

ROAD TO RECOVERY NEWSLETTER

Created by Dual Recovery at Warren Washington Association for Mental Health to support individuals in recovery

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

A Woman in Recovery

BY AMY JOHNSON

Melody Beattie once said, "Gratitude turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity... it makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow". I am grateful for so many things in my life. In fact, I have a gratitude list, numbering well over a thousand, that I started in early recovery that I have continuously added to over the past few years. When I am having a particularly difficult day, I will pull it out and it always makes me feel better. I have come to realize that it is very difficult for gratitude and unhappiness to co-exist together. Gratitude was not always front and center in my life. Because of my addiction, I used to be inherently negative and selfish. I often felt angry, stressed, and anxious. I found it impossible to see past my own suffering and find anything to feel grateful about. Whereas my addiction kept me in misery and despair, my recovery gave me hope and gratitude. I realized that a lot of my struggles ceased to exist where my gratitude began. And a grateful heart does not want to constantly use drugs and alcohol. It is imperative to anyone's healthy recovery to change your thinking patterns. Only by changing the way I thought was I able to change my life. I am here to tell you there is hope and you have the power to change your life too.

Since this is the season to give thanks, it is important to me to mention some of the things I am grateful for. First and foremost on that list is my sobriety because without that, I have nothing. I am grateful for all the relationships in my life and to the friends and loved ones who believed in and stuck by me. I am grateful for my improved mental health and self-esteem. I am grateful to have hope back in my life. I am grateful for being me- tenacious, determined, and compassionate. I am grateful for my home and living with someone special who loves me. I am grateful for a job that gives me the opportunity to help others the way I was helped. I am grateful for all the little things too, like my favorite ice cream (Crumbs Along the Mohawk), my favorite book (The Nightingale), my favorite flower (Peonies), my favorite movie (The Bronx Tale), and so many other small blessings I receive every day. I am grateful for all of the things my recovery has given me and so much more.

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HEALTH & WELLNESS

GRATITUDE

BY AMY JOHNSON

November kicks off the holiday season and with it often brings feelings of joy and happiness. However, for some people this time of the year can be especially difficult and evoke feelings of sadness, anxiety, and depression. Personally, I tend to feel more overwhelmed than happy this time of year and it can be a great source of stress for me. Research suggests there is one important thing people can do to help lift their spirits and make them happier, and that is to express gratitude. According to an article in Psychology Today, being grateful can strengthen your physical and emotional health. Studies show that people who are grateful experience less pain and stress, sleep better, have stronger immune systems, closer relationships, improved self-esteem, and do better both academically and professionally.

So, what does it mean to be grateful? Gratitude is a positive emotion that involves a thankful appreciation for what you have and what is good in your lives. Gratitude comes from the Latin word *gratia*, which means grace or gratefulness. Often the process of gratitude results in people connecting with something greater than themselves as individuals, whether to other people, nature, or a higher power. People feel and express gratitude in several ways, it may involve being thankful for your childhood or past blessings, not taking the good in your life for granted, or simply being hopeful and optimistic. But regardless of what form it takes, gratitude is something that can be positively cultivated further. Here are some helpful tips to help foster gratitude:



- Keep a gratitude journal. Writing down what you are grateful for two to three times a week over just a four-month period was scientifically proven to improve health and increase feelings of well-being.
- Write a thank you note. There is no expiration date on gratitude. Take this opportunity to express thanks by writing a hand-written note and delivering it in person to someone who has helped you along the way.
- Surround yourself with optimistic people. Positivity and happiness are contagious and with positivity comes gratitude. Just being around positive people will make you appreciate what you have more.
- Give back. When you foster a greater appreciation for others that are struggling, it will help you keep your own situation in perspective.
- Find ways to connect more with loved ones. Gratitude can help make relationships stronger and more satisfying. Spending more time with the people in our lives we care about is an integral part of cultivating gratitude.



HOT TOPIC OF THE MONTH

Seasonal Affective Disorder

BY AMY JOHNSON

“I should have been a bear” began a 1981 Washington Post article written by a young woman from New York. In the article she chronicles her battle with depression that appeared during the fall when the days got darker, colder, and shorter. At the end of this article, readers were encouraged to contact Norman Rosenthal, a researcher from the National Institute of Mental Health, if they were also experiencing similar seasonal depression-like symptoms. “I thought I was dealing with a rare syndrome”, he is quoted as saying, “but we got over 3,000 responses from all over the country.” Rosenthal was the first to identify and name Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as SAD, and has dedicated the last several decades of his career to helping people understand it better. In 1987, the American Psychiatric Association added it to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Today, it is estimated that more than ten million Americans experience SAD, with many more likely having milder symptoms. The age of onset for SAD is typically 18-30 years and women are four times more likely to experience it than men. Many people with SAD have at least one close relative with a psychiatric disorder, suggesting a genetic link as well.



