

**Statement by Cameron Lauf, Executive Director
to the
House Appropriations Committee
February 9, 2022**

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Cam Lauf and I'm the Executive Director of the Turning Point Center of Chittenden County. We are one of 12 recovery centers throughout the state that provide evidence-based peer recovery support services to individuals and families living with substance use disorders (SUD). We are the designated recovery center for recovery services to all Chittenden County residents.

This statement will provide background and clarity regarding our Employment Services Pilot Program, which ran from September 2018 through September 2021. I would also like to present the necessity of recovery centers, our services, and the urgent need for Vermont to construct a permanent, adequate, and sustained financial base for recovery services in the future. Over the past twenty years in Vermont we have pioneered compassionate, non-judgmental community-based recovery services that meet individuals wherever they are in their addiction. We inform and educate them on the science of addiction and offer encouragement and support as they consider their options and healthier life choices.

The 2018 proposal for the employment project spawned from the need for employment support to individuals visiting the Center and asking for help. Guest survey responses listed the two lowest self-satisfaction categories as "Financial Wellness" and "Occupational Wellness." In late 2015 we had received a grant from Vermont Department of Labor to employ one full-time employment consultant at the Center. In eight-months the consultant secured employment for 60 people. That Department of Labor grant ended in June 2016.

The 2018 Employment Services Pilot Program from the Department of Health was designed to assist individuals new to recovery from SUD to find job opportunities while maintaining their recovery with the help of the Center's continuum of care. The grant for \$73,600 employed two half-time employment specialists (ES), 40 hours per week, to help Centers guests seeking employment. The specialists worked with about 20 new individuals per month, maintained working relationships with the individuals assisted, and connected them to the broader recovery community. It was important to understand if an individual was immediately ready to work or if they needed more intensive recovery help before taking a job. The ES worked with the Center's Recovery Coaching, Peer Support, and alternative wellness programs, as appropriate for the individual's situation. The ES worked daily in the Center and were available to everyone who visited. They provided pre-employment support including job searching, resume writing, interview skills development and interview follow-up. They encouraged confidence in guests to be ready for and successful in employment. We found that the hopes of individuals brightened and their health and lives were enhanced as they progressed in both recovery confidence, time in recovery, and employment.

The Employment Pilot Program had positive effect up to the time that the Pandemic hit. At that point the Employment Specialists worked remotely with individuals seeking employment, but of course during that time much of the economy and many jobs were reduced. ADAP terminated the employment program in September, 2021. We were told it was because Federal funds were no longer available.

I would like to the employment pilot program to our integrated system of cooperation in support of recovery from substance use disorders. Working with the Department of Health, the hospital, the Howard Center, the sober living residences, treatment facilities, and other partners, we have to make it a priority to understand what individuals in recovery need and to help them get the help they deserve. We have built support systems for families and loved ones affected by substance use disorder through our Families Coping with Addiction Group and our Family Recovery Coaching program. We are working with media and employers to reduce the stigma associated with substance use, to encourage employers to hire individuals in recovery, and to share the message that full recovery can be achieved and sustained if we work together.

In Vermont we are applying the highest standards of recovery science and health care education through a coordinated system of community services. Our system of recovery coach training and certification meets national and international standards and recovery center personnel are highly trained to provide recovery help in our emergency care system throughout the State. Recovery center personnel are not paid at parity with other health specialists; they work without health insurance. I encourage you to recognize the achievements of Vermont's recovery centers and invest in stabilizing and strengthening your system. Recovery Coaches and peer professionals bridge the difficult transition of patients leaving acute medical care to finding and engaging in continuing community care services. Recovery centers are hubs for community engagement, services, and professional development.

The Department of Health's Medicaid waiver for recovery services offers you the opportunity to reconstruct this system. Please, study the issue and insist that Vermont provide stable funding, training, and certification for recovery center personnel, and pay recovery specialists at parity for the professional services they provide.