


A NEW CULTURE



A college campus is not typically thought of as a place for students to get well and recover from substance use disorders (SUD). Fortunately, that is changing with the expansion of Collegiate Recovery Programs (CRP). According to the Association of Recovery in Higher Education,¹ a CRP is a “supportive environment within the campus culture that reinforces the decision to disengage from addictive behavior. It is designed to provide an educational opportunity alongside recovery support to ensure that students do not have to sacrifice one for the other.” Recently, CRPs have been gaining national attention with the number of CRP programs increasing from about 35 in 2010 to near 100 in 2013.

CRPs are filling the gap in the continuum of care for young people by enabling students who are in recovery (SIR) to pursue their academic and personal goals simultaneously and overcome barriers to recovery by providing them with an array of recovery and academic support services. Institutions of higher education have improved greatly in their efforts to implement successful substance prevention, intervention, and treatment programs, but most are lacking in specific programming for SIR.²

BARRIERS TO RECOVERY ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Barriers to recovery on college campuses include finding a network of peers, leaving home, experiencing change in routine, returning to academia, and feeling isolated. All of these barriers can compound one another and pose challenges to the recovery of a student who is not vigilant about seeking support and solutions to these barriers.

Maintaining abstinence on campus is incredibly challenging especially with the added stress, insecurity, and social pressure that the college environment often brings. One of the biggest struggles is finding a network of social support to belong to. Other students do not always understand what it means to be in recovery and that partaking in any alcohol or drug use is dangerous for SIR. SIR may feel isolated from the collegiate social scene and not feel a part of the larger community. Even in a setting where there is no substance use occurring, such as a classroom, the topics of informal conversation before and after class are often centered on parties and alcohol.³

Returning to an academic setting is another barrier to recovery. New college students experience a drastic change in their daily schedule and structure, which can be problematic for SIR who do not know how to fill their time with constructive activities in a new environment. The additional change of leav-

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ing home is another obstacle in and of itself, but also adds to the scope of change experienced upon going to school. SIR have to uproot and leave the support system that provides comfort, ease, and familiarity.³

Addiction often interferes with a student's motivation and ability to do well in school; this phenomenon often starts in high school. As a result, SIR may be behind other college students and need to take remedial classes or have additional tutoring to catch up on the material not learned earlier. The fear of failing and feeling overwhelmed by the structure and amount of coursework can be challenging barriers to recovery as well.

EXAMPLES OF COLLEGIATE RECOVERY PROGRAMS

The role of a CRP is to create, implement, and maintain peer-to-peer support services that promote a culture of abstinence from alcohol and other drugs.² For many SIR, CRP is the safest pathway to attaining a college degree, and can lead to higher recruitment and retention.⁴ CRPs can vary greatly from school to school due to differences in institutional structure, the organizational department it falls under, the campus culture, and the size and type of institution.

The first and oldest recovery support program for SIR on a college campus started at Brown University. In 1977, Professor Bruce Donovan was appointed Associate Dean with Special Responsibilities in the Area of Chemical Dependency. Little did he know, he ignited a movement that would affect thousands of students across the United States. In the 1980s, the three original CRPs were established at Rutgers University, Augsburg College, and Texas Tech University all because Bruce Donovan and Brown paved the way.⁴ Two of these programs are in schools we have attended and therefore

we chose to describe them in more detail to provide a sense of what CRPs are like.

Rutgers University was the first to offer on-campus housing for SIR. The Alcohol and Other Drug Assistance Program for Students (ADAPS) has existed there since 1983. ADAPS provides chemical dependency counseling, recovery support groups, and interventions for high-risk students. It has provided on-campus recovery housing for SIR since 1988; currently, there are two campus residence halls that house 38 students. Rutgers ADAPS also employs a full-time recovery counselor who is responsible for managing all recovery-related programming on campus and serves as the primary counselor for SIR housing residents.

