



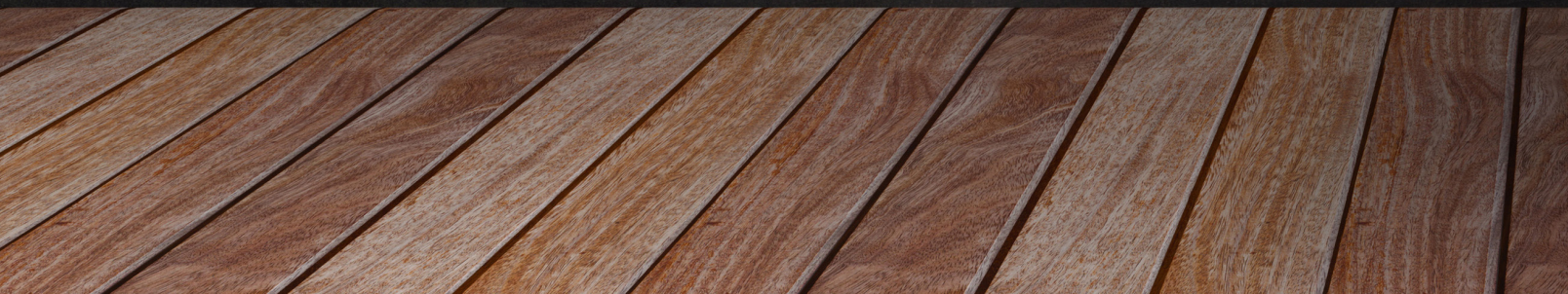
BY CAROLYN DELANEY, CAL BEYER & RICHARD JONES

Building Support for Workers Through

RECOVERY FRIENDLY WORKPLACES

The consequences of substance misuse and addiction can be catastrophic in the workplace. Impairment can result in workplace incidents that lead to injuries, fatalities, quality defects leading to rework, and lost productivity through fatigue, tardiness, absenteeism, and presenteeism.

In an industry that exists to build and create, the addiction crisis has become a destructive force in construction (see “Substance Use in Construction” a few pages ahead). However, the recovery friendly workplace movement offers new hope — and a new blueprint — for providing construction workers in recovery with the support they need to stay healthy.







The Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative

In 2018, New Hampshire launched its Recovery Friendly Workplace (RFW) initiative (www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com) to address the statewide impacts associated with substance use disorders (SUDs). Administered by Granite United Way in partnership with New Hampshire, this initiative empowers businesses to create work environments that are supportive of those in or seeking recovery, in addition to those who may have a loved one with SUD.

The RFW initiative was launched in response to New Hampshire's increasing overdose rates and its effects on local workforces, including construction companies. The initiative was designed to give employers the tools, resources, and trainings they need to encourage the success of their employees in recovery.

RFW Program Director Samantha Lewandowski explains the innovative public health approach. "Work is where we reach people, and the RFW model gives us an opportunity to make recovery resources available at really what is an unprecedented scale. This is particularly important for sectors like construction where the hours can be long and tiring, and workers may not have the time, energy, or nuanced information needed to access support outside the workplace."

What Does a Recovery Friendly Workplace Look Like?

In industries like construction that continue to struggle with workforce shortages, becoming a recovery friendly workplace may also mean directly tapping into the recovery population as a source of qualified employees. This is often accomplished by partnering with a job agency, nonprofit organization, or government agency that specializes in placing people in recovery.

In 2021, *Engineering News-Record* featured an innovative program of a recovery friendly workplace initiative involving Karas & Karas Glass, the Ironworkers District Council of New England, and other trade unions.¹

According to Jonathan Goyer, Director of Rhode Island's RFW initiative, the focus is on "... establishing a compassionate environment where people truly feel that it's okay to not be okay. And it's okay to ask for help ... it's about employers fostering an environment that is supportive of employees already in recovery and those employees making the decision to get into recovery."

10 Guiding PRINCIPLES OF RECOVERY

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines recovery as "a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential!"

