Recovery Heros: Recruiting Recovery Coaches and Peer Support Specialists at the Coulee Recovery Center

Sascha S. Cromheecke

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#RECOVERYHEROES: Recruiting Recovery Coaches and Peer Support Specialists at the Coulee Recovery Center

Coulee Recovery Center
#RECOVERYHEROES

Sascha S. Cromheccecke
MCOM 695 Thesis/Project
M.A. Strategic Communications Program
Dr. Stacey Kanihan
Spring 2024
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#RecoveryHeroes
RESEARCH

I. **BACKGROUND** The Coulee Recovery Center is a nonprofit organization that offers free and confidential services to individuals and families affected by drug and substance misuse and/or addiction within the La Crosse County Area. This area includes twelve towns/cities: La Crosse, Onalaska, Holmen, West Salem, Bangor, French Island, Shelby, Rockland, Brice Prairie, Greenfield, St. Joseph, and Burns.

Misuse and addiction are two closely related concepts. However, they should not be used interchangeably, as they represent two distinctive phases in the use of illicit drugs or substances.

Drug and substance misuse refers to the wrongful use of drugs or substances. Individuals who misuse drugs and substances remain in control of their actions, but they may experience limited life-altering consequences. Drug and substance addiction, however, is defined as a chronic brain disease with a hereditary component in which the continuous use of drugs and substances has caused a psychological dependency on the drug or substance. Individuals who are victims of a drug or substance addiction have wholly lost control of their actions and experience significant life-altering consequences.

Although substance and drug misuse are different from drug and substance addiction, the misuse of drugs or substances can be the perpetuating factor for the development of an addiction.

II. **INDUSTRY** The Coulee Recovery Center has a diverse array of roles that are critical to the organization's operations. The organization comprises an office manager/bookkeeper, prevention educator, hospital residency and wellness coordinator, peer support specialists, recovery coaches, a community resource navigator, and a recovery navigator.

While every role within the organization holds significant value in the Center's ability to operate, recovery coaches and peer support specialists are pivotal, as they work hand-in-hand with individuals who are striving to overcome their drug and substance misuse and/or addiction.

A recovery coach undertakes many key responsibilities, including helping individuals create and personalize recovery pathways, providing support (emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal), locating housing and employment opportunities, and connecting individuals with community events and resources.

Similarly, certified peer support specialists provide many forms of support, including emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. However, the distinguishing difference between recovery coaches and peer support specialists
is that recovery coaches have experienced struggles with substance and/or drug misuse or addiction, allowing them to empathize with individuals navigating their recovery journey.

III. EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT The Coulee Recovery Center faces an ongoing challenge to meet the demands of individuals seeking help in their recovery journey. This, in part, is due to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (“WisDHS”).

The WisDHS is a government agency responsible for maintaining Wisconsin residents’ public health and wellness. The WisDHS oversees a variety of subdivisions under the broad heading of public health, including mental health services, substance misuse and addiction, disability services, Medicaid and Medicare, and more. In addition to overseeing these subdivisions, the WisDHS collaborates with Wisconsin healthcare providers and community organizations to address healthcare disparities. Regarding the Coulee Recovery Center, the WisDHS identifies specific areas in Wisconsin that lack certified peer support specialists and recovery coaches, thereby determining training locations.

Despite WisDHS indicating a surplus of certified peer support specialists and recovery coaches in La Crosse County, the Coulee Recovery Center disagrees with this assessment, as they consistently find themselves needing more accredited peer support specialists and recovery coaches to meet the demands of individuals seeking an avenue to recovery.

Acknowledging the decline in mental health, which was exacerbated by COVID-19, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers took action. In July of 2022, Wisconsin launched a suicide and crisis lifeline. In that month alone, they received 6,000 calls from individuals across Wisconsin.

In response to this and many other distressing statistics, Governor Evers allocated relief funds and executive budgeting to prioritize mental health, emphasizing mental health within Wisconsin school districts. Governor Evers is of the impression that prioritizing mental health among children and teens is critical, especially when addressing risky behaviors such as substance misuse and addiction. However, despite these initiatives from Governor Evers, as of 2023, La Crosse County only has 63 certified peer support specialists.

The Coulee Recovery Center is under the assumption that the lack of certified peer support specialists and recovery coaches in the La Crosse County Area is due to the fact that individuals pursued these trainings as an opportunity to seek career advancements in other healthcare sectors, such as local hospitals/clinics, social services, or other mental health facilities. Furthermore, the Center suggests that individuals may deem these roles as less professional due to the minimal requirements: a certification and personal experiences.

#RecoveryHeroes
However, other *traditional* healthcare professions, such as Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs), only require training(s) and certifications.

**IV. COMPETITION**  
The Coulee Recovery Center’s competition is the public’s perception, values, attitudes, and misconceptions of certified peer support specialists and recovery coaches. Overcoming these stigmas benefits those seeking recovery, support, and resources the Center provides.

**V. STAKEHOLDER RESEARCH**  
The Coulee Recovery Center stakeholders are its current employees, both full and part-time, current sponsors, donors, local hospitals/clinics, and new and existing clients.

**VI. ORGANIZATION**  
The Coulee Recovery Center offers a wide variety of resources, including a Drop-in Center, Recovery Coaches, a Meeting and a Meal, a Food Pantry, JAVA Jam, Karaoke, a Special Sober Event, R.E.D. - Recovery Education Discussion, an Outdoor Recovery Project, and Women's Crafts.

The Coulee Recovery Center has 24 contractual recovery coaches and five peer support specialists. While it may seem as though the Center has an abundant amount of recovery coaches and support specialists, the Center never knows how many referrals, walk-ins, or ER calls they will receive each month, so they are always looking for recovery coaches and certified peer support specialists to guide individuals through their recovery journey.

