these themes. Overall themes from the focus group are shared as well.

FINDINGS

Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

The individuals were asked about their reasons for initially beginning substance use. Here are the common themes that were found:

Lack of Activities in Area

Individuals reported not having any activities within the area, especially ones that don't involve drugs or alcohol in some way. This contributed to boredom that some participants said led to their use of substances.

- "If you're going on to a pool league or a softball team or a soccer team or a basketball team, alcohol, drugs, alcohol, drugs, let's celebrate"
- "...there's not a whole lot of options for recovery-based type things"
- "Like, what am I going to do? I'm bored. Let's go get high. Let's go. Let's go get some beers you know."

Lack of Healthcare Resources

A participant noted their struggles with finding health care providers within the community.

"It was easier to get a drug dealer than a doctor"

Taken off Medications

Individuals expressed being taken off of medications or kicked out of recovery programs causing them to look for resources elsewhere.

FINDINGS

Reasons for Beginning Substance Use

- “A lot of people getting cut off of medications, getting kicked out of, like the Suboxone program... and the first thing they do is go look for something else to help their pain and you know, if they do it one time and that's all it takes.”

Trauma

Multiple participants described trauma, including during childhood, adulthood, and just overall trauma as a main reason for beginning substance use. Past traumatic experiences led to using substances as a coping mechanism.

Modeling behaviors

An individual expressed seeing family members using substances that led to their use later on.

- “I looked up to my older cousins and stuff like at a young age I really looked up to my older cousins and they were, you know, slim and meth and heroin”

FINDINGS

Finding Recovery Services

The individuals were asked about when they decided to find recovery services and how they found services. Here is what they shared:

Bad effects or outcomes from substances

Participants expressed both physical effects and life circumstances that caused them to seek out recovery.

- "I first started off doing like pills and stuff, and then I moved up to like fentanyl and coke. And then I started doing acid and I ended up taking a bad hit of acid rotting my brain ended up getting brain damage and sure."
- "But I don't know, frying my brain and that made me realize I need to stop and they helped me quit so never really touched drug sense."
- "I got to a point where I mean, I lost just about everything that I could in my life. And I tried ending my life on multiple occasions."

Forced Recovery due to Incarceration

Many individuals expressed how ending up in jail caused them to go without substances forcing recovery without necessarily receiving proper treatment

- "I ended up going to jail and getting a bunch of internal possession charges, and so I fled into drug court from there. And that was my first, like, taste of treatment."

FINDINGS

Finding Recovery Services

- "I would get a little bit of recovery and then I would relapse. And then I would you know, but I feel like each time I would gain a little bit something different from it"
- "I had to leave drugs, but never really got that chance to go to rehab. I either had I don't know, it's like I sat in jail or if they gave me a chance to rehab, I was at a warrant in another county for not paying my fines or something stupid and I wasn't able to go, so I didn't really get the treatment part of it."

Children Taken

An individual shared their children getting taken away and how that led to them finding their path to recovery.

- "My house got raided by the feds and my boyfriend and I got our daughter taken away. And so that was a big reason. That's when I started going to rehab."
- "I'll go back as many times as it takes to save my life. My kid deserves to have parents."

Importance of Mental Health Focus

Many individuals shared their negative mental health experiences and the importance of receiving care focused on these issues to help their recovery process.

FINDINGS

Finding Recovery Services

- "I got to a point where I mean, I lost just about everything that I could in my life. And I tried ending my life on multiple occasions."
- "I think the mental health thing like, that's the part that I left out."
- "There's deeper issues and if I didn't have the medical part of it, I don't think I would be where I am for sure."
- "the loneliness thing too, that that's a big one"

Changing Medications to Support Mental Health

An individual expressed how medication helped address mental health conditions they were struggling with to help with their recovery.

- "just a few little tweaks in medication and stuff really helped."
- "there's deeper issues and if I didn't have the medical part of it, I don't think I would be where I am for sure."

Having Social Support

One individual shared how having their family support them helped lead them to recovery.

- "My mom and them were there. I ended up calling them because I was freaking out because I wasn't coming down off of it..."

FINDINGS

Finding Recovery Services

The individuals also discussed their experiences with rehabilitation centers, their struggles afterwards, and relapsing.

Rehabilitation Centers

Participants shared how their rehabilitation centers that included mental health services made an impact on their recovery.

