

WELCOME TO DAY 1!

2026 RAI SYMPOSIUM
Community Recovery in Action:
Honoring Progress 



THURSDAY MAY 07 & FRIDAY MAY 08 2026

RIVERFRONT CONVENTION CENTER





TOM EDWARDS

Executive Director



**Remove barriers.
Build community.
Honor progress.
That's community
recovery in action.**





Heather Newton



Lara Chatterley



Lizzy Benbow Toler

We could not do this without our community's help and support!

SHERIFF BLACKWOOD

Sheriff, Orange County, NC

A 43-year Veteran of the Sheriff's Office. He was elected as the 47th Sheriff of Orange County and took Office in December of 2014. Sheriff Blackwood currently serves as the Chairman of the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association's Executive Committee. Most recently he served as the 2022-2023 President of the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association during their 100th Anniversary. In 2021 Governor Cooper appointed Sheriff Blackwood to the newly formed Commission for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services. He is an advocate of the recovery community and works tirelessly to examine and develop innovative ways to address the opioid epidemic, drug misuse and mental illness, and received the Dogwood Award from Attorney General Josh Stein for his work in these areas.



EVENT EMCEE



THANK YOU TO OUR PLATINUM SPONSOR



NC DEPARTMENT OF **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Division of Mental Health,
Developmental Disabilities
and Substance Use Services

THIS PROGRAM IS SUPPORTED AND PARTIALLY FUNDED BY
**THE NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION OF
MENTAL HEALTH, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, AND SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES.**

**THANK YOU TO OUR
PLATINUM SPONSOR**



NAADAC
NAADAC.ORG

THE ASSOCIATION FOR ADDICTION PROFESSIONALS

**THANK YOU TO OUR
NETWORKING BREAK SPONSOR**

ICGH

Integrated Care for Greater Health



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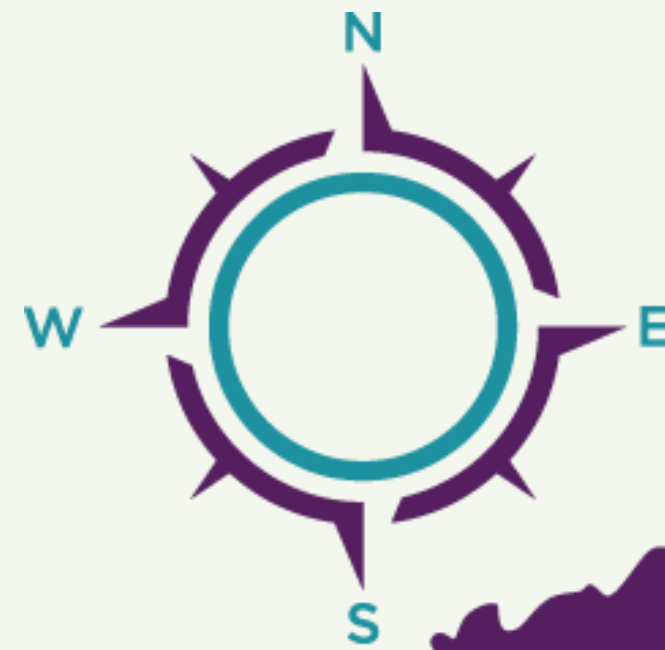


**THANK YOU TO OUR
NETWORKING BREAK SPONSOR**



**HEALING
TRANSITIONS**

THANK YOU TO OUR **GOLD** SPONSOR



ADCNC



**Alcohol / Drug Council
of North Carolina**

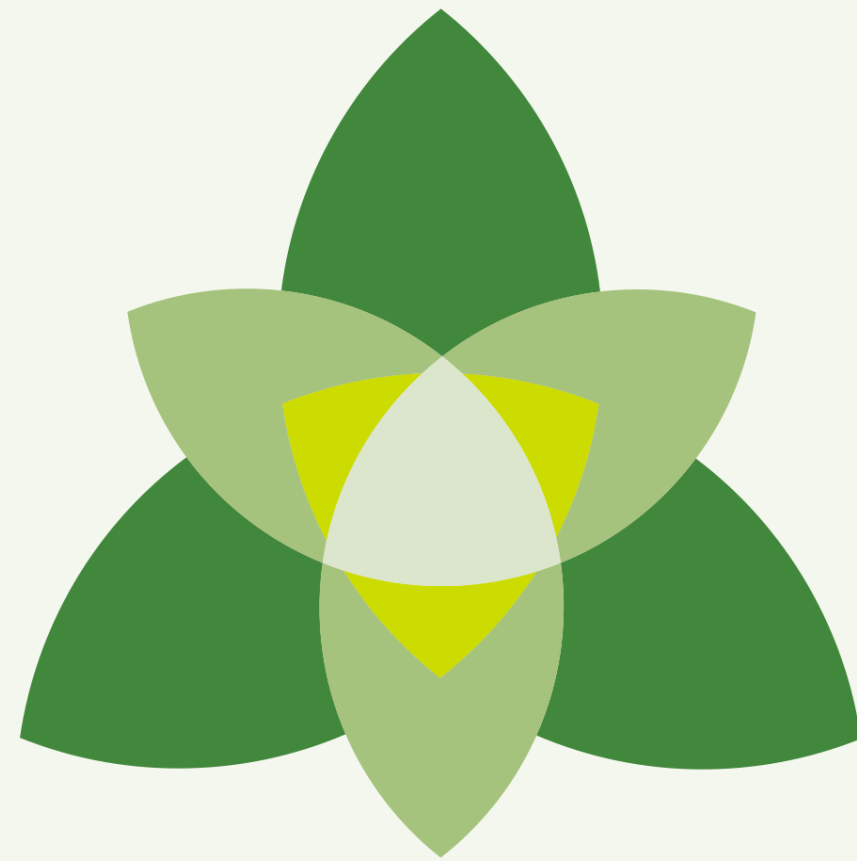


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BRYNN MARR
HOSPITAL

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Trillium

HEALTH RESOURCES

Transforming Lives. Building Community Well-Being.