**VII. SERVICES**  
The primary purpose of the Coulee Recovery Center is to provide individuals and families with long-term support services and empower them to regain control of their lives mentally, physically, and emotionally. The Coulee Recovery Center includes the following services:

- **Drop-in Center:** This is a space where individuals can socialize and hang out in a substance-free and chemical-free environment.
- **Recovery Coaches:** Recovery coaches are available to assist and support individuals in their recovery/sober living journey.
- **Meeting and a Meal:** Participants can attend an AA or NA meeting and then stay for a complimentary meal.
- **Food Pantry:** Distributes food to individuals facing food accessibility struggles.
- **JAVA Jam, Karaoke, and Special Sober Event:** This is a substance- and chemical-free social event featuring music, dancing, and singing.
- **R.E.D. - Recovery Education Discussion:** Local experts deliver a presentation on recovery, followed by an open discussion.
- **Outdoor Recovery Project:** Gundersen Health System and Mayo Clinic host an outdoor event where individuals can develop healthy coping skills through outdoor recreation.
- **Women’s Crafts:** The Women’s Fund by Greater La Crosse hosts an event where women can come and learn a new skill.
VIII. **PROMOTION** The Coulee Recovery Center relies on word-of-mouth referrals from the local community, hospitals, and clinics to attract its clientele. Most recently, they hired a marketing committee to promote their services through social media platforms like Facebook.

The organization intends to continue this initiative to attract both clientele and recovery coaches and peer support specialists, as most of its staff have personal experiences with substance abuse and/or addiction.

IX. **RESOURCES** The Coulee Recovery Center currently has 24 contractual recovery coaches and five peer support specialists. The Center requires both recovery coaches and peer support specialists to have maintained sobriety for a minimum of one year. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services also requires specific trainings for these positions.

Becoming a peer support specialist involves a more extensive training than a recovery coach, primarily because it is a certified program. Consequently, individuals seeking to become peer support specialists must stay current with yearly certifications to maintain their qualifications.

X. **SWOT ANALYSIS**

* **Strengths (Internal)**  
  o The Coulee Recovery Center offers various resources: Drop-in Center, Recovery Coaches, Meeting and Meals, Food Pantry, JAVA Jam, Karaoke, Special Sober Events, RED. - Recovery Education Discussion, Outdoor Recovery Project, and Women’s Crafts.  
  o They receive lots of word-of-mouth referrals.  
  o They have knowledgeable recovery coaches and peer support specialists.

* **Weaknesses (Internal)**  
  o High number of responsibilities for both recovery coaches and peer support specialists.  
  o Due to recovery coaches and many peer support specialists having lived experiences, a client’s journey may trigger the employee.  
  o High burnout rates.  
  o Lack of diversity.  
  ▪ There are lots of White individuals and some Hmong, but there is a lack of representation of other racial backgrounds.

* **Opportunities (external)**  
  o Seek individuals from the hospital and clinics to help at the center  
    ▪ The center employs primarily part-time employees.  
  o Connect with other centers around the state of Wisconsin.

#RecoveryHeroes
Promote employment opportunities in addition to services.
Offer to pay for certification requirements for those seeking employment as a peer support specialist.

**Threats (external)**
- Stigma about substance and drug misuse and addiction.
- Local hospitals and clinics also employ peer support specialists and recovery coaches.
- The Wisconsin Department of Health Services sees a large number of trained recovery coaches and certified peer support specialists in this area. Therefore, there is a lack of training opportunities in the La Crosse County area.
- Many trained recovery coaches and certified peer support specialists may have pursued these trainings and certificates as career opportunity advancements in other healthcare sectors.
  - Trainings are free.

**XI. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS**

The Coulee Recovery Center offers a wide range of support services for individuals who struggle with misuse and/or addiction. While recognizing that individuals need help in many ways, the Center faces challenges with not having enough recovery coaches and peer support specialists to meet the demands of those seeking recovery. This issue stems from two main reasons: the emotional toll associated with these occupations and the lack of training opportunities within the La Crosse County Area – Due to the WisDHS’s misconception of active certified peer support specialists and recovery coaches.

**XII. CORE PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY**

The Coulee Recovery Center faces a shortage of current recovery coaches and certified peer support specialists, which hinders its ability to meet the needs and demands of individuals seeking support in their recovery journey. Increasing the number of recovery coaches and peer support specialists would lessen their workload, ultimately improving the services that the Center has to offer.

**ACTION PLANNING**

**I. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

**Goal** Motivate and inspire individuals to seek professional employment with the Coulee Recovery Center as recovery coaches or certified peer support specialists.

**Objectives**
- Increase the number of recovery coaches by at least 30% within six months of implementation.

#RecoveryHeroes
○ The Center currently has 24 contractual recovery coaches. Based on this number, a 30% increase would elevate the number of contractual recovery coaches to 31.

● Increase the number of five certified peer support specialists by at least 120% within six months of implementation.
  ○ The Center currently has five certified peer support specialists. Based on this number, a 120% increase would elevate the number of certified peer support specialists to 11.

● Launch bi-weekly recruitment campaigns and educational initiatives for individuals interested in pursuing a professional substance misuse and/or addiction recovery career.
  ○ Starting September 2, 2024, to February 28, 2025.
    ▪ Utilize this six-month increment as a baseline and revise as the organization deems fit.
    ▪ Use Google’s 7–11–4 rule.
      ● Consumers are said to invest 7 hours researching, engaging with 11 key points, and finding the item located on four different platforms before purchasing.

● Conduct community outreach sessions at local colleges at least twice per semester, focusing on raising awareness about the crucial roles of recovery coaches and peer support specialists.
  ○ Starting the academic year of Fall 2024 to Spring 2025.
    ▪ Utilize this year as a baseline and revise as the organization deems fit.
    ▪ Do not host more than three sessions per semester, as college students tend to be dismissive if they see outreach opportunities on a regular basis.

II. **BIG IDEA**  To showcase career opportunities as a recovery coach or certified peer support specialist at the Coulee Recovery Center by promoting the educational pathways and responsibilities inherent in these roles.

III. **VISUAL REPRESENTATION**  The #RecoveryHeroes campaign will feature various creative forms of media, including photos, videos, and articles. In the campaign efforts to increase the staff within the Coulee Recovery Center, the content will include the following:

○ **Employee Testimonials:** Featuring testimonials from current staff members will highlight the rewarding nature of aiding individuals in their recovery journey.
● **Community Engagement**: Highlighting the Center’s involvement in the Coulee Region area shows recovery coaches and certified peer support specialists’ impact in supporting individuals in their recovery journey.

● **Benefits and Perks**: Summarize the perks and benefits offered to peer support specialists and recovery coaches, such as creating a flexible schedule and gaining professional development.

● **Diversity and Inclusion**: Showcasing the inclusive nature of the Coulee Recovery Center will show the Center’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

● **Mission and Values**: Illustrating the Center’s mission to aid and empower individuals in their recovery journey allows prospective staff members to see if their values align with the Center’s.