- “...they don't just do stuff with addiction and just give you the tools that you need to to overcome it. But they are actually treated my mental health as well, which was a really big part of it”
- “I think it helped me more actually go into the psychiatric hospital. When I went to the psych ward. I learned to deal with more there my mental health instead of going back to the drugs and alcohol because I used those to numb my feelings so I wouldn't have to feel them.”

Struggles After Recovery

Individuals expressed their struggles staying in recovery due to lack of sober activities and going back to the same social groups they had prior to their recovery.

- “And so I would just go back to hanging out with the same people I was before and end up relapsing.”

FINDINGS

Finding Recovery Services

- “the minute you like start going back to those kind of friends like they were like all about having you back. It's like, oh, yeah let's get high again.”
- “I was looking for other people in recovery or people sober to hang out with. And I really it was very few and far between. It was either they were drinking or, you know, doing other stuff that was illegal.”

Relapse

Relapse was common for many of the participants. They shared their stories of returning to rehabilitation and their struggles with relapsing.

- “I went to rehab like 12 different times, only completed like 3 different ones, but I would get home and I was lonely. And I was in my head and depressed. And so I would just go back to hanging out with the same people I was before and end up relapsing.”
- “I have relapsed and I just keep going back. I'll go back as many times as it takes to save my life. My kid deserves to have parents.”

FINDINGS

Difficulties Receiving Treatment

When asked about the steps they took to find and receive treatment, participants expressed many struggles they faced due to reasons such as barriers to care and long wait times.

Barriers Due to Money and Insurance

One of the barriers to care patients faced was due to the cost of care or medication.

- "I couldn't make a certain amount of money because then I couldn't afford it because that Medicaid would be out the window"
- "I've been there for almost a year and now I'm not on insurance anymore, Medicaid. Lost everything like it was like. It's like all of a sudden I was a person and now I'm just number again."
- "I couldn't feel good about myself working a real job because I'd make too much money and they'd take me off Medicaid"

Individuals also discussed different pricing for suboxone treatment ranging from \$350-\$800.

- "They kicked off the suboxone and then all of a sudden we got people dying left and right because of fentanyl overdose."

- "My Suboxone was \$800"

"It's cheaper to go get you know heroin off the street than pay \$350 for a script of suboxone."

FINDINGS

Difficulties Receiving Treatment

Long Wait Times

The wait times for receiving treatment were very long, many individuals sharing they had to wait weeks to get into treatment centers, especially for those coming out of incarceration.

- "To get into detox, it's a two week wait or whatever. There's not enough, and there's not enough treatment centers, you know or detox or residential inpatient."
- "It's like you have to go out of detox after three to five days and then wait for a bed. So yes, detox. And then I'm going to go back home and then I get to sit here and be sober. No, I don't think that happens that way"
- "It was too long of a period between getting out of incarceration, out of jail and getting to my outpatient services"
 - This individual shared they had a four week wait time
- "...takes forever to get to see, the people at (facility), and then that's only if you are eligible. And then if you're not severe or persistent mental health right, then they kick you over to (another facility). And (this facility) has to do an exam and all this other stuff on you where they're like what do you qualify for, you know"

FINDINGS

Difficulties Receiving Treatment

- "When I got out of detox, even, you know, trying to get back into the MAT program around took me almost a month"
- "...with incarceration is that that if you're maintenance on Suboxone or on some type of medicated assisted treatment, they don't hold that in jail."

The group discussed how having a liaison between incarceration and treatment could help bridge the gap between receiving care, or some sort of peer recovery coach to help them through the process.

- "It would be nice if there was something in there that showed people, you know, attitude of gratitude and like, hey, when you get out there is sobriety afterwards"

Lack of Staff

Individuals discussed how the lack of staff impacted their recovery, and the need for more help within the field.

- "There's a counselor out there but having to see all of those people, and she's only out there once or twice a week, that's a lot, you know, she can only do so much as one person"

Community Services

One individual shared their positive experience with local law enforcement helping them in their recovery process.

FINDINGS

Difficulties Receiving Treatment

- “They have hope not handcuffs and they were able to give me a ride up to my treatment center and back home which is really super helpful.”

Social Support

One participant shared their struggles recovering with family members in active addiction and having other people as support was helpful with their recovery

- “I have family that are still in active addiction and trying to keep them away and trying to stay safe by myself like that, it's just not it was not a good combination, but thank gosh I had different people to help support me through that and I knew people that could help try to get the doctors to go a little quicker because without that, who knows how long it would have really taken.”