To support this definition, SAMHSA identified 10 guiding principles of recovery:

- 1) Recovery emerges from hope
- 2) Recovery is person-driven
- 3) Recovery occurs via many pathways
- 4) Recovery is holistic
- 5) Recovery is supported by peers and allies
- 6) Recovery is supported through relationship and social networks
- 7) Recovery is culturally-based and influenced
- 8) Recovery is supported by addressing trauma
- 9) Recovery involves individual, family, and community strengths and responsibility
- 10) Recovery is based on respect

Source: "SAMHSA's Working Definition of Recovery: 10 Guiding Principles of Recovery." Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/pep12-recdef.pdf.

Substance Use IN CONSTRUCTION

Marijuana, cocaine, and nonprescription opioid use has been found to be higher among construction and trades workers.² The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reported similar findings, with the construction industry having some of the highest rates of heavy alcohol use, illicit drug use, and substance use disorder (SUD). And, the National Safety Council (NSC) reports that 19% of construction workers have a SUD compared to nearly 9% for workers in all industries.³

The NSC and NORC at the University of Chicago developed a Substance Use Employer Calculator for business leaders to help assess the direct and hidden indirect costs associated with SUDs in the workplace.⁴ NSC and NORC report that *each case* of untreated SUD costs employers an average of \$8,817 annually.⁵ Moreover, employers or union sponsors of health plans pay more in employee health insurance due to increased medical claims.

Hallmarks of recovery friendly workplaces include:

- Supportive leave of absence and return-to-work policies
- Recovery support meetings held on jobsites
- Employees attend recovery-related medical appointments without fear of stigma or penalty
- Peer-to-peer mentoring
- Supportive conversations with employees who disclose that they or a loved one has been affected by SUD
- Regular workplace training for addiction and recovery awareness
- Understanding hiring practices regarding employment gaps related to recovery

Besides being good for the individual employee's health and wellbeing, recovery friendly workplace practices are simply good business. NORC at the University of Chicago and the National Safety Council (NSC) report that supporting workers in their recovery can help an employer avoid an average of almost \$8,500 in additional annual costs related to higher absenteeism and worker turnover rates among workers with untreated SUDs.

Employees in recovery miss 13.7 fewer workdays than employees with an active addiction.⁶ Workers in recovery are also safer on the job, reducing health care costs due to substance-related accidents.

EXHIBIT 1: SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER MYTHS IN THE WORKPLACE

Myth	Reality
Most addicts and alcoholics are unemployed.	About 75% of people with SUDs are employed. ⁷
It's easy to spot an alcoholic or addict because they cause problems or disruptions due to performance issues.	SUDs range from mild to moderate to severe. Many people with SUDs are high functioning, and many are in leadership positions.
It's none of the employer's business what employees do with their free time. As long as workers don't use substances at work, it doesn't impact the employer or coworkers.	An SUD is everyone's business. It impacts everyone, and it's impossible to avoid the ripple effect of SUDs. SUDs cost businesses \$442 billion a year in lost productivity, health care costs, etc. ⁸
Employees will be defensive, offended, and feel judged if SUDs are discussed in the workplace. These feelings can impact retention.	It is possible to discuss SUDs in a non-stigmatizing and supportive manner. Most employees are grateful that someone cares enough to bring it up.

EXHIBIT 2: REALITIES OF RECOVERY FROM SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

Myth	Reality
A person must "hit bottom" before they can recover. If you care, then you should leave them alone until they "hit bottom" and want help.	SUD recovery is typically a process that happens over time, usually through multiple attempts. Therefore, the sooner you can intervene and start the process of recovery, the better.
The only way people with SUDs can recover is to go to rehab for treatment.	There are multiple pathways to recovery. In fact, rehab is not the most common pathway. The most important part of recovery is to start the process.
The odds of being in recovery aren't good.	Among adults who reported SUDs, nearly 75% reported being in recovery; lower prevalence of using substances in the past year and having received treatment for their substance use problem were associated with being in recovery. ⁹
Recovery is an access problem.	Recovery is an engagement problem. Access to treatment programs alone is not enough to help most individuals discover their path for recovery. Persons remaining engaged in a recovery program, process, or lifestyle is the key to attaining long-term recovery.