Within these campaign efforts, the media will feature the following individuals:

- Past and current clients of the Coulee Recovery Center;
- Impacted family members of clients who received services from the Center;
- Current employees of the Center; and
- Representees of local businesses who have donated to the Center.

These individuals will wear #RecoveryHeros campaign apparel: hats, bracelets, and shirts.

IV. **KEY PUBLICS** The key public will comprise community members, college students, and healthcare professionals in the La Crosse County area.

V. **MESSAGES, STRATEGIES, AND TACTICS**

A. **Community Members**

- **Self Interest**: By seeking employment with the Coulee Recovery Center, individuals are actively showing their support and solidarity for those impacted by the chronic brain disease of addiction and/or substance misuse, which is inherently rewarding.

- **Opinion Leaders**: Peers, families, and retired individuals.

- **Channels**: Mail distribution, display flyers in business within the Coulee Region Area, post on social media platforms, and word-of-mouth.

#RecoveryHeroes
• **Primary Message:** The power of recovery lies within the community.

• **Secondary Messages:**
  - You can make a difference by supporting your neighbors' recovery journey by reclaiming their lives at the Coulee Recovery Center.
  - Looking for a rewarding career that supports the La Crosse community? Join our team at the Coulee Recovery Center, where we are committed to positively impacting the lives of La Crosse County residents.
  - At the Coulee Recovery Center, we offer a supportive work environment where individuals can thrive personally and professionally.

• **Strategy:** Encourage individuals to show support and solidarity for those impacted by addiction and/or substance misuse by seeking employment at the Coulee Recovery Center. This involves advertisement through mail distribution, display of flyers in businesses within the Coulee Region Area, posts on social media platforms, and word-of-mouth.

• **Tactics:**
  - Organize advertisements with local radio stations and newspapers.
  - Flyer distribution to residential mailboxes.
  - Engage in community events, e.g., health and job fairs.
  - Implement search engine optimization (“SEO”) for employment opportunities.
  - Utilize social media platforms and job search websites like LinkedIn and Indeed to promote job descriptions and benefits.
  - Utilize video marketing on Facebook to showcase the Coulee Recovery Center’s work environment.

B. **College Students**

• **Self Interest:** By seeking employment with the Coulee Recovery Center, college students can achieve a professional work-school balance while securing a job prospect post-graduation.

• **Opinion Leaders:** Peers, families, and professors.
• **Channels:** Email and mail distribution to student mailboxes, display flyers in student union centers and restrooms, post-school social media platforms, and word-of-mouth.

• **Primary Message:** Begin a fulfilling career with the Coulee Recovery Center, where every day allows you to make a tangible difference in the lives of those striving for recovery.

• **Secondary Messages:**
  - Build your future with us. The Coulee Recovery Center offers flexible schedules to ensure a healthy work-school balance while developing essential skills for their healthcare careers.
  - Discover your strengths and passions as you pursue your career goals. At the Coulee Recovery Center, you’ll cultivate problem-solving skills, refine communication skills, and learn how to be empathic while assisting those dealing with substance addiction and misuse.
  - Working at the Coulee Recovery Center allows you to build your resume by showcasing your dedication to making a transformative impact in the La Crosse County community.

• **Strategy:** Inspire local college students to engage in a meaningful part-time job that enables them to maintain a work-school balance, all while supporting individuals in their journey to recovery. This involves advertisement through email and mail distribution to student mailboxes, display of flyers in student union centers and restrooms, posting on school social media platforms, and word-of-mouth.

• **Tactics:**
  - Organize on-campus events, e.g., job fairs and informational sessions during classes for the psychology, social work, and healthcare departments. **Emphasize that the Coulee Recovery Center is primarily seeking part-time employees.**
  - Utilize social media platforms and online job search websites such as Handshake to advertise and promote available job opportunities.
  - Post job opportunities in campus newsletters.
  - Flyer distribution to school mailboxes.
  - Post flyers in high-traffic areas on campus, such as public restrooms, student union centers, libraries, and

#RecoveryHeroes
academic departments (psychology, social work, nursing, counseling, and other healthcare programs).

c. Healthcare Professionals

- **Self Interest**: Through seeking employment with the Coulee Recovery Center, healthcare professionals can diversify their expertise through different avenues in the healthcare sector.

- **Opinion Leaders**: Peers, families, friends, healthcare workers, social workers, local public servants, and officials.

- **Channels**: Email and mail distribution to work mailboxes, post flyers within clinics and hospitals, and word-of-mouth.

- **Primary Message**: Apply Your Healthcare Expertise Beyond the Hospital Setting: Make Your Mark at the Coulee Recovery Center.

- **Secondary Messages**:
  - Explore your career flexibility with a part-time position at the Coulee Recovery Center. Join our team and design a schedule that fits your needs.
  - Connect with the La Crosse County community by working part-time at the Coulee Recovery Center. Join our team and play a pivotal role in supporting individuals in their journey to recovery.
  - Earn additional income while pursuing your passion for healthcare. Become a part-time Coulee Recovery Center team member to contribute to the La Crosse community.

- **Strategy**: Inspire healthcare professionals to pursue part-time employment at the Coulee Recovery Center to expand their expertise within the healthcare sector. This involves advertising through email and mail distribution to workplace mailboxes, the display of flyers within clinics and hospitals, and word-of-mouth.

- **Tactics**:
  - Engage in community events, e.g., health and job fairs.
  - Implement search engine optimization (“SEO”) for employment opportunities.
  - Flyer distribution to email and work mailboxes.
    ** Emphasize that the Coulee Recovery Center is primarily seeking part-time employees.**
Utilize social media platforms and job search websites such as LinkedIn and Indeed to promote job descriptions, benefits, and local sites.

Utilize video marketing on Facebook to showcase the Coulee Recovery Center work environment.

VI. THEORY: The theory that will be applied to this in this Strategic Communications Plan is the Kotter Change Theory. See the figure below.

The Kotter Change Theory presents an extensive framework necessary for a campaign of this size. The detailed approach encompasses essential elements such as motivation, recruitment, communication, and marketing, making it a critical component in navigating the organization’s campaign.