FINDINGS

Community Views on SUD

Participants were asked about their experiences in the community and if they are treated differently due to having a substance use disorder. They struggles with stigma in the community and finding jobs due to this stigma.

Small Town Awareness

Due to the small community size, individuals expressed everyone knowing their struggles and the negative views the community has on them that inhibits them from being able to grow.

- "Manistee is a small town, right. So the minute you get arrested, the other side of the City side of the town has already seen it and talk to their auntie."
- "Everybody knows everybody, you know. So when I had grabbed the application and left, somebody had told the manager that told me to come back for an interview the next day, told her that I had just gotten out of jail and not to hire me because I was a drug addict"
- "...it sucks that people don't see that we can change"
- "I've met some really good people, but the community in general is not like behind recovery as much."
- "I think that you get the resistance when you go into an AA room."
 - "I've been told that I was at the wrong meeting"

FINDINGS

Community Views on SUD

- “the people that walk past our shop and look at the harm reduction box sitting there, we it's mixed reviews. I either get people taking pictures and smiling or taking pictures and they're like, disgusted you know that there's a harm reduction box and Narcan out there.”
- “Community like I feel like they should stand behind where people have had years of sobriety or like people you know are benefiting recovery. We don't have none of that here.”
- “I know there are like some NA and AA groups and stuff but yeah. That nobody really shows up to them, and a lot of them are like the old school, 12 steps and not a lot of people. That's hard for a lot of people to find a higher power and to believe in something”
- “the community is actively keeping you down”
- “I still get harassed by the cops to this day. Get followed, get pulled over, you know. It's it's just, it's ridiculous.”

Employers Not Hiring

Many of the participants shared their struggles finding a job after recovery or incarceration and often faced a lot of stigma when applying and expressed their desperation to find any sort of work.

“Like I said it doesn’t matter how many years I’ve been clean, how long I’ve been clean, I will always have this stigma with me for the rest of my life.”

FINDINGS

Community Views on SUD

- "I have a misdemeanor and they wouldn't even hire me at a fast food restaurant, because I have a misdemeanor."
- "everywhere jobs are hiring, but no one's actually hiring."
- "Like if they say no, I don't think that we would allow you to host something like that here. Stigma, right? Oh, you're on medication. I don't know if I'll have you work here. Even though I can't discriminate against you."
- "But a lot of the employers they talk to each other like. No, we won't give this person a chance. Don't give this person a chance. And it really, really it disables them because not only will they not start applying to anywhere else, they already know what's going to happen, and if you have probation which says you have to turn in these applications, you have to do this and you have to get a job"
- "we can go apply at (potential job site), but those same employers are going to be talking bad about us. Yeah, because you get blacklisted in this small town."
- "I've had even jobs like hire me and then couple days later, well, we're over staffed now and I'm thinking this hadn't happened me like twice already"
- "just that chance, even cleaning toilets or anything I would I would do."

FINDINGS

Community Views on SUD

Bridging Employment Gap

The group expressed the need of having someone work with them to help them find a job during recovery, such as an employment specialist, that can advocate for them.

- "...bridge the gap between the streets and reconnect."
- "We just need someone to say hey this person is doing everything right."

Examples of Programs in Other Cities

The group shared some examples of other areas that have good recovery communities and sober programs that could be beneficial.

- "they have like like a program ... called building beginnings and they kind of help people get jobs and stuff and transition from being an addict or parolees or that"
- "Traverse City has an awesome recovery community. They have a whole like center that people can bring their kids to and you know, like you can go there anytime and they have so many, like you said, different groups at different hours. So you don't, you don't have to rush out of work or different stuff like that"
- "they go on hikes and skiing and do all this cool stuff"
- "Traverse City. They have a really, really nice recovery community"

FINDINGS

Community Views on SUD

- “like in a bigger town, there's a ton more options like sober softball.”
- “there's places where they have meetings, like, every hour on the hour and stuff”

Importance of Wanting Recovery

Participants shared the importance of wanting to recover versus being forced into recovery.

- “If you are going there on your own volition and you're just like, OK, I need help. I want help. You find that it's a little bit more tolerable than if you're forced to go.”
- In reference to mandatory AA meetings:
 - “And so a lot of the times and there's a lot of damage to that that that program, right, we're going to court order you to three meetings a week, four meetings a week, and that person is not at the stage of change where they are ready to be like, OK, I need some help”

Lasting Impacts from Substance Use

A few individuals shared the impacts of the long term effects from substance use and the difficulties that these effects play in their recovery process.

