

A Little History

My name is Mary Drew and after years of trying to control my consumption of alcohol and failing, I began my recovery from alcoholism in March of 2008. While working out of town for several years, I would drive home and listen to my adult children tell me who of their friends had overdosed and lived, and who had overdosed and died. Nothing was being done in my community to combat drug and alcohol abuse, so I decided to do something about it.

In September of 2008, I founded Reality Check to help people who were struggling with alcohol or drug use. Our mission is to holistically reduce alcohol and drug use, addiction, and overdoses and the related economic and social costs to individuals, families, and businesses, by providing comprehensive addiction services to NH residents. After meeting in my kitchen for 8 years, I wrote and received a 5-year grant from the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, to implement drug and alcohol prevention programming in school districts in the Monadnock Region.

Today, Reality Check provides prevention to school districts, individual assessments and interventions, in-person and tele-health treatment and recovery support services, and strategies for employers to better support employees with substance use issues. We also provide addiction trainings leading to credentialing to grow NHs addiction workforce.

But today, we are fighting an epidemic within a COVID 19 pandemic, which further complicates outcomes for people with substance use issues. Many have related respiratory and heart complications and cannot maintain social distancing while in shelters, treatment centers, or jail.

As support agencies and recovery centers temporarily closed their doors, in-person supports and critically needed social connection infrastructure was destructed resulting in a 30-40% relapse rate and a 30% increase in overdoses during the last 7 months. There is still much to be done on the local and state levels, to advocate for a shift for insurance companies and legislators to increase current funding allocations to meet the growing need. The CDC say a \$1 investment in prevention, treatment, and recovery yields \$7 - \$15 savings in healthcare costs, criminal justice costs, and lost workplace production.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

#1 School Districts: Educate people about the value of prevention and provide year-round prevention initiatives. Create youth coalitions to create their own prevention messages and to begin taking ownership of their world. Overhaul core curriculum to include coping skills, communications skills, emotional regulation, and crisis resolution skills. There may be a chance that by teaching skills typically taught in a treatment rehabilitation center, our kids can skip addiction altogether and we reduce instances of suicide.

Implement initiatives that reduce social norms around underage drinking and using drugs. Reduce access to alcohol and prescription drugs by keeping it locked up. Do not host underage parties or provide alcohol to youth during prom and graduation. Start talking about the damages of alcohol and drug use – and start now. Our kids really do hear us.

#2 More affordable treatment options. This will enable more than just the 7-10% of people who need treatment - to get it. Write to your senators and representatives that we need 1) legislation giving everyone access to health insurance and 2) insurance that will pay for long-term treatment stays. Being successful in treatment depends on the quality, duration, and getting long-term supports in place before reintegration.

#3 Every community should have a recovery center. Create spaces where people struggling with substance use can get a Recovery Coach, attend support groups, participate in programming, and build a support network. This space can be used for people to stay socially connected, to draw strength from each other to learn how to live without substances, and to keep recovery strong. People in treatment centers, prisons, and hospitals reintegrating into the community have a much better chance to succeed when proper community supports are in place before being discharged or released.

#4 Education – Learn about addiction – become a Certified Prevention Specialist, or a Licensed Alcohol & Drug Counselor, or a Certified Recovery Support Worker (a certified Recovery Coach). I have graduated almost 200 recovery coaches from our Recovery Coach Academy training series and three have gone on to open their own recovery centers in New Ipswich, NH, Milford, NH, and Fitchburg MA. It is the kind of ripple effect we aim for - to grow the voice of the invisible.

#5 Employers – Learn about what it takes to become RECOVERY FRIENDLY and really support your employees who have substance use issues. Provide space for people to hold support groups during breaks and lunches. Offer assistance to help pay for treatment and recovery services. Hold positions for people when they are getting treatment for their addiction. Make policies more supportive and less punitive. Reduce costs for re-training, lost productivity, workers comp claims, and absenteeism and retain skilled workers.

How does doing all this help??

- Less Academic failure and drop-out
- less Grandparents raising grandchildren and foster care placements
- less juvenile incarceration and recidivism
- less Suicide and overdose rates
- reduced law enforcement and emergency resources spent on this issue
- more workplace productivity and less absenteeism
- reduced Impaired driving violations and fatalities
- reduced HIV, Hepatitis-C cases, and unwanted pregnancies
- healthier employees and employer bottom lines
- real social connection - believed to be the key to stopping addiction before it starts.

I lost my younger brother Peter at age 47 to complications of alcoholism. Another staff lost her brother to a drug overdose and another lost her brother to suicide. These experiences fuel our passion to continue this work. Believe you all have a part in changing this epidemic because it affects all of us - directly or indirectly. We are incredibly grateful for your ongoing support.

-With gratitude,
Mary