Figure 1: Kotter's Change Theory. Taken from LDRS 614-01 Change Leadership with Joel J. Traver, EdD.
COMMUNICATION

VII. CALENDAR

SEE NEXT PAGE.
STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE FOR COULEE RECOVERY CENTER: FALL 2024 TO SUMMER 2025 (SEPTEMBER 2, 2024 TO AUGUST 29, 2025)

**Key Public: Community Members**

**Strategy:** By seeking employment with the Coulee Recovery Center, individuals are actively showing their support and solidarity for those impacted by the chronic brain disease of addiction and/or substance misuse, which is inherently rewarding.

| Week No. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | 37 | 38 | 39 | 40 | 41 | 42 | 43 | 44 | 45 | 46 | 47 | 48 | 49 | 50 | 51 | 52 |
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| Tactic No. 1 | Organize advertisements with local radio stations and newspapers. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tactic No. 2 | Flyer distribution to residential mailboxes. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tactic No. 3 | Engage in community events, e.g., health and job fairs. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tactic No. 4 | Implement search engine optimization ("SEO") for employment opportunities. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tactic No. 5 | Utilize video marketing on Facebook to showcase the Coulee Recovery Center’s work environment. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Tactic No. 6 | Utilize social media platforms and job search websites like LinkedIn and Indeed to promote job descriptions and benefits. | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

***'X's Indicate Weekly Frequency***

***Cells Shaded in Full Color Indicate Entire Week***
### Strategic Implementation Timeline for Coulee Recovery Center: Fall 2024 to Summer 2025 (September 2, 2024 to August 29, 2025)

**Key Public:** College Students

**Strategy:** Inspire local college students to engage in a meaningful part-time job that enables them to maintain a work-school balance, all while supporting individuals in their journey to recovery.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Tactic No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Organize on-campus events, e.g., job fairs and informational sessions during classes for the psychology, social work, and healthcare departments.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Utilize social media platforms and online job search websites such as Handshake to advertise and promote available job opportunities.</td>
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<td>Post job opportunities in campus newsletters.</td>
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<td>Flyer distribution to school mailboxes/emails.</td>
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<td>Post flyers in high-traffic areas on campus, such as public restrooms, student union centers, libraries, and academic departments (psychology, social work, nursing, counseling, and other healthcare programs).</td>
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**X's Indicate Weekly Frequency**

**Cells Shaded in Full Color Indicate Entire Week**
### STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE FOR COULEE RECOVERY CENTER: FALL 2024 TO SUMMER 2025 (SEPTEMBER 2, 2024 TO AUGUST 29, 2025)

**Key Public:** Healthcare Professionals

**Strategy:** Inspire healthcare professionals to pursue part-time employment at the Coulee Region Recovery Center to expand their expertise within the healthcare sector.

<table>
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<th>Week No.</th>
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| Tactic No. 1 | Engage in community events, e.g., health and job fairs. | X | X | X |
| Tactic No. 2 | Implement search engine optimization ("SEO") for employment opportunities. |
| Tactic No. 3 | Flyer distribution to email and work mailboxes. |
| Tactic No. 3 | **Emphasize that the Coulee Region Recovery Center is primarily seeking part-time employees.** |
| Tactic No. 4 | Utilize social media platforms and job search websites such as LinkedIn and Indeed to promote job descriptions, benefits, and local sites. |
| Tactic No. 5 | Utilize video marketing on Facebook to showcase the Coulee Region Recovery Center work environment. |

**X's Indicate Weekly Frequency**

***Cells Shaded in Full Color Indicate Entire Week***
VIII. **BUDGET**

SEE NEXT PAGE.
## Strategic Implementation Timeline for Coulee Recovery Center: Fall 2024 to Summer 2025 (September 2, 2024 to August 29, 2025)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Public: Community Members</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Per Item Cost</th>
<th>Total Projected</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy:</strong> By seeking employment with the Coulee Recovery Center, individuals are actively showing their support and solidarity.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tactics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organize advertisements with local radio stations and newspapers.</td>
<td>16 days</td>
<td>$15/day</td>
<td>$240.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flyer distribution to residential mailboxes.</td>
<td>53,750 houses in La Crosse</td>
<td>$55.99/box of paper + $46.99/Cartridge</td>
<td>$1,870.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage in community events, e.g., health and job fairs.</td>
<td>3 events</td>
<td>$300.00</td>
<td>$900.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilize video marketing on Facebook to showcase the Coulee Recovery Center.</td>
<td>26 Days</td>
<td>$5.00/day</td>
<td>$130.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilize social media platforms and job search websites like LinkedIn and Indeed.</td>
<td>361 days</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$-</td>
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| Key Public: College Students | | | |
| **Strategy:** Inspire local college students to engage in a meaningful part-time job that enables them to maintain a work-school balance. | | | |
| **Tactics** | | | |
| Organize on-campus events, e.g., job fairs and informational sessions during classes. | 4 days | $0.00 | $- |
| Utilize social media platforms and online job search websites such as Handshake. | 361 days | $0.00 | $- |
| Post job opportunities in campus newsletters. | 52 days | $0.00 | $- |
| Flyer distribution to school mailboxes/emails. | ≈10,327 students at UWL | $55.99/box of paper, $46.99/Cartridge & $0.00/email | $449.91 |
| Post flyers in high-traffic areas on campus. | 32 locations at UWL | $55.99/box of paper | $13.44 |

| Key Public: Healthcare Professionals | | | |
| **Strategy:** Inspire healthcare professionals to pursue part-time employment at the Coulee Region Recovery Center. | | | |
| **Tactics** | | | |
| Engage in community events, e.g., health and job fairs. | 361 days | ≈$3,600.00/year | $3,600.00 |
| Implement search engine optimization (“SEO”) for employment opportunities. | 361 days | ≈$3,600.00/year | $3,600.00 |
| Flyer distribution to email and work mailboxes. | 7,621 employees at Gundersen | $55.99/box of paper, $46.99/Cartridge & $0.00/email | $299.94 |
| Utilize social media platforms and job search websites such as LinkedIn. | 361 days | $0.00 | $- |
| Utilize video marketing on Facebook to showcase the Recovery Center. | | | |

**The Coulee Recovery Center has a printer.**

**Total:** $7,503.91
IX. **IMPLEMENTATION**  
The Coulee Region Recovery Center is a non-profit organization looking to increase the number of peer support specialists and recovery coaches to support individuals suffering from addiction.

In line with the objective, the Coulee Recovery Center must invest a significant amount of time and effort in engaging with individuals who are drawn to make a difference in the lives of those who have an addiction. Additionally, the center must utilize publications and materials for individuals seeking a professional occupation in addiction recovery.

This campaign effort will be executed by existing staff members, with the participation of current interns and/or volunteers. Rita Von Hayden, Executive Director of the Center, will oversee the execution of these campaign efforts.