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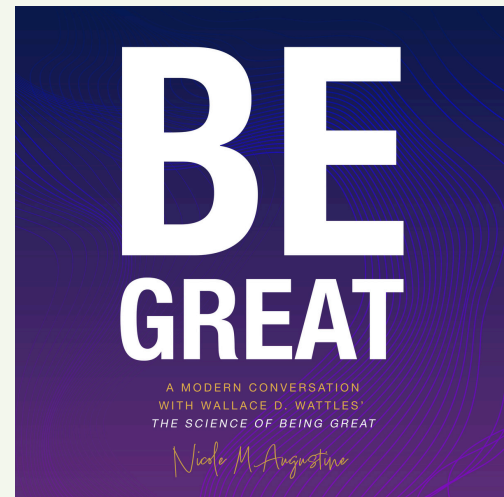
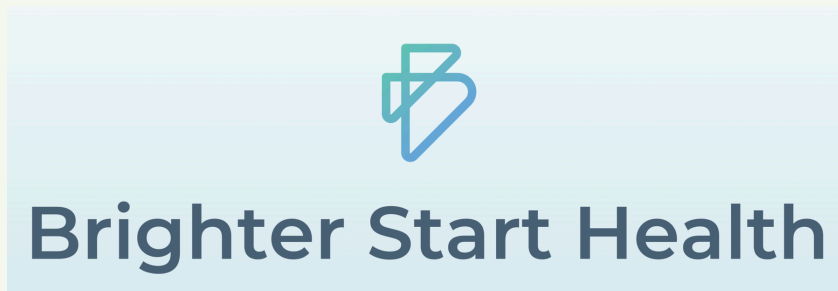
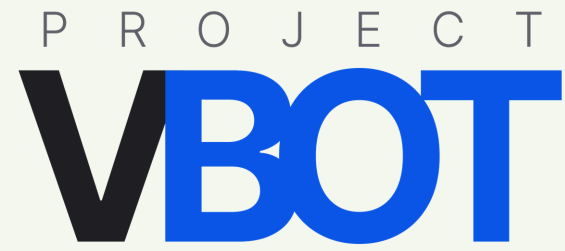
GREENSBORO ABC

THANK YOU TO OUR **GOLD** SPONSOR



The
Harold H. Bate
Foundation

THANK YOU TO OUR SILVER SPONSORS



BINGO

Name: _____

1. Write your name on this sheet.
2. Visit each exhibitor and have them sign their square.
3. Once all squares are filled, drop your completed sheet into the RAI Bucket.
4. You'll be entered into the Day 2 Samsung Galaxy Tablet A11+
5. Must be present to win.

1. Visit the exhibitors
2. Get all of their signatures
3. Then enter for your chance to WIN!

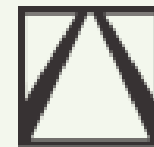


Continuing Education Credits!

PLEASE COMPLETE THE **ATTENDANCE VERIFICATION & EVALUATIONS** TO RECEIVE CREDIT

FREE

OFFERING CONTINUED EDUCATION!



NORTH CAROLINA STATE BAR
CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION

**8.5
CLE**

**9
SS**

**7
CLE**

Thursday, May 7, 2026					
Session	NC APPB (SS)	NC State Bar (CLE)	NAADAC (CE)	Contact Hours	Initial session attendance
Welcome (Tom Edwards, Sheriff Blackwood, Jack Veit)	0.5	0	0		
Activity #1 - What was your the first message about addiction? Victoria Menz	0.5		0.5		
Keynote Speaker #1 - Nicole M. Augustine: Being Great: Rethinking Prevention, Recovery, and What It Means to Truly Thrive		1.5			
Panel #1: Beyond Stability: What Does Excellence in Recovery Actually Look Like? Facilitator: David Whitesock // Panelists: Nicole Augustine, Beth Fisher Sanders, Stephanie Thornton	2		2		
Case Studies: Group Table Activity Facilitated by: Rulo - Kristina Bryant & Tara Kunkel+ Panel Discussion		1			
	2	1.5	2		
Total available	5	4	4.5		
Total for DAY 1 you are requesting					



← Scan QR Code to complete Day 1 Evaluation

Friday, May 8, 2026					
Session	NC APPB (SS)	NC State Bar (CLE)	NAADAC (CE)	Contact Hours	Initial session attendance
Keynote Speaker # 2 - Dr. John Kelly: "Maintaining Vigilance and Building Resilience: How Communities Mobilize Successful Change"		1			
Panel #2: "From Vigilance to Action: How Communities Sustain Recovery and Public Safety" Facilitator: David Whitesock // Panelists: Dr. John Kelly, Jeff Hill, Ernie Lee, Chris Budnick	2		2		
Table work Stephanie Thornton: Recovery Ecosystem	1	1	1		
Panel #3: "Once the Fire Is Out: Flourishing in Addiction Recovery" Facilitator: Chris Budnick, // Panelists: Bill Stauffer, Jason Schwartz, Trina Fullard	1	0	1		
Total available	4	3	4		
Total for DAY 2 you are requesting					



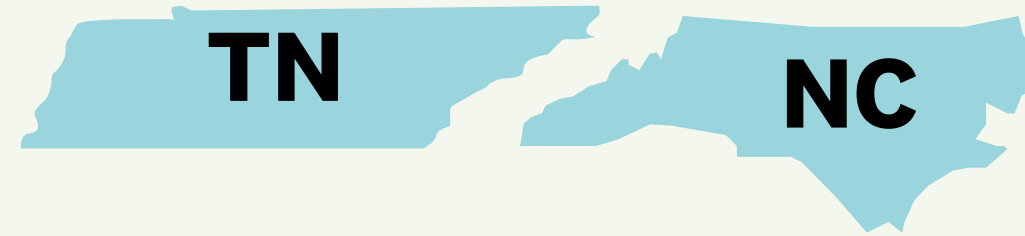
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DAY 1 AGENDA