FINDINGS

Community Views on SUD

- "So that can be frustrating if you're trying to recover, but you're still suffering from even like mild like I remember this. I don't. You're going through guilt and shame"
- "... it's like some of those people permanently damage their brains and so now they can't find a normal job"
- "But a lot of them have had a lot of three months psychosis. We've been seeing a long prolonged psychosis lately ... and people are just permanently in psychosis, like for a straight think the longest, it was like 3 1/2 months"

Positive Community Events

Individuals did express some positive events in the community regarding their recovery.

- "I know you've been, you know, you've got us out on some hikes and we've grilled out a couple of times and you've you've done awesome stuff for this community."
- "The meetings here, if you relapse, I could say that people are like then they welcome you back. Thank God you're back here."

Potential Recovery Ideas

A few participants shared some ideas to help increase recovery participation in groups and help with schooling.

FINDINGS

Community Views on SUD

- "I feel like if a younger person were to chair a meeting here and get a couple friends to come like them, first couple groups, then word would spread and more younger people would be comfortable with going to those meetings and opening up because they're more, they're all the same age. They're all living in the same town and probably know each other anyway."
- "I think there should be like schooling for people who have brain damage from drugs like, just keep their brain working."

Words Against Stigma

Participants shared a lot of inspiring statements in regards to the stigma they face from the community.

- "We have friends, family that are still in addiction and are in recovery and we want to keep them happy, healthy and safe at all costs. All costs man, I like. I take big pride and like I will never look at somebody differently just because they're a user, right? Like they're still a f***** human being."

"they're still someone's
daughter, still
somebody's son."

FINDINGS

Community Views on SUD

- "It doesn't matter if you're addicted to gambling or if you're addicted to drugs. It's still an addiction. It's still a bad habit that needs to be talked about."
- "But there's so many different pathways for people"

FINDINGS

Factors for Treatment Success

Participants of the focus group were asked about what factors are important when considering the success of treatment.

Length of Treatment

Individuals expressed the differences in the length of treatment and how more time may be better. One individual also expressed not being hired until a certain length of time passed during recovery

- "I did a 90 day treatment and I think that these 26 day treatments are not long enough, to be honest, and you know, not authorized for payment for longer than that. But I know even though they say, meet medical necessity and stuff like that, but you got to dry out like you got to be learning things."
- "I was in there for 14 days and half of the people that they're trying to treat, hundreds of people at the same time thinking that we're all the same just because we were addicts, but really we all use for different reasons."
- "I feel like, hey, I stayed longer than that 14 days, then. Yeah, maybe I would have, you know, got into it a little bit more, but I knew I was counting down the days. Right when I got there. 12 more days. Five more days. Let's go. So, yeah, definitely longer stents of of treatment. And like I said, maybe not just focusing on addiction, but also the mental health."

FINDINGS

Factors for Treatment Success

- "a lot of places, there is a 2 year like minimum of being clean, like otherwise they won't hire you."

Health Insurance Determination

Individuals shared their struggles with insurance and how their quality of care differed by insurance.

- "It shouldn't be all because you have Medicaid should not be bottom of the barrel treatment, right? You know, it should be. There should be a standard of care."
- "... someone should get to say you know what I don't really want to go to (treatment center), I'd rather go here, right? Because of the success rate that's here ... you're going to throw me in here with a bunch of guys, and it's a real, like, one star place. But there's this three star place over here and I know it's determined on on on your medical insurance and stuff like that, but it shouldn't be."
- "we're getting kicked out of the Suboxone program because of Medicaid and different stuff. I know people that go all the way down to Muskegon every morning to do the methadone treatment."

Quality of Care

Participants shared issues with the quality of care they received during treatment and how they lacked resources that could have been beneficial.

FINDINGS

Factors for Treatment Success

- "A lot of people probably wouldn't be a reason to stay too you know if it wasn't so awful and you weren't eating jail food that's what you're eating. And if you've ever been to treatment and sometimes it's not the best food."
- "we've never had those resources because our (treatment centers). They are not allowed to have some of those resources. They don't have the funding for it or they don't have the licensing for it"

Lack of Counselors in Community

Individuals talked about the lack of counselors for those in recovery in the area, and that there is only one main individual for the community.

