A community paying it forward

FALL RIVER – For the past 10 years, the community has rallied together to raise funds to help those less fortunate; the homeless.

On August 17, 2013 this event will occur again, with hundreds of walkers and volunteers joining together at Steppingstone’s annual 5k Get Steppin’ walk.

“When we started the walk in 2003, we hoped it would be a success, but didn’t imagine what a huge success it would actually become.” shared Kathleen Schedler-Clark, Steppingstone’s Executive Director. The proceeds of the Get Steppin’ walk are essential to help with operational costs of Steppingstone’s First Step Inn, the only emergency shelter operating in Fall River, MA.

“Our First Step Inn is just that…the first step in the process of changing lives. Before coming to the Inn, some of our guests couldn’t imagine where they would find there next meal or place to stay. Many guests have moved on and now have permanent places to live, better health and ties to the community. Those able to work have jobs and others are active in the community in other ways. Our goal is not just to provide a bed, it’s really to change lives.” says Rosa Medeiros, First Step Inn’s Program Director.

For more information about the Get Steppin’ walk, visit www.steppingstoneinc.org/walk

A Note From the Outpatient Director by Melissa Kachapis

Recently we experienced traumatic events occurring close to home. The recent bombing and shooting in Boston has devastated many lives and has had both physical and psychological impact on people in our communities. The first noticeable effects were physical, with many brave and caring responders immediately taking action. What sometimes takes time to surface is the psychological impact trauma has on individuals in the community.

People respond in different ways and we know it’s healthy to respond, take action in whatever ways we can, process emotions, and return to normal life. Most people in the community recover with community and family support. But for those significantly affected by trauma and vulnerable persons, it is often difficult to recovery without help.

When a traumatic event occurs in the community, many parents wonder if they should try to avoid having their young child view the news or hear discussions regarding the event so they don’t become frightened. I recently read a very helpful article provided by the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that responds to the question (continued page 2)
and we will share excerpts of this article with you in hopes that you will find it helpful also.

Our hearts truly go out to the families and communities that were personally affected by the recent devastating events and they are in our thoughts. We are blessed to have a great community filled with effective resources and responders that pull together in times of crises and help those affected.

We find that often the challenge is for people affected to recognize they need professional help to deal with trauma. Many people try to overcome the affects alone. While many are successful, there are those that need professional help.

Once someone recognizes they need help, the next step is finding a qualified professional they can trust and confide in. We have many great behavioral health providers in our community that are qualified to help.

Here at Steppingstone we have a committed, qualified staff of professionals who provide effective, compassionate, trauma informed treatment services. If you or a loved one are in need of our help to deal with trauma or a substance use, or mental health problem, please don't hesitate to call our Outpatient Program. We have licensed professionals that are compassionate, experienced and qualified to help.

Telephone: 508-679-0033

Talking with Children after a Disaster

When a disaster or traumatic event occurs, how do we approach discussing this with our children, what should we say or do? Recently SAMHSA published a very helpful article, “Tips for Talking With and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or Traumatic Event”, which provides guidance on this topic. The following information below has been extracted from this Guide.

Children will have reactions which are normal to dealing with stress, with behaviors lasting about 2 to 4 weeks. If they last longer, or appear suddenly later on, they may need more help coping. If this occurs, you should access reputable local resources qualified to provide mental health treatment to children and youth.

Some possible reactions to Disaster/Trauma:

- 0-5 years old—May show same emotions as caregiver, may act differently such as crying for no reason, withdrawing from people, not playful as usual.
- 6-19 years old—May fear going to school and stop spending time with friends, may have attention problems and do poorly in school, may have aggressive behavior for no reason, may complain about physical aches or pains because they cannot identify what is really bothering them emotionally, may engage in risky behaviors such as using alcohol or drugs.

How parents/caregivers can support recovery from traumatic events:

- Most importantly, make sure children feel connected, cared about and loved.
- Help children express emotions through conversation, writing, drawing and singing. Tell them it's okay to express emotions. Crying is a way to relieve stress. Pay attention and be a good listener.
- Help them see the good such as heroic actions, families and friends that helped and support from people and the community. Children feel better when they help others; they can send thank you notes to people who helped. Encourage these activities.
- It's okay for children to see adults cry, but not to exhibit intense emotions. Violence and extreme emotions can further frighten children or lead to more trauma.
- Show children how to take care of themselves. Model self care routines, eat healthy meals, get enough sleep, exercise and take breaths to handle stress.

To access this full SAMHSA guide and learn more, go to: http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/docs/KEN01-0093R.pdf
There has been so much discussion, both for and against, the Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act (PPACA) and how it affects the insurance industry, employers and employees. However if we take a closer look we might find that PPACA offers all Americans access to affordable health care with no penalties for pre-existing conditions and safeguards against insurers dropping individuals who are ill. Additionally it ensures low income families receive federal subsidies to have comparable access to the same services many Americans enjoy.

