February 2019
At the Heart of Wellness

Message from Maria

What is this thing called trauma?

Trauma. What is the first thing you think of when you hear or see that word? Many people think of horrific events like a car or plane crash. Others think of war and the physical, emotional and life-threatening experiences that accompany it. Would it surprise you to know that trauma is all of those things, and more?

Trauma can be the death of a loved one. It can be the feeling of helplessness in the face of violence. Being physically and/or emotionally bullied at home, at school or in your community. All of these are traumatic events. Dr. Gabor Maté defines trauma as "what happens inside of you as a result of traumatic events. It is a loss of connection to oneself and to the present moment".

“IT’S not what happens to you externally that defines the trauma but what happens internally to you as a result of it.”
- Dr. Gabor Maté

So how does McCall help you to deal with trauma? In 2018 we embarked upon a Trauma and Gender Initiative (TAG) with funding from the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, to provide trauma informed care. We recognized early on that in order to help our clients deal with trauma we would first need to look closely at our practices, our perspective, behaviors, attitudes and our agency culture. We began by forming a TAG committee comprised of staff members who reviewed existing assessment protocols, policies and examined
or neglected may deploy complicated behaviors to keep people nearby. A person who was abused sexually may look for human connection in self-destructive ways, like promiscuity. These experiences build and shape our world view – and we build coping skills over time to survive. The world can be a scary, threatening and very stressful place if you didn’t have adults who provided a safe foundation for growth, exploration and support. Or – if that foundation was disrupted by a violation of your trust or safety. People seek relief in many ways from that pain and stress…they may find it in food, gambling, the internet, sex and/or drugs and alcohol. The end goal is the same – to alleviate the pain and suffering that feels relentless. A person with a trauma history may go to the doctor for a sprained ankle or sore tooth – take a medication designed to alleviate physical pain and find that they also have relief from the mental pain they’ve been walking around with as well. That often sets the addiction into motion. It helps to understand the root causes of addiction because people often think of just the chemical hook, when in fact the disease is all about the deeper human experience. That’s where the healing must take place – in those deeply painful places that cause us to go back again and again to self-destructive behaviors because we’re seeking relief. That sounds terrifying but in fact, therapy puts the person in the driver’s seat, controlling what, when and how much to take on at any time. Recovery from trauma McCall’s internal culture. With energy and enthusiasm, the committee recommended changes and new ways of thinking to recommit ourselves to being curious and empathetic to our client’s life experiences. Rather than ask, “what’s wrong?” we began saying, “tell me what happened to you.” Often people believe that they cannot overcome or “do anything about” adverse childhood experiences or other experiences leading to severe trauma. Which is why any time we talk with our clients about trauma we include a conversation about resiliency. The term resiliency refers to “the capacity of individuals, families, and communities to heal from trauma, and to strengthen their wellbeing and adaptability in ways that can mitigate or prevent future trauma”. (Trauma and Resiliency: A Systems Change Approach, 2017).

McCall offers numerous evidence-based trauma-specific interventions that have been proven to facilitate recovery from trauma, including assessments, treatments, and recovery supports. Some of the trauma-specific interventions we offer include; Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Healing and Empowerment Group (Women’s Trauma), Building Resiliency Group (Men’s Trauma), Trauma recovery and Empowerment (TREM), and Helping Women/Men Recovery groups. By realizing the widespread impact of trauma on our clients and understanding potential paths for recovery we are now able to more easily recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma. McCall has transformed our employee’s knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, that seek to actively resist re-traumatization and better serve our clients.

McCall’s Heart

The McCall Center for Behavioral Health is fortunate to have a remarkable group of employees who are dedicated to our clients, our community and our agency. Beginning this month, and continuing throughout the year, we will be featuring a staff member. We know how amazing our staff is and we think it is important for you, our readers, to get to know a little bit about them as well. For McCall employees this is not just a job, they love this agency, believe in its mission, have hope for their clients (even when those clients feel lost and hopeless) and know that their work is critically important to turn the tide of the ravages of addiction toward the journey of health. Our employees are the heart of McCall. This month we are featuring Andrew Lyons, MPH.
is possible. At McCall, we see it, every day. Know that you can do this, and you don’t need to do it alone.

My very best to you always,
Maria

Make a difference in someone's life and support McCall today.

Our mission is to provide comprehensive 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!

My title here at McCall is “Prevention Facilitator,” which can be loosely translated to “Coordinator for the Torrington Awareness and Prevention Partnership”; though, that’s a mouthful so Prevention Facilitator is definitely preferable. The Torrington Awareness and Prevention Partnership, or TAPP, is a youth substance use prevention coalition that works to identify and address the environmental factors that promote, influence, or facilitate youth substance use in Torrington.

One of my favorite quotes comes from the Kurt Vonnegut novel Mother Night - “We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be” - and it’s always reminded me of the importance of being real and being genuine. I think this idea is one of the things that’s gotten me to where I am today; throughout my education, my time in the National Guard, and now my career, it’s helped to create new opportunities, mitigate challenges, and build new relationships.

Which brings me to McCall – I haven’t been here all that long, but I was almost immediately struck by how fortunate I was to find this organization. Not only was I able to find a job that was able to apply the things I’d been studying for the past few years, but I also get to come to work every day and be around people who are welcoming, caring, passionate about their work, and just plain fun to be around; I can’t really ask for more than that.