While the financials included in the budget section of this strategic communications plan may seem exceptionally expensive, the plan consists of informed approximations based on factors such as the size of Gunderson Health System's employees, the current enrollment at the University of La Crosse, and the makeup of La Crosse County households—ultimately serving as a guide for resource allocation.

To make this plan more extensive, the Coulee Recovery Center shall look to all three higher education institutions in La Crosse County and additional healthcare providers such as Mayo Clinic to seek individuals seeking an occupation in addiction.

X. **EVALUATION**  
The Coulee Recovery Center will know it has achieved its goal of motivating and inspiring individuals to seek *professional employment* as a recovery coach or certified peer support specialist by comprehensively analyzing the data collected from the strategies and tactics. Through this comprehensive analysis, the Center can assess whether they are acquiring more recovery coaches or certified peer support specialists, or if adjustments are necessary to meet the overall goal.

This approach enables the Coulee Recovery Center to effectively evaluate the choice of target markets, messages, and tactics. Additionally, it allows the center to make informed decisions, ensuring that these efforts will maximize its support resources.

a. **Objective one:** Increase the number of recovery coaches by at least 30% within six months of implementation.
i. **Criterion:** The Center currently has 24 contractual recovery coaches. Based on this number, a 30% increase would elevate the number of contractual recovery coaches to 31.

ii. **Measurement Tools:** After completing this objective, take the number difference between the two variables, then multiply by 100. Example: 31 - 24 = 7/24 = .291 * 100% = ~ 30%

**b. Objective Two:** Increase the number of five certified peer support specialists by at least 110% within six months of implementation.

i. **Criterion:** The Center currently has five certified peer support specialists. Based on this number, a 120% increase would elevate the number of certified peer support specialists to 11.

ii. **Measurement Tools:** After completing this objective, take the number of differences between the two variables and multiply by 100. Example: 11-5 = 6/5 = 1.2 * 100% = 120%

c. **Objective Three:** Launch bi-weekly recruitment campaigns and educational initiatives for individuals interested in pursuing a professional substance misuse and/or addiction recovery career.

i. **Criterion:** Starting June 1, 2024, to January 1, 2025.

ii. **Measurement Tools:**
   - Monitor engagement through recruitment campaigns, e.g., location, type of device, pages visited, and traffic source;
   - Track the number of applicants;
   - For new hires, collect a survey and feedback regarding the campaign efforts, e.g.,
     a. “How did you learn about this job opportunity?”
     b. “Have you encountered our campaign efforts on social media platforms(s)? If so, which platform(s)?”
     c. “Were you aware of the Coulee Recovery Center before applying?”

d. **Objective Four:** Conduct community outreach sessions at local colleges at least twice per semester, focusing on raising awareness about the crucial roles of recovery coaches and peer support specialists.
i. **Criterion:** Starting the academic year of Fall 2024 to Spring 2025 – **No more than three sessions per semester.**

ii. **Measurement Tools:**
   - Track the number of individuals who engage in conversations about becoming a peer support specialist or recovery coach;
   - Have individuals complete a survey and/or QR if they want more information or become a peer support specialist or recovery coach.
REFERENCES

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

A. Interview No. 1

Research Method Used: In-Person Interview
Timeframe of Study: 25 minutes
Number of Respondents: 1
Names or Organization of the Interviews: 

1. Please describe your role and responsibilities at the Recovery Center.

“So I am the . So basically that means that I am in charge of everything. I shouldn't say basic – The main pieces of the puzzle are obviously fundraising and marketing of the agency, but I also am the main grant writer, and then a little bit of anything and everything. I've actually been with Coulee for 17 and a half years. I started out as a Prevention Educator and I've just kind of continued from there. So there's still bits and pieces of everything else I've done that I still have my hands in on. It's so hard to say, ‘This is what I do’ because it encompasses a lot. As an Executive Director, my main focuses are supposed to be the fundraising and the marketing and staff development and things like that.”

2. Based on prior communications with the Recovery Center, it has been noted that there is an absence of Recovery Coaches and Peer Support Specialists. Has this been a longstanding issue within the organization? If so, what factors have contributed to this deficiency?

“Due to it not being like, you don't get a college degree to be a recovery coach or peer support specialist, it's not necessarily seen by everyone as an extreme professional role, and so it's not necessarily a first line of conversation in all aspects of things. Due to the lack of, not the lack, of the shortage of professional roles, less people going into counseling or psychology, all of those kind of things that's needed to help with the substance use and mental health issues that our society has due to the lack of people going into that field, we are struggling with helping the need. And so we look at how there's so much need and so there's just not enough of any of it.

And so the other side too is that we look at not having enough because there's just never enough trainings. There's just never enough. In order to do these things, it's very appropriate that there be trainings, that individuals are trained to get the most skills and understanding of what their roles are. And now with the two, there's two different kinds of trainings that you would take if you need to distinguish between the two: the Peer Support Specialist is more of a mental health services based
training, and the Recovery Coach is more of the AOD or the alcohol and other drug training. The other separation is the Peer Support Specialist, once you've gone through the training, then you actually take an exam and get a certification through the state of Wisconsin. Whereas the Recovery Coach is what I like to kind of term as it's a certificate training. So there isn't like a state test. So there is that difference, too. Is there a benefit to having both? Yes. Some programs only require one over the other, but is there a benefit to having both? If you're helping individuals who are struggling with substance use disorders, it's hard to talk about mental health without talking about substance use and vice versa. So having both is good, too.

The big piece is, if you actually look at the Wisconsin Peer Support Specialist website, they have, like you can see kind of gives like a pinpoint of where everybody who has that certification are. There are a lot that have been trained and certified in La Crosse county. The problem is not all of them are actually working or using it. And so the hard part is that they look at the state as a whole and they look at where there isn't a lot that are trained. So they see a lot trained in La Crosse, but they don't necessarily look at who's actually utilizing it. So they train in areas where they don't see a lot that are certified. That's why for that one, there isn't a lot of trainings, whereas with the Recovery Coach, it's just the matter of actually getting the trainings and having the trainings run. And the CCAR, which is based out of Connecticut, which is what most of us use, it's a Recovery Coach Academy. They have changed their requirements for the trainers. And so it took a lot of the trainers a while to get that retraining up and going. So then there was kind of a halt in trainings. There's barriers to treatment, and there are barriers to getting trained.”