- 10 - 10:25 AM** **Welcome: Tom Edwards, RAI & Charles Blackwood, Sheriff, Jack Veit, Craven County**
- 10:25 - 10:45 AM** **Activity: “What was your first message about addiction?” Victoria Menz, Safe Project**
- 11:05 - 11:55 AM** **Keynote: Nicole M. Augustine, “Being Great: Rethinking Prevention, Recovery, and What It Means to Truly Thrive”**
- 12 - 1 PM** **Lunch - Pork BBQ, Rolls, Cole Slaw, Baked Beans, Hush Puppies, Dirt Cake**
- 1 - 2 PM** **Panel #1: “Beyond Stability: What Does Excellence in Recovery Actually Look Like?” Nicole Augustine, Beth Fisher Sanders, Stephanie Thornton, Facilitated by: David Whitesock**
- 2 - 2:15 PM** **Eastern Regional SUD Task Force Update, Scott Harrelson, Craven County Public Health Director**
- 2:20 - 2:35 PM** **Networking Break**
- 2:35 - 4:00 PM** **Tablework: Case Studies, Tara Kunkel & Kris Bryant**
- 4:00 - 4:15 PM** **Closing: Attorney General Jeff Jackson**
- 5:30 - 6:30 PM** **Craven County Opioid Settlement Annual Meeting**

VICTORIA MENZ



victoria@safeproject.us

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, SAFE PROJECT SAFE Project (Stop the Addiction Fatality Epidemic)

Victoria or “Vic” Menz is the Assistant Director of SAFE Campuses at SAFE Project. Vic oversees the Collegiate Recovery Leadership Academy, where she supports student leaders in making an impact on their campuses through equity-centered recovery and harm-reduction initiatives.

Her professional background includes expertise in higher education, public health, and mezzo social work. Before joining SAFE Project, Vic worked in the Student Wellness department at UNC-Chapel Hill. There, she integrated harm reduction strategies into campus practices, managed grant-funded prevention and recovery initiatives, and collaborated with campus departments and community organizations. Her approach focuses on systems-level change, person-centered perspectives, and reducing stigma.

As someone in long-term recovery, Vic is passionate about fostering inclusive environments that empower help-seeking, servant leadership, and cultural shifts towards recovery-informed communities.





Starting Where We Are

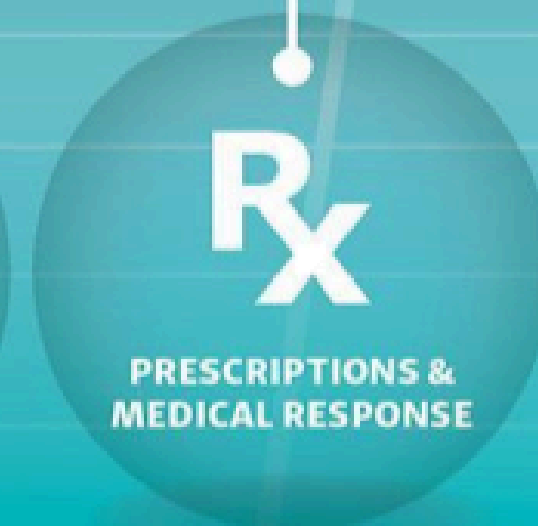
A REFLECTIVE EXERCISE



SAFEProject

Stop the Addiction Fatality Epidemic

Our mission is to contribute in a tangible way to overcoming the addiction epidemic in the United States.