So, what is SAD exactly? The American Psychiatric Association describes SAD as a Major Depressive Disorder with a seasonal pattern. People with SAD experience mood changes and symptoms typically in the fall and winter months when there is less sunlight and usually improve with the arrival of spring. Some symptoms and mood changes can be serious and greatly affect how a person feels, thinks, and handles daily activities. So, how is it treated? Because of the lack of light that winter brings, individuals with SAD have decreased serotonin levels. In 1981, Rosenthal came up with the idea of “lengthening” the shorter winter days with artificial light, which has been found to improve mood and increase energy levels. This is probably the best place for people with SAD to start. Diet and exercise can play a key role in feeling better as well, as aerobic exercise that increases heartrate is known to improve our mood and energy levels. Healthy eating that focuses on less carbohydrates and more protein rich foods will go a long way for overall health and well-being. Practicing mindfulness meditation may also be important because it keeps our mind in the present, helps us feel less anxious, and increases our emotional regulation.

Don't be afraid to reach out for help if you are experiencing symptoms associated with SAD.





LIFESTYLES

The Power of Journaling

BY AMY JOHNSON

Ever since I was a kid, I loved to write. I remember creating elaborate stories and writing them all down in a notebook. I kept a diary in my youth too. One of those old school ones with a lock and key. It was my most prized possession when I was young. I still have several of them, although I have not read them in a long time. Here is one of the greatest tragedies of addiction: you lose sight of all the things you loved and held dear. It is almost as if the moment you pick up drugs or alcohol, you put down or forget about the things that brought you joy and happiness. There is no room for them in the vortex of addiction. At least that is the way it was for me. Reading and writing were my best friends, and I am so happy that being in recovery has made room for them in my life again.



Journaling is more than just the keeper of your memories or an act of self-expression though. It turns out it is great for your emotional, physical, and mental health too. According to an article in Psychology Today by David B. Feldman, Ph.D., dozens of studies show journaling has a positive effect on a range of outcomes, including happiness, goal attainment, and physical health. Most of us know by now that stress can be damaging to our health and journaling is an amazing stress-management tool. This good-for-you habit decreases the impact that mental and physical stress can cause. In fact, in a 2013 study done by Psychosomatic Medicine, researchers found that a certain type of journaling, commonly known as expressive writing, was most beneficial. They uncovered that journaling just three times a week over the course of four months was enough to lower blood pressure, improve immune functioning, and heal wounds faster. This style of journaling will also keep your memory sharp, boost your mood, and strengthen your emotional health. Don't know where to start? Grab a piece of paper or notebook and start a gratitude journal by listing a few things you are grateful for, or just jot down the first few sentences that come to mind. The important thing is that you start somewhere.



*"Fill your paper
with the breathings
of your heart."*

WILLIAM WOODSWORTH



COMMUNITY UPDATES & RESOURCES

HOMETOWN THANKSGIVING

The 37th Hometown Thanksgiving Dinner will be held on Thursday, November 26 at the Christ United Methodist Church located at 54 Bay Street in Glens Falls. Stop by anytime between 12-3pm to pick up a free Thanksgiving meal, just look for the big tent on the corner of Bay and Washington Street. Please be sure to wear a mask and adhere to 6 feet social distancing.

For more information or to inquire about transportation and meal deliveries, call 518-232-8896.

TRI-COUNTY TOYS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

The Marine Corps League is continuing their annual tradition of giving back to those in need through their “Tri-County Toys for Boys and Girls” program. Signups will be taking place on November 16, 17, and 18 from 9am-5pm at 3033 State Route 4 in Hudson Falls. Signups must be made in-person and are first come, first served. Make sure to bring valid ID and proof of residence in Warren, Washington, or Saratoga County. The toy program is for children aged 1-12. For more information, call 518-792-2687.

LOCAL RECOVERY RESOURCES

Hope & Healing Center, Hudson Falls | Website: www.facebook.com/HopeAndHealingRCOC/ | Peer Support: 518-812-5813

Healing Springs, Saratoga | Website: www.sararecovery.org/healing-springs/ | Peer Support: 518-306-3048

AA Meeting Schedule: www.district13.aahmbny.org/ | AA Hotline: 518-793-1113

NA Meeting Schedule: www.abcdrna.org/ | NA Hotline: 888-399-5519



THE DUAL RECOVERY TEAM



Amy Johnson

Amy began her journey with Warren Washington Association for Mental Health as a resident in treatment housing. Amy's experiences on her road to recovery led her to her current position as a Peer Specialist and she now celebrates over two years in recovery. Amy is very passionate about her role in supporting her peers in their recovery journeys and is excited to express some of that passion here within each newsletter. Amy has her bachelor degree in Childhood Education from SUNY Plattsburgh and she is also a Certified Recovery Coach. If you would like to get to know her more, or are in need of peer support, please feel free to reach out to her via email or phone.



Rebecca Ryan

Rebecca is a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) and has been working for Warren Washington Association for Mental Health since 2014. Rebecca became the Director of Dual Recovery in September of 2019 and has been eagerly exploring new ways to serve and support not only members, but the community at large. The purpose of this monthly newsletter is to provide you with some fun articles, personal stories, seasonal updates, and more that can hopefully help in each of your recovery journeys. Please feel free to reach out to Rebecca with any thoughts or ideas for future newsletters, or if you are interested in learning more about Dual Recovery. Happy reading!

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