3. What challenges does the organization encounter due to the shortage of Recovery Coaches and Peer Support Specialists? Are there financial implications or concerns regarding overall sustainability?

“Big challenges are just the fact of having not enough coaches to help, the need of referrals that are coming in. We don't want to overstack our coaches and burn them out. Because all of our coaches and this big thing with all of these is that all of them are individuals with lived experience, meaning they themselves are in recovery. So they're still trying to work their own recovery path and they're trying to keep themselves healthy. So they have to stay healthy to help somebody else find their path and be healthy. So there can be some pretty heavy things in those peers lives. There can be some pretty trying times, and there could be times where the peer and the coach are working together and something that's going on in the peer's life could really trigger the coach. So the more peers they take on, you might have some peers that are
needier than others, which can be very taxing on the coach. So the more peers they have, the more weighed down they can get. And then they have to think about, well, if they have a family or if they have another job or if they have school. So it's doing our best to balance their life and their work life and trying not to give them more peers than they can handle. But the other barrier to it is having the coach being honest with us. If it's too much and being willing to say, “Okay, I can't take on another one,” or “Right now, I just can't handle this load,” can we find a new coach for this person? Those kind of things. So just the honest aspect.”

4. **What factors, in your opinion, deter individuals from seeking employment at the Recovery Center?**

   “The anonymity piece – Allowing maybe others in their world to realize that they’re in recovery, and maybe they have not opened up to people in their life that this is something that they're going through, or that they're dealing with. They may not take on this adventure because of that. But, yeah, the other part might be just not getting a training or it being too much for them, or not being able to keep stable enough in their own recovery.”

5. **In my secondary research, I found that COVID-19 has profoundly affected organizations, specifically recovery centers. How has COVID-19 affected the Coulee Region Recovery Center as a whole organization?**

   “The nice part about our agency is we already had kind of a call service, in a sense. And so, we have the ability to help individuals over the phone. We already had a lot of that support that was in place before COVID hit. We were actually only fully closed for, I want to say, two, three months or so. I cannot remember, its been so long now. But then we started following the guidelines of the county. So we opened up only for support group meetings, rooms where we had tape places, and making sure people were sitting and doing what we could to at least follow those guidelines, but to get people out of isolation, because that's a big thing. Opposite of addiction, is connection. So keeping people connected as best we could, we ended up taking. We kind of did a little campaign thing that promoted our phone line thing that we're here. Call us if you need anything. We did everything we could to remind people that we're not just a building. There's more to who we are. And when we did fully open back up again, it was slow moving and our numbers slowly picked back up again and then we slowly added different activities back and then things gotten in full range. There was a lot of individuals who didn't really believe it was true and all that. You're going to have that everywhere. But it was difficult to get everybody to kind of go beyond their beliefs and just try to help and keep everybody safe. But we did what we could with what we

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had. But I would say it probably took from being fully closed down, I would say it probably took maybe about a year, to get numbers back up to where they normally were and get back to full fledged activity. But we never really lost. I can’t say we lost much from it.

6. How has COVID-19 affected the Recovery Center regarding Recovery Coaches and Peer Support Specialists?

“[Recovery Coaches and Peer Support Specialists] were the ones that manned our phones. We had systems in place where they took turns being the ones that took the phone calls, and phone calls were directed to them, or they got the referrals that they worked with. So we did what we could to utilize them. Part of our Recovery Coach Program is actually getting dispatched to the emergency department that was still available. We just had to follow obviously all COVID guidelines with emergency departments and there was some downtime with that because emergency departments weren’t allowing a lot of visitation in. So that was still there. But when they did have individuals who presented to the ER who could benefit from a recovery coach, they would provide contact information and still try to connect the patients with us. Our in-house recovery coaches were our first man of the phones, or they would be the ones that would have the building open for the support group, and then our contracted coaches with our other programming were then they were still fielding phone calls and if we got the calls into the ER and things like that. So they were still obviously not full par working, but still there for that support when it came through… They called them PPP funds, which was all Covid funds, so we were able to still provide extra funding outside of the regular hour. So staff was still able to get funding so that they weren’t. We were lucky enough to provide still for our staff. Yeah, it was definitely an interesting time.”

Summary

- Rita mentioned the challenges of recruiting recovery coaches and peer support specialists due to lack of professional recognition.
- Training differences between peer support specialists and recovery coaches are highlighted.
- Rita discusses the impact of Covid on the organization, mentioning a brief closure and subsequent gradual reopening.
- The organization adapted to Covid restrictions by promoting phone support and outdoor meetings.
- Rita addresses the impact of Covid on recovery coaches and peer support specialists, mentioning no significant decline in staffing.
- The organization received PPP funds to support staff during the pandemic.
- Client referrals come from various sources, including behavioral health, social workers, and jail services.

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B. Interview No. 2

Research Method Used: In-Person Interview
Timeframe of Study: 23 Minutes
Number of Respondents: 1
Names or Organization of the Interview:

1. Please describe your role and responsibilities at the Recovery Center.

“So my name is [redacted], and I'm the community resource navigator and also, it's called, ED2Recovery Coach Navigation Program. So I'm supervisor to the of the coaches along with Rita, because I'm still kind of learning.

I don't do any of the grant work or anything like that, so it's more about the supervision of the coaches. So when I first started a couple years ago, my role was created by the Alliance to Heal, which is a group of organizations that, I don't know if she explained them to you at all, but they're a group of organizations in this area that are working on – It used to be the heroin task force – they're working on decreasing opioid overdoses and then also the less emergency room visits and stuff like that. So they wanted somebody to be posted at Coulee full time as a Peer Support Provider and Recovery Coach who has had lived experience, especially with utilizing Coulee, because it's basically full circle. I came to Coulee eight to nine years ago. No, it's longer than that. 10-11 probably, to receive services and didn't have any clue where to start, and that's where a lot of people are when they come here. So just helping them figure out if they qualify for county services, going over different kinds of treatment services with people, and answering questions about them. If it's somebody who actually needs to be detoxed, calling with them, not for them, for a bed and getting them up to a detox facility. Stuff like that. So just more of that first response kind of touch and then also being there for when they may have a little bit of time, sober time, and being that constant contact of, “Hey, I need this kind of resource or this kind of resource to sustain that recovery.” So being very knowledgeable of the resources in the community, keeping up with that, keeping in contact, networking a lot with the organization so that I can make sure that things are cleared. Like I said, if I don't know you, I'm going to make it my business to know you for my people.