Since 2009 when PPACA was first rolled out it established minimum standards for health insurance policies.

It ensures that young adults have access to health insurance even though they may feel that they don’t need it. Parents can now sleep at night knowing their children are covered under their plan until age 26 whether or not they live with them, are not a dependent on their parent’s tax return, are no longer a student or are married.

Well care visits are covered one hundred percent so there are no co-pays, deductibles or co-insurance for an annual physical. This means no one should be required to pay for that visit unless there is follow-up conducted or the physician administers a required vaccine.

All new plans must cover Women’s Preventative Services with no cost-sharing requirements. It includes well-woman visits, mammograms, colonoscopies, gestational diabetes screening, human papillomavirus (HPV) screening for women age 30 and older, sexually transmitted infection (STI) counseling, HIV screening and counseling, FDA-approved contraceptive methods and counseling, breastfeeding support, supplies and counseling, and domestic violence screening and counseling.

In 2012 PPACA required all group health insurance plans to maintain an internal claim and appeal process that meets certain standards and to provide for an external appeal process.

It also required insurers and plan sponsors to provide a Summary of Benefits and Coverage (SBA) for annual enrollments and notify enrollees of material mid-year changes with their plan.

Soon individuals will have access to the Health Insurance Marketplace (formerly known as the “Exchanges”) to purchase insurance whether they are full-time or part-time employees. Stay tuned for further details.

Beginning January 1, 2014 all employers must offer employees working 30 hours or more, health insurance even if they work those hours intermittently. Employers are required to take a look-back period of 3 months or more to track those employees who work on an intermittent basis. In the future employers may choose to limit the number of hours that employee works or offer the health insurance benefit at the same price that full-time employees pay.

As of January 1, 2014, employer group health plans may not impose annual dollar amounts on essential health benefits or impose pre-existing conditions exclusions for any enrollees.

Since 2006 many of us who live and work in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, have had experience with Health Care Reform so PPACA and many of these national health care changes seem like “old-hat” to us. Yet it is now exciting to see that all Americans, not only the ones who live in Massachusetts, will have access to the same benefits we all enjoy.

For further information on the Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act (PPACA) please go to http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/healthreform/
Growth at Steppingstone Inc.

OUTPATIENT SERVICES: Since Steppingstone’s Outpatient Clinic obtained a mental health licensed to operate several years ago, there has been continued growth in the number of requests for treatment. In order to continue to provide efficient access to treatment, the Outpatient Program is in the process of expanding to 279 N. Main Street, which will offer more space for more clinicians to meet the growing need for treatment services in our community.

The anticipated opening date of the new clinic is July 1, 2013. (Feature article regarding opening to be included in next newsletter.)

MAINTENANCE DEPARTMENT: With more buildings to maintain, there has also been a need to expand our maintenance department building. The maintenance department was previously in a small shed which moved to a trailer. This trailer was recently replaced by a new large maintenance building.

OFFENDER REENTRY SERVICES: Steppingstone was recently awarded a grant by SAMHSA to provide offender reentry services to men exiting the Bristol County House of Correction who are re-integrating into our community. Services begin in the correctional setting and continue out in the community with a goal of reducing recidivism to criminal activity and/or substance use.

Passion for Art in Recovery

I’ve been drawing since I was a small child. I actually received a BA degree in Art in 1998. I draw constantly in my free time as I see the world through very imaginatively creative eyes. I can walk down the street and see something that moves me emotionally, and then draw it later on in a different format than the original version. I tend to create movements of color across the paper and draw trees to excess as they represent life and change.

Drawing has become more important to me in recovery as it has allowed me to express my feelings through colors and shapes. It also allows me to take the time for myself to concentrate on the positive things in my life. It keeps me passionate about the steps I am taking towards a better, more productive life in sobriety.
I think today I’ll start anew,  
Forget the hurt and fear!  

I think today, I’ll start to undo,  
Put on a smile and loose a tear!  

Though, I feel it may be too hard,  
I refuse to continue being scarred!  

Though, many will surely doubt,  
I have to prove what I’m about!  

I can be who I was meant to be,  
From these chains, I will be free!  

I can slowly change my life,  
Slowly forgetting all the strife.  

Each day, I will become stronger,  
Hopeless I will be NO longer.  

Each day, I will shine more bright,  
Then with others, I’ll share my Light.

Make My Day, Make Your Day

Everyone feels the effects of stress, not just those in recovery from substance use or mental health. No one is immune to daily frustrations and life challenges, it happens to us all…. family problems, conflicts at work, illness, financial stress. When we get depressed or anxious, treatment programs and medications may be recommended by professionals to help. But is there something simpler that can also help? Research indicates there is. Help others to help yourself!

