



New Frontier For Addiction Medicine At AMH

by Ty Bechel

February 24 2021 1:16 PM



ALTON – Had you told me eight years ago that I would be the founding executive director of a nonprofit, host of a successful podcast (*Recovery Uncensored*), a columnist for two separate media publications, a part-time revenue director for a local radio station, or working for BJC, I would have told you I was nothing other than an utter failure and to get lost -- because I deserved to wither away in a ruinous pit to perish alone.

Flash forward to 2020 and I recently was named the recipient of Centerstone's 2020 Community Champion Award for the work I do in Madison County. Receiving and reading the email that said I was chosen as a recipient made me think about how far daily prayer, meditation, and hard work have brought me.

But back to eight years ago. Then I was 165 pounds, close to going to prison, and couldn't think of a purpose for living. Drug and alcohol addiction had me against the ropes. I felt I had failed as a father, son, neighbor, employee, and friend. Mirrors were my enemy. Public outings were usually shrouded in hoodies and dirty blue jeans. It was apparent that my addiction was speeding up my final curtain call, and I would have welcomed Death's invitation with no questions asked. I sank so far down the scale that I convinced myself that society would be better off without me.

Fortunately, I did not have to answer Death's invitation. On Aug. 19, 2012, with my daughters far from my reach, my mother's disappointment more apparent than ever, and a probation officer ready to recommend a prison sentence as the only way to save me from myself, I fell to my knees. Now, I do not believe you have to accept the God I believe in or believe in any spiritual deity, but I cried out to an energy bigger than me and begged for life or death. The words I shouted as tears flooded my face were just this:

"God, if there is any reason for me to be on this Earth, then please save me. If not, please take me out of my miserable existence."

I have been in long-term recovery since.

I started with Alton Memorial Hospital in July 2019. I got a call from Brad Goacher, Chief Operations Officer for AMH, whom I initially met at a River Bend Growth Association ceremony. Amare, the nonprofit I founded, was receiving their 2018 Chairman's Award when we met. Brad asked me to help consult on recovery support services for a new program under the direction of Meredith Parker.

On numerous occasions, I met with Meredith to discuss developing the Warm Hand Off Program that would provide peer recovery specialists meeting with patients that screen for alcohol or substance use disorders to link them with treatment and resources.

I was later offered the lead certified peer recovery specialist position. The initial focus of the Warm Hand Off Program was on opiate addiction and helping those in active withdrawal who wanted to utilize Suboxone for Medical Assisted Treatment (MAT). At the time, we did not realize how the program would take off. To date, we have seen more than 450 patients who have screened for a potential alcohol or substance use disorder and have referred more than 150 patients to one of our partner providers to

continue their MAT services. We also oversee the Medical Stabilization Unit at AMH and conduct detox intakes for admissions.

I believe life is about change. Through this change -- and learning through trial and error -- we understand that we must evolve individually, communally, and organizationally. When I began working with doctors that have been through medical school and residencies, and nurses that pour their hearts into patients they assist, it was a feeling of abnormality. I felt out of place. The nagging voice that tells me I am not good enough turned up the volume and amplified my doubts. But, through a fantastic team at Alton Memorial Hospital under the guidance of pushing the envelope of cultural acceptance by BJC, we all began adapting together.

I was not alive during his presidency, but through countless hours of reading and studying, John F. Kennedy was someone, in my opinion, who loved our country and understood we had to look to the future and welcome change.

JFK wrote that “Today our concern must be with that future. For the world is changing. The old era is ending. The old ways will not do.”

I believe positive change is attainable. I believe that impactful change is achievable. I believe collective change for a better tomorrow is ripe for the taking. It has been an honor to be part of a beautiful team with Elizabeth, Jason, Meredith, Sarah, Terrea, and all of the other staff. Our new program is ushering in a new era of understanding and treatment for a disease that has separated families and divided our communities. There is hope on the horizon for the new frontier of medicine and organizational connectedness.