I'm a member of the recovery community right now, so it's like always, I can be available even outside of here. I try to have boundaries, obviously. Since I was in my second year here, because of the change of
her going into the director role, they needed somebody for the supervision role for the recovery coach program because that's what she was doing. So she basically has been slowly kind of putting me in that role.”

2. **Based on prior communications with the Recovery Center, it has been noted that there is an absence of Recovery Coaches and Peer Support Specialists. Has this been a longstanding issue within the organization? If so, what factors have contributed to this deficiency?**

“Peer support and recovery coaching is so new that it's kind of hard to know if it's you know what I mean? The recovery coach training is probably more available than the peer support and mostly that's because it's an easier training, it's a little bit shorter. It's not as hard for a trainer to be trained. The peer support, there's just not as many trainers. There's not as much funding. It's, you know, provided by DHS in the state. So it's like they look at each county's needs, so every time there's a new training out, it's specific to certain counties and La Crosse has not been one of them. I think they feel like we have a lot of people trained in this county because we did have WTC training for a long time, but I don't know where those people are that got trained. Maybe they're at the care center or different organizations that I'm just not aware of. But it says if you look at the records, it's like 60 some people are currently actively certified in La Crosse county. So when they're doing the trainings, they don't think we need it because some of those other counties are definitely deficient of that... Maybe the hospital or they just did the training for the heck of it and didn't do anything with it. That's the thing, it was a free training. So it was something that, why not do it? Especially if you're going into human services or social work or something.”

3. **What challenges does the organization encounter due to the shortage of Recovery Coaches and Peer Support Specialists? Are there financial implications or concerns regarding overall sustainability?**

“I would say it's hard to sometimes pair up the people correctly. I'm old fashioned. I like to make sure men are with men and women are with women. Especially when you're dealing with people in recovery, it doesn't matter how much training they get, they're just still learning about boundaries themselves. And most of us are codependent. So, that's a twelve step thing. It's worked really well in twelve steps. So I personally think it's needed. So making sure there's the right fit and sometimes drug of choice makes a difference too, and what kind of live experience they have. It's amazing to have somebody available of the same culture. We have Hmong gentlemen who recently got trained and he was not quite a year clean, which was one of our main requirements. We still snatched him up and asked if he would be willing to be limited on how many peers
he gets and have extra supervision to make sure he's working on his own recovery first and not overdoing it. But he has brought so many other Hmong people into the center now learning about their own addictions and mental health, and it's amazing to have that, but there's still a lack of other cultures that we want to. We don't have anybody speak Spanish. We need that. So, yeah, just being able to be able to fit everybody's needs."

4. **What factors, in your opinion, deter individuals from seeking employment at the Recovery Center?**

   “Most of the coaches are people who are trying to go to school and have a part time job for extra income. Those are the kind of people we're looking for because we can't promise it to be a full time income. It's a lot on their mental health, and they have to be very long term recovery. You know, I mean, to be able to take on big caseloads.”

5. **In my secondary research, I found that COVID-19 has profoundly affected organizations, specifically recovery centers. How has COVID-19 affected the Coulee Region Recovery Center as a whole organization?**

   “COVID affected a lot of people's recoveries. I figured out when I came back that there was 14 of my very good friends that were long term in recovery, that never came back. Every one of them relapsed, at least by alcohol. Maybe not the harder drugs that they used to be on, but it was sad. So yeah, the COVID it messed up everybody and different people found different jobs. I just recently I've noticed though, things have been booming more and so now we're very busy. There's so many people working on the recovery, but they're maybe not quite ready to work as a recovery coach. So we are starting to see more people available, getting a year clean, actually being in that spot, that spot that we would want to encourage them to be a Recovery Coach. But it's taken what, three years for people to work on themselves before they can be available to help others. So, the trainings aren't going to be free and so it's got to be something that they really want to do... A lot of the COVID funds that were there in the beginning are running out now.”

6. **How has COVID-19 affected the Recovery Center regarding Recovery Coaches and Peer Support specialists?**

   “Having to rebuild the team. So when I took over the supervision position, it was kind of like a group of people that were working during COVID and it wasn't as busy. I think that a lot of people forgot how to do the paperwork and the data entry, because they just were only available when needed. Now pretty much everybody can have a full caseload if they want now because we're getting so many referrals. So there were a few of

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them that maybe were more old school and didn't have to do a lot of that work that they didn't want to do. That kind of dropped off."

**Summary**

- Danielle’s role involves supervising coaches, providing peer support, and helping individuals navigate county services and treatment options.
- Danielle’s personal experience with recovery adds a unique perspective to her role.
- The recovery center faced challenges due to shortages of recovery coaches and peer support specialists, impacting proper pairing of individuals and cultural diversity.
- Factors contributing to the shortage include limited training availability and the need for long-term recovery individuals.
- COVID-19 significantly affected the recovery center, leading to a loss of staff and increased workload due to referrals.
- The pandemic also impacted the availability of funds for training, making it essential for individuals to be committed to the role.
- Rebuilding the team post-COVID has been challenging, with some staff members facing difficulties adapting to new requirements.
- Danielle emphasizes the importance of professionalism and timely completion of paperwork for part-time staff.
- The recovery center has observed an increase in individuals seeking support post-pandemic, necessitating a more efficient and dedicated team.

**II. SECONDARY SOURCES**


Peer support recovery programs for addiction, involve individuals grappling with addiction or substance misuse seeking guidance and support from peers who have, in most cases, undergone a similar recovery process. Peer support is essential for numerous reasons, including acquiring new coping skills, having non-judgmental conversations, relating to someone who understands the means of addiction, and engaging in activities without the temptation to use.


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Peer recovery support is a non-clinical service delivered by individuals who have experienced recovery. The purpose of these services is to guide individuals in their mental health or substance abuse journey by providing a nonjudgmental and supportive environment. Peer recovery specialists offer many benefits, such as helping individuals “build resilience and protective factors, promote access to clinical services, and facilitate person-driven recovery plans.” However, peer recovery support specialists are not to replace clinical support but instead aid them.

A strategic plan developed by The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (“SAMHSA”) addressed that wider use of peer support specialists would be of great benefit to these clinical professions as they suffer from a lack of health care professionals. Moreover, peer support services have been recognized for their cost-efficiency.

This strategic plan sparked RecoveryPeople, a nonprofit organization based in Texas, to collaborate with researchers from the University of Texas Health Science Center to develop a plan for integrating peer workers into mental healthcare.