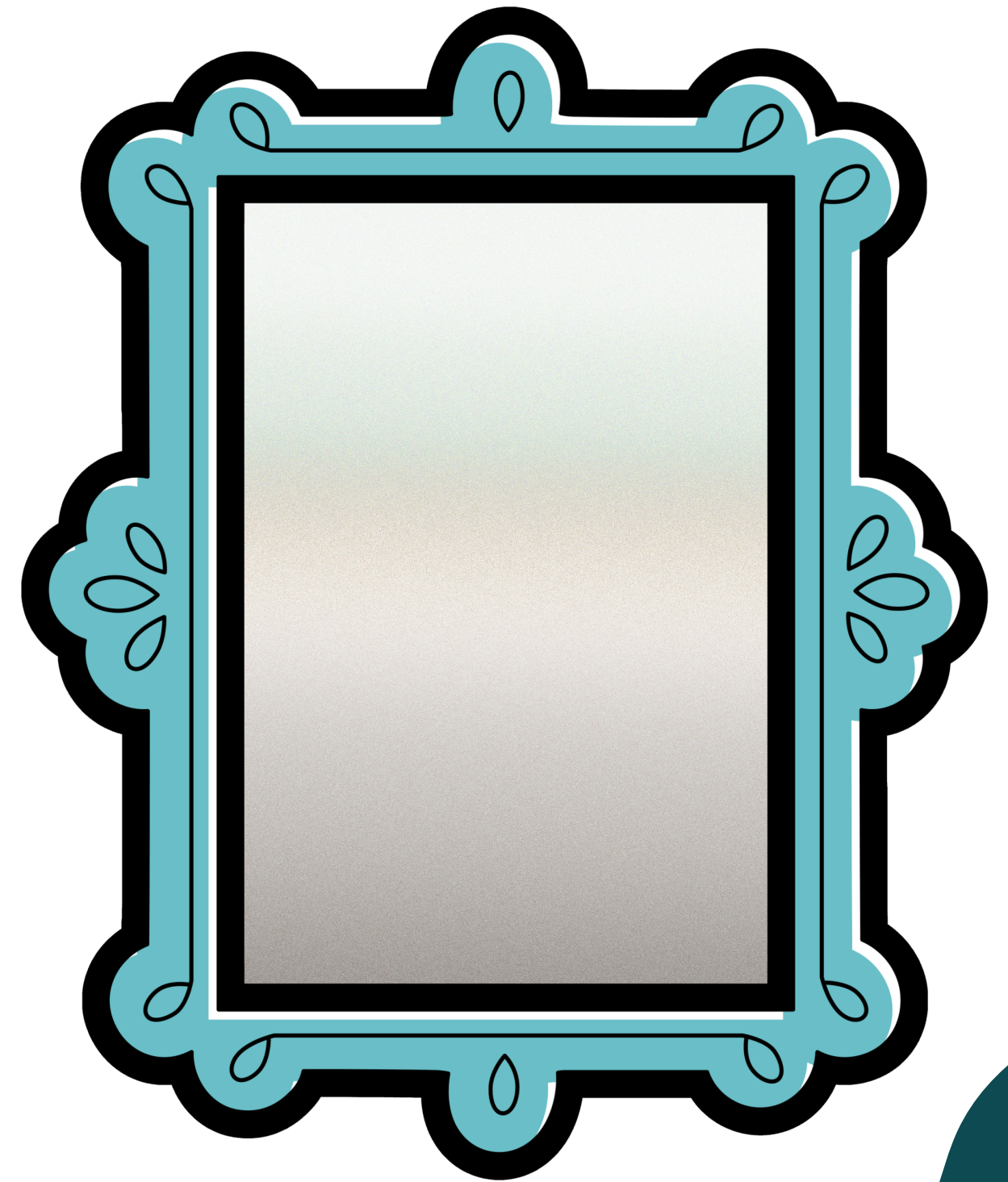


Activity Framing:

We all come from different experiences and roles that form our perspectives. Those perspectives shape how we respond, what (or who) we prioritize, and who feels welcome.

This is a quick session to pause, reflect, and connect before diving into the rest of the Symposium.

The activity encourages us to reflect on what we carry with us and how it influences our experiences in the field.

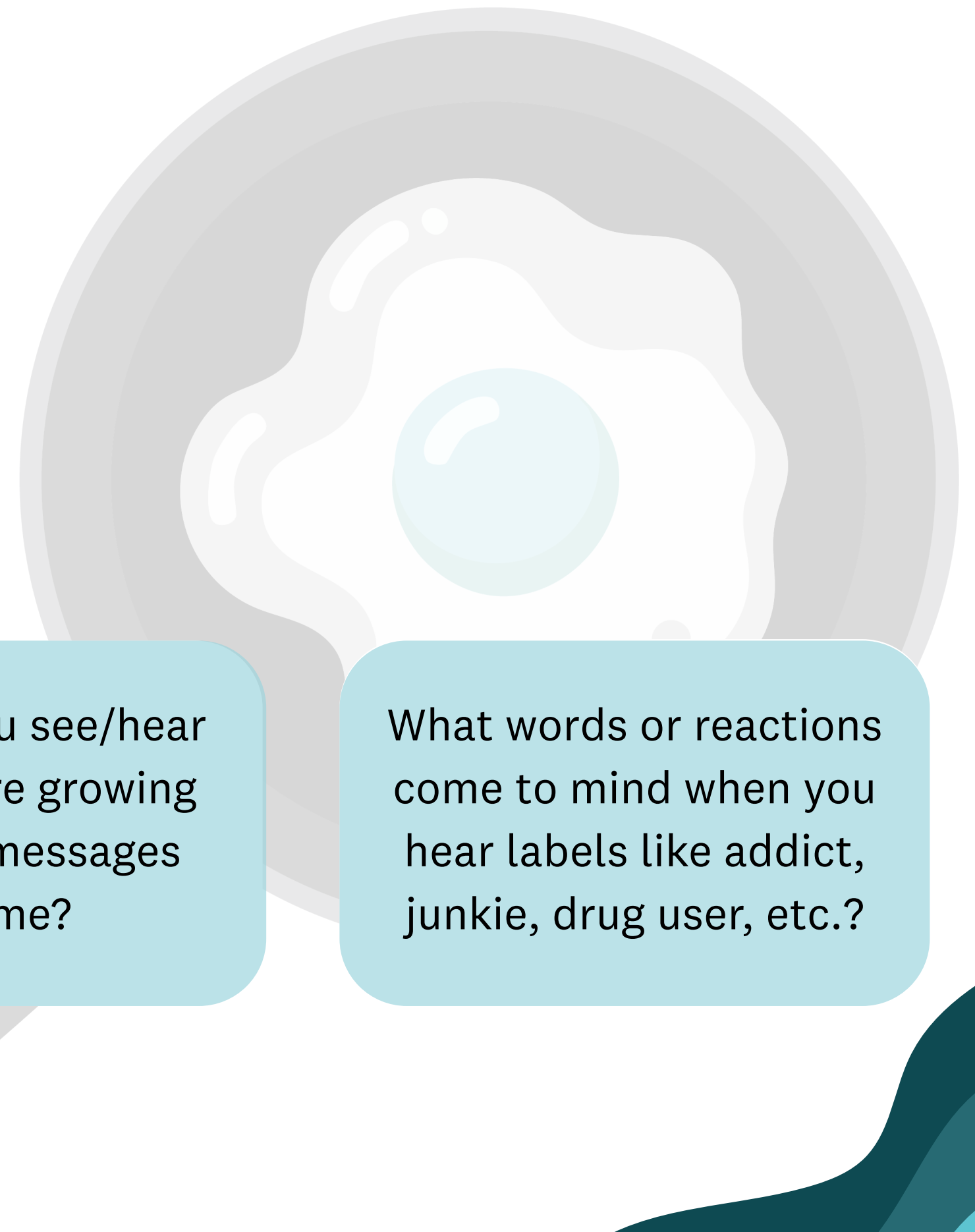


Keep In Mind



- No need to share personal or difficult experiences
- Keep this reflection at a level that feels comfortable
- Passing or simply listening is always okay
- Be thoughtful about language. Do your best to avoid judgments and speak from personal experience rather than generalizations when possible