- "She's the only good one."
- "There's a lot of social workers out there right. They don't want to deal with addiction. No, it takes a very special person to deal with an addiction."
- "The tribe was supposed to hire a peer recovery coach and then they never hired him"
- "She does a really good job. However, she's cut off by the Tribal Council. The Tribal Council has no drive to help addicts or they don't. They're the same way. They don't want to admit that they have any of these problems."

FINDINGS

Factors for Treatment Success

Recovery Not Main Goal

One individual shared that not everyone at treatment centers is necessarily there for treatment, but instead they are there for shelter.

- “So and half of the people that were in there because this was downstate, actually half of them were homeless and just wanted somewhere to stay. So they really didn't. They weren't taking it serious, they didn't care as long as they had roof over their head and food in their mouths, so to to try to take it serious while I was there, I mean, and I didn't really try to cause, like I said, I was just trying to go get out of jail and come back home”

Peer Recovery Coach Regulations

Participants shared their thoughts on regulations of being a peer recovery coach and showed their willingness to help others with their recovery journey, although the importance of placing limits on helping others to not destroy their own recovery process. Some also shared experiences working with peer recovery coaches.

- “Coaches in Michigan is one of the most strict states to become a peer recovery coach in like with requirements”
- “that's what I appreciate appreciate about my peer recovery coach. Like if I don't reach out for a couple days, they make sure to check in on me”

FINDINGS

Factors for Treatment Success

- "I would say I didn't have to pay for any of my any of my drugs, any of my supplies. It was cool because I was able to do it all online over video, so it is more. It's easier to do now probably than it was a couple years ago."
 - "Six months sober should not be a recovery coach. They don't know much about their own recovery. They haven't dealt with their trauma, and they sure as h*** are not going to they could go down in flames and take a client with them, yeah."
 - "they still take that time out to reach out to me every couple days at least once a week"
 - "that's all a lot of people do need it's just that little, that little bit of support, that little voice that stays in their head like, hey, I'm here if you need me. Call me anytime. It doesn't matter if it's the work hours or not like you can call them and even if you text them you know something like. If you don't feel like talking on the phone, just a text like that can help so much."
- "I'll do anything in my power. But I will never anything I put before my recovery I will lose and I can't sit and watch somebody shoot up."

"You have to have enough recovery yourself before you can add and try to support someone else's recovery"

FINDINGS

Factors for Treatment Success

- "I think there should be a peer recovery coach everywhere in the in the court system and the school is in the jail everywhere that you can get somebody that has knowledge and experience with addiction that addiction is everywhere."
- "I did not have a peer recovery coach three years ago, and I wish I would have."
- "that day-to-day contact, you're gonna have to meet them where they're at for sure"

4 out of 8
participants had
worked with a
peer recovery
coach

Need for Community Support

Participants expressed their need for more prevention efforts in the community, less stigma, and overall kindness and support from members of the community.

- "I think prevention is super important and the things that we do in this Community for prevention is not very. It's not a lot."
- "that's why they are so judgmental and stigmatize us like they do because they don't understand it"
- "It's supposed to be a community, but we're kind of all separated"
- "no matter what you can't force them. You can tie them down to a table and get them clean, but they're still going to make their own choices, so you literally have to let them make their own choice."

FINDINGS

Factors for Treatment Success

- "We don't want anything in return, just to be nice."
- "They just want to talk to somebody."
- "You need somebody to talk to. I'll be there like, you know, and. And a lot of times you don't even have to say anything. Just let that person talk. Just let that person talk. That's all they need to do something. And and sometimes the best advice you can give is by not talking."
- "I know addiction is different. I know detox is scary. However, that's why we want team. That's why we need more treatment. That's why we want more people to help us out. Because the hard and difficult things are the things that we're not getting help with."
- "I can't save everyone or change their mind, but I can help."
- "A lot of times people are so used to hearing that you can't do it, so that one person to say that you can do it can make a world of a difference."

Ideas to Support Recovery

Individuals shared different creative ideas to help build the recovery support within the community.

- "Give them a garden in the community to garden and not make them pay for it."