“The findings will be used to inform rapid-cycle quality improvement at the partner and system level as well as shape comprehensive workforce development strategic plans. The joint project will train 210 peer workers over three years, focusing on high-need regions along the Texas-Mexico border, Hurricane Harvey-affected areas, and rural parts of the state.”


At the beginning of 2020, mental health addiction treatment facilities were considered an expanding industry, boasting approximately fifteen thousand service providers, an annual revenue of $42 billion, and a projected yearly growth of 5.2%. However, COVID-19 has changed the trajectory of these facilities, setting them up to struggle.

As widely recognized, COVID-19 exacerbated social and economic disparities such as homelessness, substance use disorder, addiction, and mental health conditions. Therefore, the shift in the negative trajectory for mental health and addiction facilities was not due to a lack of demand but because of mandated safety regulations, as well as a lack of referrals from hospitals, which, in turn, has caused financial barriers.
Doug Tieman, the president and CEO of Carson Treatment Centers based in Pennsylvania, states, "Most of us, especially in the non-profit world, operate on a couple of percent margin. If you begin to erode the top line by 15% or 20%, it has a profound financial impact."

**Key Statics/Takeaways:**

- In the summer of 2020, the rehabilitation industry lost $4 billion in revenue;
- The National Council for Behavior Health ("NCBH") published a survey on September 9, 2020, which represents approximately 3,000 mental, om which states:
  - 54% of the said organizations' discontinued programs;
  - 65% of organizations turned away patients;
  - About 50% of organizations have decreased their staff hours, and,
  - Over 25% of them had significant layoffs.
- The government offered treatment facilities up to 2% of their annual revenue relief plans.


COVID-19 has substantially increased alcohol and substance use, but the mandated quarantine has placed treatment centers in hot water financially. While there isn’t a definitive answer(s) as to the decrease in patient intake levels, some speculate that patients may have either relapsed or are concerned about contracting COVID-19.

Yngvild Olsen, Baltimore REACH Health Services Medical Director and VP of the American Society of Addiction Medicine, states, “Prior to COVID-19, we were seeing between 14 and 15 new patients a week. We are now seeing five patients.” Olsen emphasizes that this is not only a medical issue but also a business problem,

Organizations like REACH Health Services and the American Society of Addiction Medicine have never had to allocate funds for services such as teletherapy or products such as face shields, gowns, and face masks. These extra expenses, consequently, have endangered their financial stability.

Chuck Igoglia, CEO of the National Council for Behavior Health, says, “Unfortunately, it's a self-perpetuating cycle, right? You have fewer staff or fewer programs, which mean you can treat fewer people, which then has long-term impact on your revenue… What's worse, says Ingoglia,
a plunging economy also threatens the public funding many organizations rely on."

One positive aspect that emerged from COVID was the implementation of telehealth within treatment centers, as it has proven to be cost-effective.

**Key Statics/Takeaways:**

- National Council for Behavioral Health survey of 3,400 members
  - 92.6% of those have cut back on programs and have laid off employees.


Acknowledging the decline in mental health, which was exacerbated by COVID-19, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers took action. In July of 2022, Wisconsin launched a suicide and crisis lifeline. In that month alone, they received 6,000 calls from individuals across Wisconsin.

In response to this and many other distressing statistics, Governor Evers allocated relief funds and executive budgeting to prioritize mental health, emphasizing mental health within Wisconsin school districts. Governor Evers is of the impression that prioritizing mental health among children and teens is critical, especially when addressing risky behaviors such as substance misuse and addiction.


Treatment centers in Minnesota have struggled to maintain operations due to staffing shortages and narrow profit margins. In Minnesota alone, approximately ten centers closed their doors in 2023. Consequently, Minnesota’s overdose rate remains steady.

According to data from the Minnesota Department of Health Data, on average, over three people lose their lives to overdose daily.

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Eric Grumdahl, Assistant Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services, highlights the challenges of retaining workers who can handle the emotional strain of this occupation. Furthermore, Grumdahl notes that the state’s requirements for these treatment centers are often burdensome, and the pandemic and inflation have exacerbated the situation.

“This is not a simple solution. It’s a really complicated problem that is, in many ways, decades in the making... So rates is a part of that, administrative simplification is a part of that, removing barriers to licensure and entering the field is a part of that,” stated Grumdahl.

Key Statics/Takeaways:

- The state reimbursement rates do not align with “what they are spending to do the work.”
- Teen intervention requires additional licensing and requirements
  - The low state reimbursement rates make it difficult.


Drug and alcohol addiction persists as a significant problem in the United States. Despite insurance companies and Medicaid acknowledge that this is a national problem, individuals facing these addictions are unable to utilize their insurance or Medicaid coverage due to the scarcity of support resources.

Jeff Zornitsky, from Advocate for Human Potential, a health care consulting firm, conducted a study in which he measured “how many behavioral health professionals are available to treat millions of adults with substance use disorder, or SUD, in all 50 states.” Zornitsky utilized a metric termed called the “provider availability index,” which indicated the many social workers, psychiatrists, counselors, and psychologists for every 1,000 individuals with substance use disorders, i.e., approximately 70 workers in the state of Vermont vs. 11 in the state of Nevada. Zornisky found that “nationally, the average is 32 behavioral health specialists for every 1,000 people afflicted with the disorder.” However, “no one has determined the ideal number of providers, but experts agree the current workforce is inadequate in most parts of the country.”
One of the many reasons that the workforce in the addiction field continues to suffer is due to inadequate compensation. In the past, salaries for addiction professionals were lower than those of other healthcare professionals who have acquired the same level of education and training. For instance, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “the average salary for social workers in the addiction field is $38,600, compared to $47,230 in the rest of the health care industry.”

Between 2015 and 2020, the addiction field set out to recruit more than 330,000 employees to meet the demand adequately. However, this issue seemed to have worsened over the years.

**Key Statics/Takeaways:**

- The Affordable Care Act requires all insurers to cover treatments for drug and alcohol addiction.
  - In the past, it only covered pregnant women and children.
  - Private insurance would either (a) not pay for the treatment or (b) pay a small amount, which individuals could not afford to pay the difference.
- Of 18 million insured citizens in the United States, 2.5 million have a substance use disorder.
- Of 19 million uninsured citizens in the United States, 2.8 million have a substance use disorder.
- Of 23 million Americans, approximately 11% receive treatment compared to 80% for diseases such as diabetes.