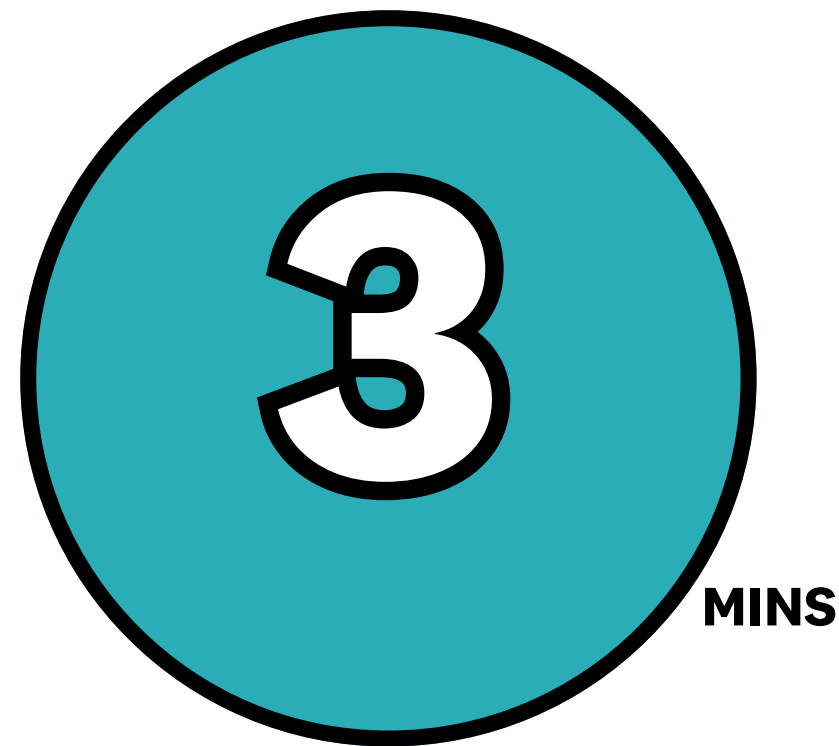
2
MINS



How did your family or people in your childhood environment talk about substance use or people who use substances?

What messages did you see/hear from media and culture growing up? How have those messages changed over time?

What words or reactions come to mind when you hear labels like addict, junkie, drug user, etc.?



Share with those at your table or near you.
As you discuss, consider:

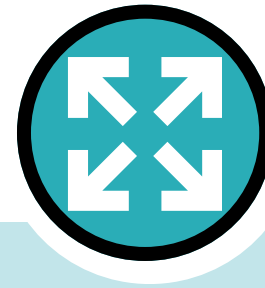
- What patterns do you notice?
- What differences stand out?
- Where did these messages come from?

So...why does this matter?

These messages can have lasting impacts that may:



shape how we
respond



expand or limit access
to care and support



influence who feels
supported



Awareness of these influences can increase our
empathy for people impacted by substance use.

Common Responses to Medical Diagnoses

How We Respond Matters



It's not that people don't care...



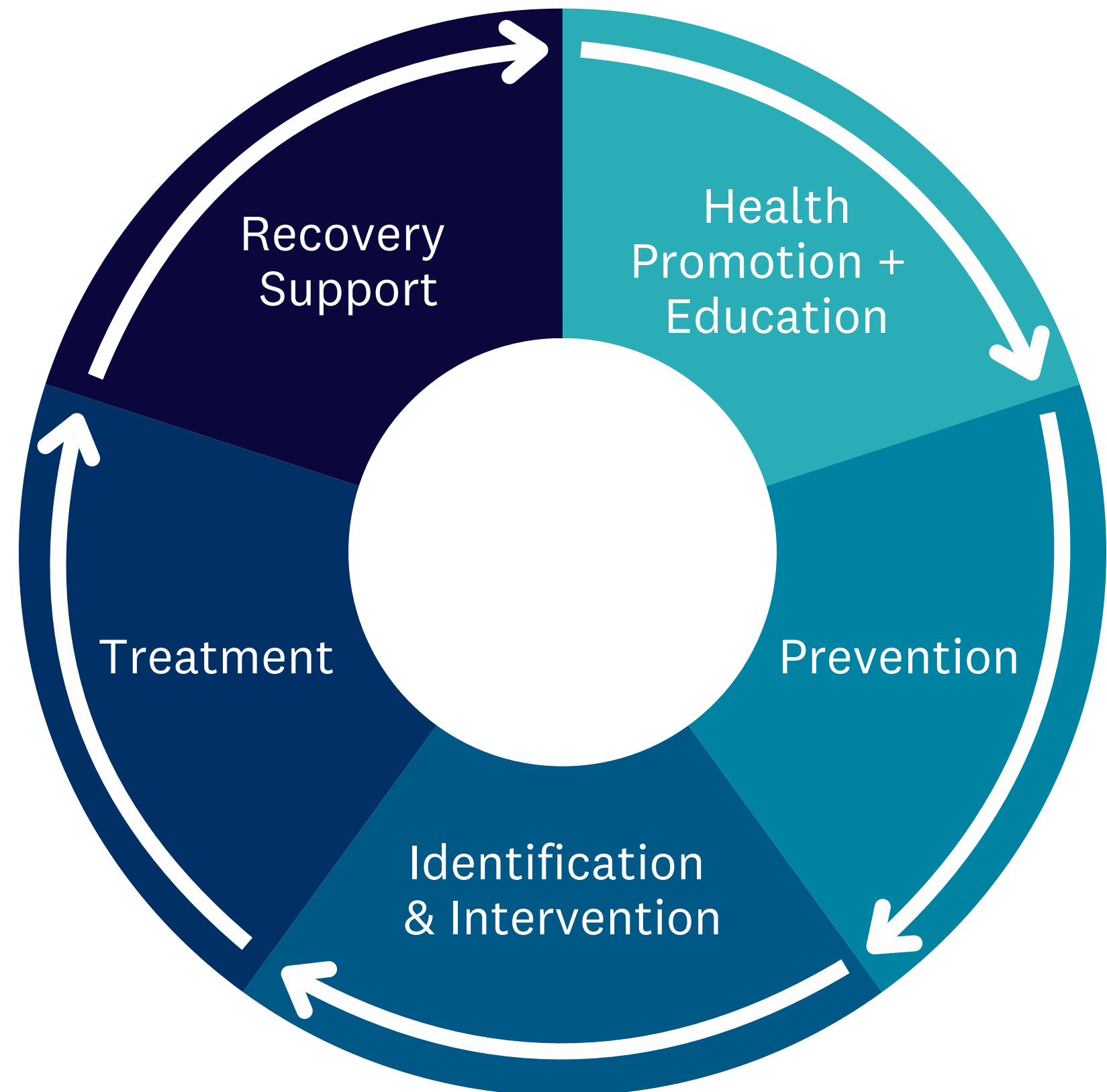
...it's that we've learned different ways to respond.