FINDINGS

Factors for Treatment Success

- "I think it's good to be a volunteer. You can volunteer to those things ... we're going to have you talking to people on the phone and then we're going to do it telehealth and then we're going to actually sit down and meet."
- "We're playing basketball. We're fishing, we're cleaning. If we're not doing that, we're doing something tedious like beading, cause Native Americans. You know, that's how I want to connect my culture. Cause culture is prevention across Native Americans"
- "I think Manistee would be the best recovery community, not only the fact that you can just stick them in the National Forest for a few days to detox."
 - Individual shared ideas of doing camps for at risk youth or those in recovery to learn new life skills while keeping them out of harm.
- "a designated recovery center ... somebody can walk in there and not feel shameful"

Self-stigma and Reflection

Individuals expressed the difficulties of being in recovery and the stigma within the recovery community when relapsing as well as hardships they place on themselves.

FINDINGS

Factors for Treatment Success

- "being an addict was the hardest thing I've ever done"
- "It's like I didn't want to call and lean on my sponsor because I didn't want to look weak to him."
- "Let's say a recovery coach relapses. What then? Is there anything to like make them feel like they steal their time and what they've done and who they are and still like just because it messed up one time and didn't hide it, you know?"
- "I wouldn't want someone to lose all positivity because of that, because really you would because of the way the community set up. If you ain't perfect, everybody has to hide their their relapses."

"I mean, as addicts, we have shame anyways, we're harder, some of us are harder on ourselves."

Targeting on Social Media

Participants shared experiences with targeted messages on social media platforms about parties even after recovery.

- "on Facebook. Family friends get messages from Muskegon that say do you party and if those the same lines but they'll come all the way up here."
- "You're even in recovery and they go and add all your friends cause they assume that all your friends are drug addicts."

FINDINGS

Stigma From Medical Community

Focus group participants were asked about stigmatization from the medical community and their experiences. Many were treated differently being in recovery and saw mistreatment.

Staff Assuming Still Using Substances

Participants shared experiences with targeted messages on social media platforms about parties even after recovery.

- “the first words out of their mouth are what are you on and my and my girlfriend says she is 14 years in recovery or I think is 12 then, 12 years in recovery, she’s not on anything. She goes, how do you know that? Do we need to get a drug test?”
- “they're so condescending towards you, they're like oh what are you on today?”
- “It's like that really hurts because you know, I'm just having an off day. But if you're gonna assume that I'm relapsed every single time I start being off maybe you should check on me instead of attacking me”

Pushing Drugs as Treatment

A few participants shared their experiences with medical staff pushing drugs as treatment options, even if they try to express not wanting any drugs due to being in recovery.

FINDINGS

Stigma From Medical Community

- "I think they are appreciative if you say yeah, I am you. I am allergic to anything that gets me high, so I don't give it to me"
- "I feel like Xanax is being pushed a lot. Maybe I don't know, like people that wouldn't even normally you know, drug addicts even."

Sharing Information

One individual shared that everyone was aware of their business after mentioning something to medical staff.

- "It's like you go somewhere and say anything to a doctor and all of a sudden everybody knows your stuff. It's crazy."

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

Pregnant Mother with SUD

An interview in Lake County with a mother who experienced SUD during pregnancy shared her experiences and found several common themes with the recovery focus group.



"IF WE WOULD SHARE MORE KNOWLEDGE AND ESPECIALLY US AS RECOVERING ADDICTS, IF WE WOULD SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE MORE AND AND BE LOUD AND PROUD ABOUT IT, I FEEL LIKE WE WOULD HELP A LOT MORE PEOPLE THAT ARE IN ACTIVE ADDICTION. NOT JUST MOMS, BUT EVERYBODY."

-Interviewee

FINDINGS

Key Informant Interview

The mother shared her experiences with stigma from the medical community, her need for social support, the battle of SUD during pregnancy.

Stigma from Medical Community

- "Even still today, eight years sober (hospital), they still treat me like I'm drug seeking."
- "I cried my eyes out to these people asking for help and they didn't do anything for me. They didn't give me resources. They didn't do anything for me."
- "I still to this day get treated like I'm drug shaking. "
- "I begged them and they didn't do anything."

Need for Social Support

- "I don't care how many times you have to tell somebody about you know, or you know how many times you have to talk to a mother or anybody in general about getting sober, or how many times you have to offer them resources and support. You keep doing it because there's going to be a chance one day that they're ready, that they're at their absolute lowest, you know, and are going to take your advice or take your help."
- "more people need to be like, hey, are you okay?"

