

Fredericksburg Peer Recovery Group Assists Community Members

By **Sean Woodard** · October 23, 2018



An organization in [Fredericksburg, Virginia](#) that serves multiple counties is now offering a peer recovery group.

The group was introduced by the [Rappahannock Area Community Services Board \(RACSB\)](#) on July 20th. The RACSB has a long history of servicing the local residents who have mental health and substance use disorders, including [veterans through the Rappahannock Veterans Docket](#).

Jeremy Burton, a RACSB recovery support specialist, leads peer recovery sessions for local residents every Friday at the RACSB's Fredericksburg clinic. Burton's group — dubbed 'Hunger for Hope'— brings people together to explore strategies to maintain sobriety, learn coping skills and develop relationships.

"[The group had] about six, seven people at first because it hadn't been advertised," Burton said. "Not many people knew about it or what it was. But then after about two or three weeks, it started being about 10 to 18 people. And recently it averages about 15 people every week."

Open discussions occur during the first three Fridays, while a guest speaker visits on the fourth Friday.

The peer recovery group has validated some of Burton's feelings about his own addiction recovery and the [stigma associated with substance use disorders](#).

"I always thought it would hurt to be too authentic, that people would judge it and they wouldn't understand me," he said. "Being around people that suffer the same way, it makes me feel like I belong. That was the biggest thing for me and I think that they feel that way too. I can see hope in their eyes. I can see some of them lighting up. I guess, for me, it's like I never really understood [that] there seems to be something powerful [about] working with somebody else who suffers with a substance use disorder."

In addition to his role leading the support group, Burton also assists patients in the medication-assisted treatment program (MAT).



*RACSB Peer Recovery Specialist,
Jeremy Burton*

"I was just told by a counselor that one of the guys missed the MAT group and he told him to come to the Hunger for Hope group to make up for it. We believe firmly in the MAT group. We believe that going to a couple community-based groups a week is really not a lot of work compared to what we did when we were using drugs."

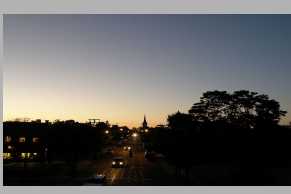
In addition, RACSB works closely with a local crisis center called the Sunshine House. "The peer specialists over there bring the crisis center people over to participate in the group. We've actually had people that are still coming to the group who were in the crisis center in the past."

Burton hopes that a [peer recovery](#) resource center will open in the near future and house not only Hunger for Hope group meetings but also other services. In addition, he would like to form a committee to help connect patients to service projects.

Recent research has observed that peer recovery support services can positively benefit persons in [addiction recovery](#).

A peer-reviewed research article by New York University School of Medicine personnel noted that involvement in addiction treatment services, including peer support groups, reduces the rate of drug relapse and helps treat patients in a holistic manner. In addition, an individual's self-efficacy appears to increase with the support of such services.

"This opioid epidemic is more than just a community problem but it's a nationwide problem," Burton concluded. "I love working with people in recovery, but now we need all people to work together, so that we can find healing for future generations."

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