The Continuum of Care

The continuum of care is often shown as a linear path, which can make each stage feel separate or one-directional, with recovery as an endpoint.

In reality, these areas are interconnected—each informs and is informed by the others.

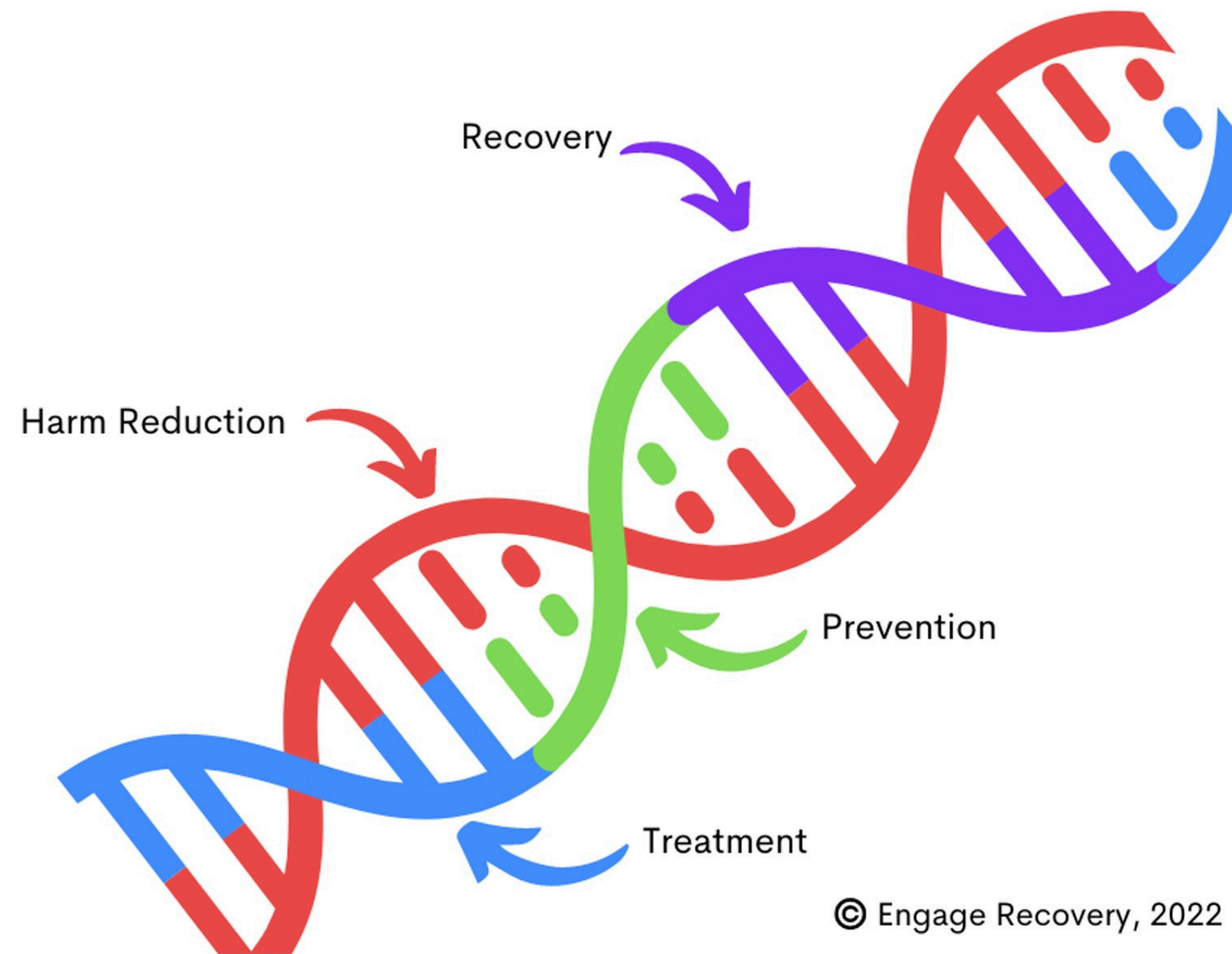
A circle better reflects this, though people often move between stages in non-linear ways based on their needs and experiences.



<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bdas/continuum-of-care.htm>

Harm Reduction is Part of the Continuum's DNA

It isn't tied to one stage—it moves with people across the continuum.



© Engage Recovery, 2022

Throughout the Symposium...

- Stay curious about our own assumptions
- Notice how language and reactions shape access
- Consider how your role can expand who feels supported

*The way we think about this work shapes
the way people experience it.*

Questions?



**Send us an email at
campuses@safeproject.us**



www.safeproject.us



A photograph of two Chihuahua puppies sitting in a field of tall grass. The puppy on the left is looking towards the camera with its mouth slightly open. The puppy on the right is looking slightly to the right. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal filter. The text 'Thank you.' is written in a large, white, bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

Thank you.



Sponsor Spotlight:
Networking Break Sponsor

ICCGH

Integrated Care for Greater Health

Lets take a short networking break 10:50 - 11:05 AM



You don't want to miss what's coming up...



NICOLE AUGUSTINE

Public Health Strategist, Social Entrepreneur, & Founder RIZE Consultants

Nicole M. Augustine is a public health strategist, social entrepreneur, and founder of RIZE Consultants. She is known for translating complex prevention and behavioral health concepts into language that moves both hearts and systems. Nicole's work bridges prevention, treatment, and recovery through a lens of human potential, belonging, and practical action.



A dynamic keynote speaker and author of *Be Great: A Modern Conversation with Wallace D. Wattles' The Science of Being Great*, Nicole brings a signature style that blends evidence-based insight with transformational storytelling. Her message helps leaders, providers, and people with lived experience see themselves as active agents of change in building healthier communities.

