Dear Friends:

We are a nation awash in grief. Between COVID, gun violence, suicide and overdose, Americans are in terrible pain. Although we are experiencing grief at every turn, we are not very good at processing it. Practice doesn’t make perfect in this case, unfortunately. Grief is an action word, it requires us to invite the hurt in – knowing that it will break our hearts. That’s terrifying, so we do whatever we can to avoid it. But, it doesn’t just go away, unacknowledged grief lies in wait. It amplifies our pain as it seeps sideways – in the need to numb, denial or discharge. And it reduces our capacity to show up for others. We look away from the bereaved parent, we isolate, or behave aggressively toward one another. We all witnessed these extremes far too many times.

Overdose awareness day is an opportunity to invite grief in – to allow our collective hearts to be broken – it may bring you to your knees. And when it does, look around – and know that you are not alone. It’s in these vulnerable moments where we can, in safe and measured bits, begin the process of grieving. Today we aspire to sway together. I see and recognize your pain, I am here for you. The hope is that we can allow ourselves to be loved, supported and fully known. Let’s open our broken hearts to one another - and do the healing work of grieving together:

From my heart to yours,
Maria

Did you Miss our WZBG Interview?

Click on this link to hear this month’s interview on WZBG 97.3 with Dale Jones and Joy Pendola, LIMFT, LADC, Chief Clinical Officer at Help, Inc. and the McCall Center for Behavioral Health. Tune in on the 3rd Wednesday of every month at 8:20 to hear us in real-time.

Make a difference in someone’s life and support McCall.

Our mission is to provide compassionate integrated substance abuse and mental health treatment to help people lead healthier and more productive lives. Your donation will directly support our prevention, recovery and community programs and help us provide clients with the support they need regardless of their ability to pay. Click here to donate today!

Ending the Shame-Use Cycle with Empathy & Connection

Sarah McKinnon, @sunwithsundays

Shame Prevents Proper Treatment

The danger of shame is that it prevents people with substance use and mental health disorders from getting the treatment they need. It keeps them isolated, in denial, and ultimately delaying care. During Mental Health Awareness Month, Made of McIlona, asked their followers what shame kept them from, and they responded:

“Shame kept me from becoming the person I was meant to be.” @brenemckinnon

“Shame kept me from getting help sooner.” @schizophrenic.ncy

“Shame kept me from a happy childhood. If I gave fully into my shame, I didn’t seek help. I wouldn’t be sitting here today.” Sarah McKinnon, @sunwithsundays

Leading with Empathy and Connection

Author, speaker, and researcher Brené Brown spent two decades studying courage, shame, empathy, and vulnerability. She explains that shame needles silence, secrecy, and judgment to thrive, and that empathy is the antidote to shame. When one is met with empathy and connection in treatment for substance use and mental health disorders it is powerful in breaking down the shame-use cycle.

Breaking the cycle begins with positive self-talk and changing the way we think about ourselves. In treatment many people also find they have similar shared experiences. We see it often in group work when someone is afraid of sharing their story but is vulnerable and open up, then a peer says, “me too.” That connection is the often a lightbulb moment when they realize they are not alone. It produces a visible physical change when we see the result directly from our clients when they refer to themselves as a junkie, an addict, or bipolar.

Society at large is starting to recognize what we have always known; mental health and substance use disorders are common and treatable. This past summer Simone Biles, the GOAT of women’s USA gymnastics, made the decision to put her mental health first and withdraw from many events during the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. Her decision was widely accepted and celebrated, a sign there has been a true societal shift. However, we still know there is work to do.

The Shame-Use Cycle

We have all experienced shame at some point in our lives and it can leave us feeling full of self-doubt. When we begin to believe that we don’t conform to what society has deemed “acceptable” or “normal” we start internalizing feelings of “I am a failure”, “I cannot do anything right”, and “I am not worthy”.

For some of us, this voice speaks to us on a daily basis, and it strives to keep us feeling and thinking that we don’t conform to what society has deemed “acceptable” or “normal” we start internalizing feelings of “I am a failure”, “I cannot do anything right”, and “I am not worthy”.

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Breaking the cycle begins with positive self-talk and changing the way we think about ourselves. In treatment many people also find they have similar shared experiences. We see it often in group work when someone is afraid of sharing their story but is vulnerable and open up, then a peer says, “me too.” That connection is the often a lightbulb moment when they realize they are not alone. It produces a visible physical change when they feel understood. That is the power of empathy and connection. We still have a long way to go to change perceptions of substance use and mental health disorders in this country. It feels daunting, but change can start with each of us. We can begin by showing compassion to ourselves and others. If you or someone you love is concerned about their substance use or mental health, know that seeking help is courageous act, but if you believe yourself to be vulnerable and put in the work, a wonderful life awaits you.