These workers are loyal and highly engaged, and employers report less turnover and lower retraining costs associated with attrition.

Stigma: The Major Barrier for Recovery Friendly Workplaces

There are barriers that must be overcome to successfully implement a recovery friendly workplace. Stigma remains high throughout society on mental health and substance misuse.

When stigma exists, SUDs are not discussed by employees for fear of reprisals, including judgment from supervisors and peers, being assigned less desirable work tasks, undue scrutiny over work practices, being passed over for promotions, or being the first to be laid-off.

To reduce the stigma, it is important to talk openly about SUDs and recovery.

Exhibit 1 addresses common myths about SUDs in the workplace, while Exhibit 2 summarizes the realities of workplace supported recovery.

Recovery Support in the BUILDING TRADES

Supporting fellow union members is nothing new in the building trades, but the opioid crisis pushed that support to a new level. The Massachusetts Building Trades Union (MBTU), formerly known as the Massachusetts Building Trades Council, represents the members of 62 local unions and district councils in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Building Trades Recovery Council was created to grow awareness for union members seeking recovery and support from substance use disorder (SUD) and other mental health challenges.

“Building Trades Recovery programs vary from union to union,” Frank Callahan, MBTU President, explains. A cornerstone of their programs is union assistance and peer support; whether it be a union staff person or office or a dense network of rank-and-file union members, they work to help fellow union members find the resources they need through, for example, their union health insurance program. Benefits, including employee assistance programs (EAPs), are different for each union, and members aren’t always aware of what is available to them. Peers also help members find community support (e.g., 12-step groups), attend meetings with them hosted at local union halls, and organize substance-free events (e.g., softball games). Peers and union recovery leaders are available any time — night or day — to offer support and assistance.

Banners at jobsites and stickers on job boxes, hard hats, and portable toilets with phone numbers or QR codes help get the word out about the program. Each trade union has a number to call, but members are welcome to access services of another union as well.

“Whatever trade you’re in, there’s help,” Callahan says. “If you’ve got a problem, we want to keep you. You’re a valued asset, you’re a union member, and you’re our brother or sister.”

Human Resource Policy Considerations for Recovery Friendly Workplaces

When working with employees in recovery, it’s important to understand their legal rights and the employers’ responsibilities. Under the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA), employers are prevented from discriminating against an employee simply for having a disability, disease, or medical condition, such as SUD.¹⁰ Generally, employees in recovery or treatment are covered by the ADA, but active illegal drug use is not protected.¹¹ This is an important boundary for employees in recovery to understand.

Another piece of protective legislation, the *Family & Medical Leave Act* (FMLA), can also apply to people in recovery. For covered employees, FMLA legally ensures the ability to take unpaid leave for serious medical conditions, including treatment for SUD.

Recovery friendly workplaces create hope for those seeking to overcome the circumstances of addiction in their lives. Coworkers, customers, and other stakeholders also benefit from the hope they feel when they experience the power of people getting a second chance and greater empathy and understanding for everyone.

ADOPTING A RECOVERY FRIENDLY WORKPLACE INITIATIVE

not only promotes the psychological safety and wellbeing of workers in recovery and those who are sober curious, but also elevates them to be seen by potential new employees, business partners, and the communities they serve.

Recovery friendly workplaces can not only change lives, but they can also save lives. As Samantha Lewandowski relayed, “One of our staff members did a Narcan training at a company and left kits there. Not long after, we were informed that because of having kits on site, they were able to save the life of one of their employees.”

Recovery Capital

Recovery capital is the sum of the total resources that a person has available to find and maintain their personal path to recovery — a well-known concept within long-term recovery communities. The Recovery Capital Index (RCI) (www.recoverycapital.io) is a person-centric measurement tool of a multi-dimensional wellness journey in recovery. RCI can be applied at the person level and at a broader level, including for an organization.¹²

One of the pillars of recovery capital is employment that provides accessibility to several other pillars like food, shelter, transportation, etc.