Nicole lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, and serves organizations nationwide through speaking, facilitation, strategic planning, and curriculum development.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER



The Greatness Continuum

*Rethinking Prevention, Recovery, and
What It Means to Truly Thrive*

Nicole Augustine

Public Health Strategist, Social Entrepreneur,
& Founder, RIZE Consultants



What does it
actually mean
for a person
to be well?

Truly well.



Stability is the doorway, not the destination.

Purpose.
Connection.
Contribution.
Dignity.
Possibility.



A PERSONAL JOURNEY.



THE STORY I INHERITED

A CHILD. A FAMILY.

A VERSION OF THE TRUTH.



Science gave
me language
for compassion.



People are
responding to
conditions.



**Stories shape
systems.**
**Systems shape
outcomes.**

FROM STORY TO CONDITIONS.



STORY



SYSTEMS



OUTCOMES



THE GREATNESS CONTINUUM



BE GREAT.



HOW WE SHOW UP

PURPOSE. ★ PRESENCE. ★ DIGNITY.



DO GREAT.



HOW WE FOLLOW THROUGH

ACTION. ★ TRUST. ★ FOLLOW-THROUGH.



**I did not
need one door.
I needed
a path.**



LIVED EXPERIENCE



IS INTELLIGENCE.

WISDOM.



INSIGHT.



STRATEGY.



BUILD GREAT SYSTEMS.

HOW WE REMOVE BARRIERS TOGETHER

CONNECTED PATHS.

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY.

REMOVED BARRIERS.



RECOVERY IS PREVENTION FULFILLED.

That is greatness.



SURVIVAL



STABILITY



CONNECTION



CONTRIBUTION



LEGACY

SHOW. SHIFT. STRENGTHEN.



SHOW

How will I
show up
differently?



SHIFT

What will I
shift in my
daily practice?



STRENGTHEN

What partnership
will I
strengthen?



Write it down.

THE GREATNESS CONTINUUM



**What are we creating
that allows it
to unfold?**



THE GREATNESS CONTINUUM



Thank you.





GROUP PICTURE & LUNCH

PLEASE RETURN BY 1:00 PM

PANEL #1: “BEYOND STABILITY: WHAT DOES EXCELLENCE IN RECOVERY ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?”

Facilitated by:

DAVID WHITESOCK
Founder CommonlyWell



Nicole Augustine

Public Health Strategist, Social Entrepreneur, Author & Founder RIZE Consultants



Beth Fisher Sanders

President Emeritus and Standards Chair of National Alliance for Recovery Residences (NARR) & Founder and CEO of Hope Homes Inc.



Stephanne Thornton

Clinical Director, West Virginia Judicial and Lawyer Assistance Program & owner of Transform Legal, a consultancy focused on mitigation, training, and sustainability

Eastern NC Regional SUD Task Force Update





**Carteret, Craven, Duplin,
Greene, Jones, Lenoir,
Onslow, Pamlico and Wayne**



CHAIR

Chris Jenkins

Beth Fisher Sanders

Jeff Hill

Open

TASK FORCE



UPDATE

Position

Development:

Regional Coordinator

Resources:

Updated the recovery housing list for ECC region.

Strategic planning for connecting resources to service providers

Resources:

Mapping gaps + existing supports

Stigma:

Addressing as key access barrier

Next: Expanding membership + meeting post-symposium

Next:

Identify Chair/Co-Chair

Expanding membership

4 FOCUS AREAS

**INTERESTED IN JOINING A
TASK FORCE?**

Contact Heather Newton

heathern@recoveryall.org

Sponsor Spotlight: Networking Break Sponsor Operation Gateway



Lets take a short networking break

2:20 - 2:35 PM



You don't want to miss what's coming up...



TARA KUNKEL

- Award-winning national leader in criminal justice, substance use, and public health.
- Inspired by a family member's struggle, built a career pioneering cross-sector collaborations.
- Former Senior Drug Policy Advisor, U.S. DOJ – grew opioid response program from \$27M → \$187M.
- Directed 25+ projects nationwide; forged DOJ–CDC partnership saving countless lives.
- MSW (VCU), BA (UVA). Resides in
- Arlington, VA & enjoys escape room competitions.

KRIS BRYANT



- 30 years of justice experience, focusing on community corrections and court management.
- Former Principal Consultant at the National Center for State Courts, leading DOJ-funded projects.
- Expertise in justice, substance use, and mental health; trained in SIM & Evidence-Based Decision Making.
- Frequent national presenter on supervision, behavioral health, rural justice, and workforce wellness.
- MBA and a BS in Criminal Justice, with minors in Psychology, Sociology, and Business.

Rulo Strategies



CASE STUDIES

TABLE FACILITATOR

How It Works

- Case studies highlight individual + community context with prompts.
- Participants discuss, applying local knowledge of services.

Facilitator Role

- Guide discussion + record responses.
- Encourage ideas, innovation, and collaboration.
- End with a community takeaway from participants.



LARGE GROUP DEBRIEF

CASE STUDY #1: CRYSTAL

Background

- 37-year-old woman from a stable, middle-class, religious family
- Began substance use in teens to cope with isolation and emotional discomfort
- Progressed to heroin (IV use at 23) and alcohol use disorder
- Long-standing cycle of substance use and incarceration
- Currently hospitalized with severe vein infection

Challenges

- Multiple treatment attempts; unable to sustain long-term recovery
- Cycles of sobriety during incarceration, relapse upon reentry
- Ongoing domestic violence; repeated separation and reconciliation
- Internalized stigma and limited understanding of substance use

Barriers

- No stable housing or recovery environment post-incarceration
- Family support limited by boundaries and lack of addiction education
- Lack of coordinated, continuous care across systems
- Minimal access to long-term recovery supports and safe alternative

CASE STUDY #2: REGINALD

Background

- 28-year-old man from a close-knit, high-achieving family
- Former standout student-athlete (4.0 GPA) with strong future expectations
- Began using Adderall at 18 to cope with anxiety and self-doubt
- Use escalated rapidly to high daily doses; academic and personal decline followed
- Maintained a multi-year deception about college/law school; now living at home, unemployed