The Collegiate Recovery Community at Texas Tech University began in 1986 due to an abundance of recovering students who were a part of the chemical dependency counselor program. This CRP grew from providing a 12-step meeting on campus, to hiring staff, to building a 17,000-square-foot building dedicated to SIR. Programming includes on-campus support group meetings, a recovery meeting called Celebration of Recovery, a specially trained academic advisor, financial assistance, a seminar in addiction and recovery, a peer mentor system, family weekends, organized community service, and the registered student organization, the Association of Students About Service.²

BENEFITS AND SUCCESS OF COLLEGIATE RECOVERY COMMUNITIES

Although outcomes to measure the success of CRPs are limited, preliminary data show signs of effectiveness. Results from the first national study of CRPs utilized data from 26 schools and 235 CRP students;⁵ 77% of CRP students said that it was very important for their school to offer recovery supports and that they

would not have enrolled in their school if it did not have a CRP. The recovery rate of the SIR students was 92%, meaning only 8% relapsed during the academic year surveyed. Overall retention rates were higher for CRP students than for the average student body (92% vs. 81% respectively); graduation rates were also higher within CRPs (89% vs. 61%).

The benefits of CRPs are not limited to SIR. The campus at large is also positively affected by having a visible CRP and vocal SIR. CRP students that are open about their recovery and are involved in alcohol- and other drug-prevention and awareness efforts on campus can use their lived experience to provide more effective messaging to the other students. SIR also help to reduce the stigma that surrounds seeking help for a SUD.⁶ Another benefit of a CRP is showing other students a counter culture that is alive on their campus and that there are other ways of living besides the stereotypical alcohol/ party scene. The presence of this counter culture may reduce the overall drug and alcohol consumption of students. Typically, recovering students have a tremendous sense of gratitude, grace, and redemption which lends them to being assets in the classroom. SIR take class seriously, are of service to their peers, and take advantage of every opportunity to better themselves.

The success of CRPs is due to creating a supportive community that increases recovery capital and promotes long-term recovery. Recovery capital are those assets that support both beginning and maintaining long-term recovery.⁷ There are four main types of recovery capital: personal, social, community, and cultural. The types and amount of recovery capital depend on a variety of social and environmental factors and differ from individual to individual, as each person needs different types of supports to help her or his recovery. Research found that programs focusing on social and community recovery capital were able to increase long-term recovery outcomes as well as increase quality of life.⁸ More specifically, CRPs that include organized weekly activities that allow for positive socialization and relationship development within the community have higher recovery rates among their members than those without such supports. In addition, this research found that the inclusion of community service activities helps to increase the success of CRPs as measured by student retention and recovery rates.

CONCLUSION

Many approaches have been taken on college campuses to combat the effects of drug and alcohol use on their student bodies. A CRP is the most comprehensive

method to support SIR. We know the power of CRPs from our own experiences and would like to conclude with stories from our lives. Having the opportunity to excel academically at Rutgers because of its CRP, this past year Ben received the Harry S. Truman Scholarship, which is a highly competitive national scholarship. During his finalist interview he openly discussed his recovery, the Rutgers CRP, and being incarcerated when one of the interviewers, a U.S. District Court Judge, said to him, "So, it seems like you're the exception..." Ben interrupted the interviewer and said, "I'm not the exception. I may seem like the exception because I've been given the opportunities that allow me to be here today, but I know countless other people, if given the same opportunities that I was, could be sitting here before you. If I'm the exception and I receive this award, and I move forward, and no one else who has come from where I've come from has an opportunity to win this award, then I haven't done my job and I haven't been a good advocate."

Sarah's CRP experience has come full circle. She was once a student in the CRP at Texas Tech University and is now helping The Ohio State University start its CRP. As a Graduate Administrative Associate in the Student Life Student Wellness Center, she serves in an administrative role helping to increase the recovery capital of the students. Sarah says that there is no greater feeling than to carry the message of recovery to the over 56,000 students on her campus and create a culture that is proud to have a visible recovery community.

The reality is, each step along the way we have had support, mentors, and opportunities; but unfortunately that is not the case for everyone. It is our hope and the vision of the CRP movement that all SIR will have access to similar opportunities and supports. Because of CRPs, students are returning to school and maintaining their recovery. They are contributing to their campus through service, involvement, and leadership. Parents are able to sleep soundly at night while their children are away at college. The necessity for these programs and the benefits of them is clear. By investing in SIR via CRPs, colleges and universities will be sending a message that these students are just as important as any other student and deserve a second chance at higher education.

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