Recovery friendly workplaces are effective because they increase the capability of those in or seeking recovery to begin a personal recovery journey. The importance of maintaining employment is more than economic to persons in recovery. Employment is a vital link to self-esteem, meaning, and purpose of one’s life as well as socialization and connectivity with others. There are many elements of recovery capital, including but not limited to:

- 1) Physical safety and stability (job, food, shelter, transportation, etc.)
- 2) Self-esteem, internal motivation, and resiliency/hardiness
- 3) Purpose and spirituality
- 4) Access to information
- 5) Available social support (family, friends, employer/union, etc.)

- 6) Employee assistance programs (EAPs) or member assistance programs (MAPs)
- 7) Health insurance
- 8) A 12-step program and/or other community-based programs
- 9) Access to treatment, recovery, and other recovery support (community-based health programs, recovery community centers, recovery high schools and colleges, etc.)
- 10) Lifestyle changes and sober living practices
- 11) Peer support coaching

Recovery friendly workplaces increase the amount of recovery capital available to individuals seeking or sustaining long-term recovery from SUDs.

How to Implement Recovery Friendly Practices

The first step toward becoming a recovery friendly workplace is to start talking about it. According to Ariana Williamson, Project Coordinator of North Carolina’s RFW initiative, this is sometimes the biggest step of all, as reluctance to address addiction and recovery head-on still persists.

“Employers can think, ‘but that type of person doesn’t work here’ ... what shocks them to learn is that, yes, you are hiring people who are in recovery who either don’t share about it or don’t give any indicators of recovery or substance use ... That’s why the number one goal of our initiative is to combat the stigma about recovery ... so employers can better support their employees.”

To educate employers and implement recovery friendly practices, initiative directors often connect them with other businesses that have successful support programs. “You need to know that you are not alone,” notes Goyer. In this way, employers that are curious about the nuts and bolts



of recovery friendly workplaces don't have to reinvent the wheel to get programs up and running.

State initiatives also have resources available, including hands-on training for managers and other business stakeholders. If your business is in a state that has yet to officially join the movement, check out these free online resources from New Hampshire's RFW Initiative (www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com).

While every industry has its own specific mix of recovery support practices that best suit workplace needs, the focus in construction may be on supporting workers in recovery, but it is important to also double down on safety practices that can prevent worker injuries and the prescriptions for addictive pain killers that these injuries can sometimes trigger.

Opioid risk reduction has been a major ongoing initiative in the construction industry. For more on the opioid crisis in construction, see "Waging a Counterattack on Opioids: First-Dose Prevention Strategies for the Workplace & at Home" from the March/April 2022 issue of *CFMA Building Profits*.¹³

Lived Experience

RECOVERY JOURNEYS BRING HOPE, HELP & HEALING

By Carolyn Delaney

The importance of safe messaging is important to destigmatize substance use disorder (SUD) and to support those seeking treatment leading to recovery.

"You don't look like your story." At 26 years old, I was homeless, unable to care for my children, and not drawing a sober breath for weeks at a time. Now, at 55, in recovery for almost 30 years, I don't look at all like I did back then. I have a home. I was able to reunite with my children (who are 33 and 36 now). I had a 25-year career leading IT departments and have been active in my local community.

The importance of sharing personal recovery stories cannot be overstated; treatment is just the beginning. When society only sees, hears, and experiences the devastation of active addiction and despair, then stigma continues to perpetuate the cycle. When there's no visibility of things getting better, it's hard to imagine a different way.

With 22 million people in recovery, there are quite literally millions of stories from people who are living a life free from the grips of a deadly addiction. The visibility of how they did it, what their lives looked like then, and the reality of their lives now can create a compelling story for those who are struggling. It can also reduce stigma by expanding the lens through which society sees recovery from addiction. An expanded lens amplifies hope.