Feel-good research

Research shows that people who help others are more likely to be happy and less likely to be depressed. In one research study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, MRI scans monitored the brains of participants as they decided if they would donate part of the research study payment to charity. Those choosing to donate experienced activated parts of the brain (mesolimbic and subgenual areas) which respond to monetary rewards and other positive stimuli and produce feel-good chemicals.

When you imagine helping someone, a part of the brain (the "mesolimbic system") lights up, says Stephen G. Post, Ph.D., professor of preventive medicine at Stony Brook University in New York and author of "The Hidden Gifts of Helping." "It's an evolutionarily ancient, emotional part of the brain," he says. "When people just think about giving, the body does out feel-good chemicals such as dopamine, which has a soothing effect, and possibly serotonin, one of the brain chemicals we treat depression with. They feel joy and delight—helper's high."

It doesn't happen to everyone, or every time, but it's very common. In one study, more than half the people who worked in a soup kitchen for a couple of hours felt a mood elevation. Says Post, "Some people feel more tranquil, peaceful, serene; others, warmer and more trusting."

Why does doing good work?

Considering our culture normally associates happiness with obtaining something, who do we respond so positively to giving? "As Charles Darwin noted, group selection played a strong role in human evolution. If something like helping benefits the group, it will be associated with pleasure and happiness," explains Stephen Post, Ph.D., a research professor of bioethics at Case Western Reserve University who co-authored the book Why Good Things Happen to Good People.

So it may be that evolution primed us to feel better when we give; but there may also be other reasons. Many people believe that when they focus on someone else, they aren't focusing as much on their own problems and as such, shift to a more positive perspective. So give it a try. When you’re feeling down, or even when you're not, do something good.

Just a few ideas of opportunities to give to others:
- Smile and brighten up someone’s day
- Give a donation
- Give a listening, non-judgemental ear
- Donate time or money to charity
- Open a door for someone
- Put change in someone’s expiring parking meter
- Suspended coffee/lunch (The person ahead pays for a lunch/coffee for a person in need who goes in for coffee/lunch later that day.)
- Mow your elderly neighbor’s lawn
My personal rock bottom was waking up in a homeless shelter on Cape Cod on January 151, 2013. I woke up bloody with road rash all over my backside and legs with barely any recollection of the previous evening’s events. My circulation was so bad from drinking heavily and using drugs that my feet were swollen to 3x their normal size and were so cramped that I had barely been able to walk for days. My family had put out a missing persons report on me and was unsure if I was dead or alive on a day to day basis. They were at their wits end, had tried everything in their power to help me and had finally made the hard decision to stand their ground and say they could not support me until I made the decision to get some help. I don’t know what it was that finally clicked for me that morning waking up completely alone in an unfamiliar place but I know I felt entirely defeated and knew I could not continue to live that way. I put what was left of my pride aside and asked the shelter to call me an ambulance so I could go to the E.R. and beg for some help. After my physical addiction was taken care of, it was time to deal with the mental and emotional addiction. I chose to come to Steppingstone because it was the one program that I consistently heard positive things about I had heard all over that it was a very structured program with an exceptional success rate.

Steppingstone saved my life. When I first came in I was petrified and had no idea what to expect. It was overwhelming to walk into a house with twenty seven different women with twenty seven different personalities all with their own opinions explaining to me the regimented schedule and all of the guidelines expected of me to abide by. Steppingstone is a "Therapeutic Community" and they really put a lot of emphasis on the house being a peer run community as much as possible. My first impression of the house was definitely the sense of community within; there were a couple girls there to greet me and show me around and everyone was very welcoming, helpful and patient in explaining to me how everything works.

I have now been at Steppingstone for five months and the transformation that my loved ones and I have seen is amazing. My determination, my peers and the staff has all been an integral part of my success. With their encouragement, guidance and support I have been able to get acclimated back into society again one day at a time. I am working consistently, starting college courses soon, have been appointed as the house "president" and am extremely active in my recovery.

One of the most important things that the program has provided me with is counseling. It is my first time receiving such help in over ten years. I trust my counselors inexplicably and know that I can speak with them about anything. I have an in-house counselor with whom I meet with weekly that goes over my treatment plans and works with me on my short and long term needs and goals. I have a Steppingstone outpatient counselor with whom I also meet with weekly. I just began family counseling which is already helping me with processing and overcoming my past, building better communication skills and strengthening our relationship. It also have access to the house support staff 24 hours a day whenever an issue arises or I need someone to talk to. For a long time I could not bring myself to open up or talk to anyone but the staff has been wonderful about engaging me, making me feel comfortable and discuss feelings.