Challenges

- Stimulant use disorder with polysubstance use (Adderall + cannabis)
- Untreated anxiety and depression driving substance use
- Significant identity loss tied to high-achiever expectations
- Legal issues (probation, misdemeanor larceny)
- Deep shame and denial delaying recognition and intervention

Barriers

- Lack of early mental health identification and treatment
- Stigma and pressure to maintain success/perfection
- Family uncertain how to support
- Limited connection to treatment and recovery resources
- Legal record impacting future stability and opportunities

CASE STUDY #3: DENISE

Background

- 43-year-old woman from rural eastern North Carolina
- Early exposure to loss, trauma, and family instability
- Began alcohol use at 14; progressed to cocaine, then methamphetamine
- Long-term meth use (16 years) while maintaining appearance of functioning
- Mother of two; now facing emotional exhaustion and concern for son's substance use

Challenges

- Substance use driven by unresolved grief and trauma
- High-functioning addiction masking severity for years
- Limited emotional processing; reliance on substances to cope
- Significant impact on children (anxiety, instability, neglect)
- Intergenerational risk - son showing early warning signs

Barriers

- Limited access to rural mental health and treatment services
- Lack of trauma-informed care across lifespan
- Cultural norms (stoicism, privacy) discouraging help-seeking
- Delayed recognition and intervention due to outward functioning

CASE STUDY #1: “CRYSTAL”



AMANDA
WILLIAMS

CASE STUDY #2: “REGINALD”



JEFF HILL

CASE STUDY #3: “DENISE”



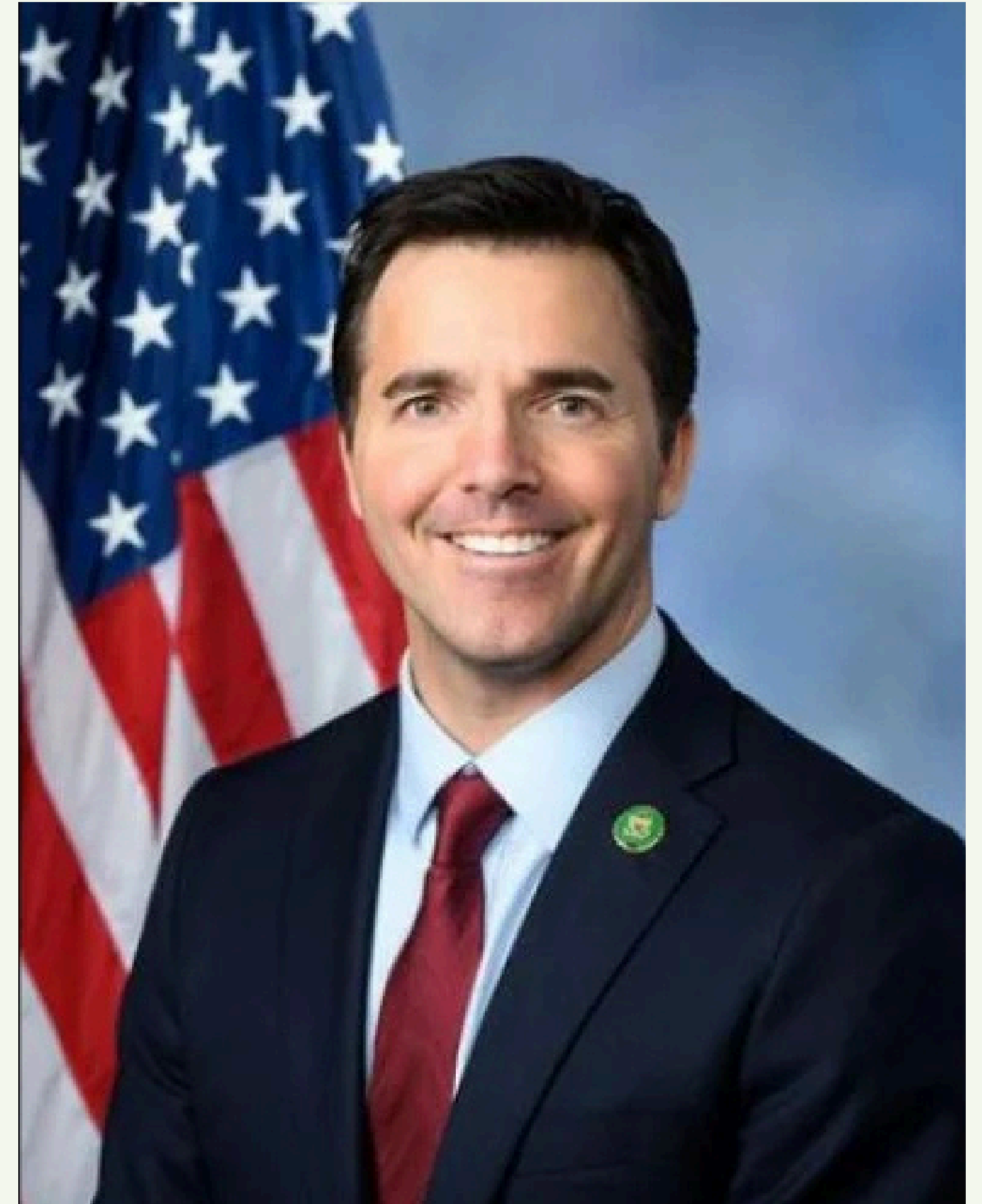
TRACEY
PRICE

2026 RAI SYMPOSIUM
Community Recovery in Action:
Honoring Progress



ATTORNEY GENERAL

JEFF JACKSON



- Take 1 minute to share your thoughts
- Helps us reflect, improve, and shape future events

*Every response matters.
Thank you!*



BINGO

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OFFERING CONTINUED EDUCATION!



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CLE**

**9
SS**

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TONIGHT!

5:30-6:30pm - Stay to attend the Craven County Annual SUD Community Meeting

TOMORROW!

8am - Coffee & light fare

9am - Morning Session begins