For more personal lived experience stories related to SUDs and recovery, the following people have shared their stories to help eliminate the stigma:

Chris Carlough: www.cfma.org/articles/the-long-road-back

Rob Trymbulak: www.cfma.org/articles/i-found-freedom-from-addiction-in-treatment-and-recovery

Dorothy Reed: www.cfma.org/articles/sobriety-the-solid-foundation-for-a-life-of-meaning-purpose-and-service

LIFE AT A RECOVERY FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

Cianbro, one the largest employee-owned open shop construction and construction services companies in the U.S., is headquartered in Pittsfield, ME. Director of Operational Human Resources Destiny Demo describes the company's experience with becoming a recovery friendly workplace.

"Cianbro has a long history of focusing on the overall wellbeing of its team's health and safety. As a recovery friendly workplace, Cianbro values human dignity and believes that each team member is unique and brings value with them. Today, there are many team members in various stages of recovery, some of whom require modifications to their work activities, schedules, and more. Cianbro works closely with each individual to accommodate those modifications as best they can."

As a supportive recovery friendly workplace, Cianbro team members develop invaluable loyalties. When people feel supported within their individual teams, they are more likely to have less anxiety, which in turn improves their quality, production, and most important their ability to contribute to a safe work environment.

Conclusion

Creating recovery friendly workplaces is an important workforce development strategy to help build a stronger construction industry.

Adopting a recovery friendly workplace initiative not only promotes the psychological safety and wellbeing of workers in recovery and those who are sober curious, but also elevates them to be seen by potential new employees, business partners, and the communities they serve. By providing job and career opportunities to individuals who frequently face barriers to employment, it also shows commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) initiatives. ■

Endnotes

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Employers Working Toward a Recovery Friendly Workplace: 10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) **Recognize** the reality that substance misuse and substance use disorder (SUD) is affecting your organization.
Complete a sample calculation for your company using the Substance Use Employer Calculator (www.nsc.org/forms/substance-use-employer-calculator).
- 2) **Understand** the importance of reducing stigma and embracing the language of recovery. Use language that emphasizes SUD as a health condition while focusing on the person rather than on the disease or disorder. It is important to refer to a "person in recovery" and avoid labels such as "addict."
- 3) **Evaluate** the influence of alcohol at company-sponsored events and thoughtfully consider how to diminish the status of alcohol at these events. Representative methods include offering alcohol-free events, increasing the variety of nonalcoholic beverages, decreasing the length of time for open bars, and using a ticket system to reduce excessive consumption.
- 4) **Galvanize** leadership's commitment to address issues and provide education for leaders and managers.
- 5) **Leverage** personal lived experiences among senior leaders to normalize conversation on substance misuse and SUDs throughout the company.
- 6) **Understand** and promote:
 - The capabilities of your organization's employee assistance program (EAP) to determine the services available to employees who are either seeking or sustaining recovery.
 - The coverage for behavioral health services, including SUD treatment and recovery, in the health insurance benefits program available to employees.
- 7) **Understand the legal responsibilities** of employers and the rights afforded to employees under the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, *Family & Medical Leave Act*, and any other local jurisdictional statutes/laws against workplace discrimination, harassment, bullying, and retaliation.
- 8) **Tap into resources** available from either state or local governments or nonprofit agencies to evaluate if there is an existing initiative that your company can join. Assess if your state is among the more than 25 states with recovery friendly initiatives (www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/otherstates).
- 9) **Recommend providing annual training** for all employees on recovery first-aid to reduce stigma and promote active care seeking by those who are "sober-curious." Recovery first-aid training provides resources for employees to share with their family members and other loved ones.

Recovery First Aid is an evidence-informed self-paced distance learning course offered by Youturn Health that provides a baseline understanding of issues related to SUD and recovery options.

The course is approximately one hour in length (12 video lessons) and is monitored by Certified Peer Support Specialists who serve as mentors and answer questions that naturally arise when SUD and recovery is the topic.
- 10) **Evaluate digital platforms and point solution apps** to promote the education of workers and families on substance misuse and SUD leading to treatment and recovery. Representative examples of such platforms include Quit Genius, Sober Grid, and Youturn Health.

RECOVERY FRIENDLY WORKPLACES



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Additional RESOURCES

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