FINDINGS

Key Informant Interview

- "People need to feel like like they have support without being judged."
- "Anybody can take a couple of minutes out of their day to help somebody."
- "I mean, man, it's so hard to get sober when you don't have support."
- "everybody knew me and they knew I was struggling and I can't tell you one time that I remember somebody coming up to me and be like, hey are you okay do you need help"

SUD During Pregnancy

- "the need to have that drug is, I don't want to say stronger than you worrying about what it's going to be your baby, but it is. It's definitely more powerful."
- "I was about to have a baby I knew that if I didn't get off of this thing she was going to be born dependent."
- "CPS is going to get called. Mothers are terrified of that"
- "withdraw obviously can can cause you to lose your pregnancy"
- "There's like a big risk. You could lose your baby"
- "So it's almost like you want to keep using it because, you know, if you don't, there's like, you know, this percent of a chance that you could lose your baby."

FINDINGS

Key Informant Interview

Need for Mental Health Resources

- "... you have to have the counseling. To be honest, the Suboxone program, I don't think would work without the counseling."

Barriers to Treatment

- "... they don't have good Internet or a way to access Internet, a ride to go do it. You can go to the library to use Internet but you got a pack of all your kiddos. You got to go there. You got to sit there with your kiddos. I mean, it's hard."
- "We have really no resources, to be honest. Not for sobriety, not for active addiction."
- "A lot of moms don't have a lot of money, can't, you know, aren't able to get home Internet. They have just their cell phones. Cell phones don't always get service."

Medical Staff Pushing Drugs

- "I just had a C-section. I had, you know, been so adamant with the doctors. I can't have anything, opiate, anything narcotic. So I had just gotten done telling the doctor this before she did my release paperwork. The nurse comes in and I kid you not. They called me in a prescription for 30 oxycodone. "

FINDINGS

Key Informant Interview

Words on Addiction and Sobriety

- "It surprises me that we don't. That you don't hear about substance use disorder, I guess. Like as much as we hear about the COVID pandemic because it is such a major pandemic, it really is."
- "And it comes in all shapes and sizes. Addiction can be any mind altering mood changing, you know things."
- "If you could make a career out of addiction, I did it."
- "Once you get into it man it's so hard to get out. It's so hard and it happens so quick, man, it happens so quick"
- "... another thing I wish people would realize we didn't wake up one day and decide, hey, I want to be an addict, you know."
- "There's always gonna be controversy about whether or not addiction is a disease, but if you ask a person who's suffered from addiction, it's a disease. It it it. It wasn't my choice. I didn't want to end up like that know it wasn't my instead of wanting to be a doctor, I wanted to be an addict."
- "Addiction isn't just drugs, and I wish more people would know that."
- "Not everybody can get sober and just be sober."
- "... sobriety can be such a beautiful thing if you're willing to put in the work."

FINDINGS

Key Informant Interview

- "I mean, you might fall on your butt a few times man, if you keep, if you pick yourself back up and you keep going it is so unbelievably worth it in the end."
- "You can't force anybody to be sober."

OVERALL THEMES

Needs for Supporting Those in Recovery

- **Increased need for mental health treatment**
 - Many individuals have underlying reasons behind their substance use, so having treatment that involves mental health therapy or counseling can strengthen their recovery.
- **Improved support from the community**
 - Having support can impact someone's recovery process and help them feel comfortable seeking treatment and prevent relapsing.
- **Decreased stigma from community and medical professionals**
 - Individuals face stigma from community members, medical professionals, and employers that prevent them from progressing in their recovery.
- **Decreased barriers to care**
 - Cost, transportation, internet, lack of recovery options and insurance all play a role in having access to treatment. Breaking these barriers can help provide more individuals the ability to receive care.
- **Increased recovery or sober activities**
 - Create communities for individuals in recovery to strengthen bonds and give healthy outlets to socialize with one another.

OVERALL THEMES

Recommendations

- Sober Sports League
 - Providing adult recreational sport leagues specifically for those in recovery.
- Prevention or Recovery Camps
 - Camping for those in recovery or at risk individuals to help build life skills and create social bonds with others.
- Employment Liaison
 - Someone to bridge the gap between treatment or incarceration and help find job opportunities
- Recovery Job Network
 - Connect with community partners and organizations that will hire individuals in recovery.
- Treatment with Mental Health Services
 - Connect treatment centers to mental health services in order to strengthen the recovery process.
- Step Process for Peer Recovery Coaches
 - Create a step program to becoming a peer recovery coach to allow individuals to help others sooner, without putting their own recovery at risk.