I have also learned through the program how to be accountable in life. Even the simple guidelines that I don’t always enjoy have benefited me and my recovery; going to bed at a reasonable hour, waking up early, making my bed, taking my medications as prescribed, cleaning my room, making and keeping doctor’s appointments, being responsible for attending recovery meetings, obtaining a sponsor and being active in service work and my recovery has all helped me to reimmerse myself back into day to day life. A lot of these things may seem simple or normal to a lot of people but they are habits that I have not practiced for years and I recognize now the importance of maintaining a daily routine and schedule. Through the program I have also been given the opportunity to volunteer for different causes and give back to my community. I could go on and on about how much the Steppingstone program and its staff has done for me but to sum it up, the program has helped me to get myself and my life back; how to live and not just merely exist, one day at a time.
Welcome Home Combined with Case Management

Fiscal Year 2013 was a year of change and transition. Due to the ending of the funding cycle, Steppingstone’s Luis E. Martinez House closed its doors last year. But true to the saying... “When one door closes another will open”, Steppingstone received funding to open the doors of the new Welcome Home Program.

Welcome Home is funded through the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act and overseen by the New Bedford Office of Housing and Community Development. The Welcome Home Program provides eleven scattered site apartments in the city of New Bedford to persons who are living with a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS. This housing is combined with Steppingstone’s HIV/AIDS Case Management and Health Related Support Services Program, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Office of HIV/AIDS. This Program affords Welcome Home residents with an array of services structured to support clients achievement of important outcomes in housing stability, health, community involvement and other independent living goals.

The Program offers medical case management and social service coordination as well as housing advocacy and peer support. The Program outreaches to persons with a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS living or homeless within the Fall River and New Bedford catchment area. Peer leaders serve as role models, help individuals cope with their diagnosis, and adhere to healthy routines.

The housing advocacy component assists individuals in the Fall River and New Bedford catchment area with locating and accessing safe, affordable housing. Program participants are also assisted with arranging for appropriate services that support independent living, such as budgeting, accessing parenting skills training, or other skills guidance, suitable to the clients individual situation.

Consumers of the HIV/AIDS Case Management and Health Related Support Services Program, which includes Steppingstone’s Welcome Home and Next Step II consumers also, participate in several education groups such as an ongoing Medication Adherence, Financial Savings Planning, Beating the Holiday Blues, Flu Prevention, and Hepatitis Basics groups It has been a year of many changes and the Program has risen to the challenge and will continue to grow and improve upon the services currently offered.

For more information about these programs, call 508-674-2788 Extension 506.

Healthy Recipe of the Month - Honey Chicken Stir Fry

Directions

- In a large nonstick skillet, stir-fry chicken and garlic in 2 teaspoons oil for 1 minute. Add the honey, soy sauce, salt and pepper. Cook and stir until chicken is lightly browned and no longer pink. Remove and keep warm.
- In the same pan, stir-fry the vegetables in remaining oil for 4-5 minutes or until tender. Return chicken to the pan; stir to coat. Combine cornstarch and cold water until smooth; gradually stir into chicken mixture. Bring to a boil; cook and stir for 1 minute or until thickened. Serve with rice.

Yield: 4 servings.

Nutritional Analysis

1 cup stir-fry mixture (calculated without rice) equals 243 calories 244.2 kcal 5 g fat (1 g saturated fat), 66 mg cholesterol 470 mg sodium 19 g carbohydrate 3 g fiber, 28 g protein.

Originally published as Honey Chicken Stir-Fry in Quick Cooking September/October 2003, p14

Ingredients

1 lb. boneless skinless chicken cut into 1” pieces
1 garlic clove, minced
3 teaspoons honey
2 tablespoons reduced sodium soy sauce
1/8 teaspoon pepper
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 16oz. package frozen broccoli stir fry veggie-blend
1 tablespoon cold water
PROGRAMS

Men’s Treatment Program
466 North Main Street
Fall River, MA 02720
508-674-2788 x 102

Women’s Treatment Program
522 North Main Street
Fall River, MA 02720
508-674-2788 x 101

Women’s Treatment Program
979 Pleasant Street
New Bedford, MA 02740
508-984-1880

Outpatient Treatment Program
279 and 179 North Main Street
Fall River, MA 02720
508-679-0033

Next Step Home
506 North Main Street
Fall River, MA 02720
508-674-2788 x 113

William B Webster Program
506 North Main Street
Fall River, MA 02720
508-674-2788 x 118

New Bedford Graduate Program
977 Pleasant Street
New Bedford, MA 02740
508-984-1880

Transition House
542 North Main Street
Fall River, MA 02720
508-674-2788 x 118

First Step Inn Emergency Shelter
175 North Main Street
Fall River, MA 02720
508-679-8001

Stone Residence
177 North Main Street
Fall River, MA 02720
508-675-4159

Welcome Home
5 Dover Street
New Bedford, MA 02740
508-984-1892

www.steppingstoneinc.org

Steppingstone is a United Way of Greater Fall River Agency