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Step By Step, Inc.

Newsletter - Fall 2023

Step By Step Named WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) Center of Distinction

We are pleased to announce that on September 21, 2023, Step By Step, Inc. became the first **Center of Distinction (CoD)** from **Advocates for Human Potential, Inc.**, the owners of **WRAP**. Our agency is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment where all individuals served and employees feel supported and empowered to take control of their mental health and wellbeing. By empowering our employees and those we serve through WRAP, we are breaking down barriers and promoting a culture of wellness, resilience, and wellbeing for all.

What is WRAP? WRAP is a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) that is a simple and powerful process for creating the life and wellness that you want. With WRAP, you can:

- Discover simple, safe, and effective tools to create and maintain wellness.

- Develop an organized plan to identify stressors or triggers and how to use action planning to address these stressors and triggers.
- Develop a daily plan to stay on track with your life and wellness goals.
- Identify what throws you off track and develop a plan to keep moving forward.
- Gain support and stay in control even in a crisis.

The WRAP process supports you to identify the tools that keep you well and create action plans to put them into practice in your everyday life. WRAP helps you to incorporate key recovery concepts and wellness tools into your plans and your life.

This past year Step By Step has been incorporating WRAP as an essential component of the recovery process



for the benefit of both those we serve and our employees. We believe that it is important that our staff and individuals we serve have an opportunity to focus on personal wellness. The effects of COVID-19 vastly impacted our lives in many ways. Many people experienced adverse effects of isolation and changes to their personal and professional lives that continue to be felt. One way that many people have found helpful is WRAP. WRAP is an evidenced-based practice that has helped thousands of people around the world to improve their quality of life, improve their personal wellness, improve relationships, accomplish

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Step By Step Appoints Susie O'Donnell as Chief Financial Officer

It is with great pleasure that we announce the promotion of **Susie O'Donnell** to the esteemed position of Chief Financial Officer (CFO) here at Step By Step, Inc. Susie O'Donnell has been an integral part of our organization for over two decades, demonstrating unwavering dedication and exceptional expertise throughout the fiscal department.



As Vice President

of Finance, Susie played a crucial role in identifying financial opportunities, steering us away from deficits, boosting revenue, trimming expenses, and guiding our senior management teams towards fiscal soundness.

Eric Lindley (President and Chief Executive Officer of Step By Step) expressed his enthusiasm by stating, *"We are thrilled to elevate Susie to the role of CFO. Her extensive knowledge of our financial landscape will undoubtedly enhance the*

experiences of our consumers and staff."

Susie holds a Master's in Finance from King's College and a Bachelor's in Accounting. Beyond her professional achievements, Susie is deeply involved in our community, actively participating in various community and school organizations. Prior to her remarkable journey with Step By Step, Inc., she served as an Accounting Manager at CIW Enterprises.

Please join us in congratulating Susie on this well-deserved promotion, as we look forward to achieving new heights of success together.



Step By Step Named WRAP Center of Distinction (continued from page 1)

goals, and build better relationships. We have been offering our staff the opportunity to participate in a WRAP seminar to connect with our peers, learn about a personal wellness plan in a supportive environment and learn about a wellness tool that can support and empower the individuals we serve.

Whatever your goals or challenges, WRAP can help you make a plan that

really works, with results you can really see. For more than 20 years, people around the world have used WRAP to support their goals and transform their lives. No matter how you define "wellness," WRAP can help you to achieve it, your way, and on your terms. WRAP can help you to shape every aspect of your life the way you want it to be. WRAP can help you gain freedom from troubling

thoughts, behaviors, or patterns that repeat in your life. WRAP empowers you to make decisions about your life and build a strong support network of people and resources to help you reach your goals.

If you are interested in learning more about WRAP and bringing WRAP to your organization or community, please contact us to learn more.

Horton Brothers Join Step By Step

Step By Step is pleased to welcome **Lee** and **Dennis Horton** to our team. Lee and Dennis Horton are Program Development Coordinators at Step By Step and they are champions of justice who have overcome unimaginable adversity. Wrongfully imprisoned for an astonishing 28 years, their story is one of unwavering faith, hope, and the pursuit of truth. Their exoneration is a testament to their unyielding determination, as well as the tireless efforts of countless advocates and legal professionals who fought to secure their release.

Their story is one that touches the hearts of everyone who hears it. For 28 long years, they faced the challenges of life behind bars, all while



Dennis Horton (l) and Lee Horton (r)

maintaining their innocence. Their unwavering faith in the justice system, their commitment to proving their innocence, and a truthful conversation with their maternal grandmother,

kept them going through the darkest of times.

During their time in prison, Lee and Dennis embarked on a transformative journey that would not only change their own lives, but also positively impact the lives of countless others. They are certified peer support specialists and Advanced Level **WRAP** Facilitators.

They have played an integral role in introducing the transformative WRAP program to Step By Step, extending its benefits to the employees, consumers, and to the broader community Step By Step serves.

WRAP, with its inclusive approach, is designed to be accessible to **everyone**, regardless of age, stature, or socioeconomic status. Lee and Dennis are committed to Step By Step and the WRAP program and demonstrate how WRAP embodies the belief that personal wellness and growth are universal aspirations that know no boundaries.

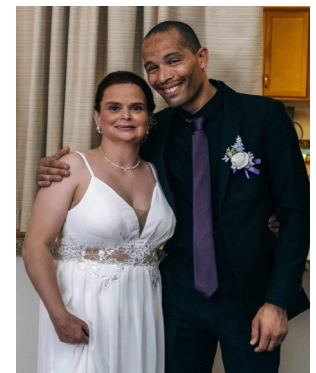
Please join us in extending a warm welcome to Lee and Dennis Horton as they assume the role as Program Development Coordinator and continue to expand WRAP amongst our agencies, communities, and organizations as large.

April M. Said Yes!

April M., an individual supported in one of Step By Step's Programs, shared marriage vows with **Jason F.** on July 15, 2023. A lot of amazing staff came together to help create beautiful memories for the bride, groom and their many family and friends.

April M. was honored to have her sister, **Annette**, walk her down the aisle. The wedding/reception was held at The Theater at North, Scranton, PA. The wedding incorporated a sand ceremony, which is a symbolic blending of two different-colored sands into a single vessel, indicating the blending of two different beings into a single inseparable unit that is their marriage.

Congratulations to the couple. May your love bloom brighter and your companionship grow sweeter with each passing year!



Self-Care: It's Time to Take Care of You

You may have heard the phrase, “**you can't pour from an empty cup.**” It is important to know and be able to communicate what fills your cup in order to live a happier, healthier life. **Self-care** means taking the time to do things that help improve your overall well-being. It is taking care of yourself so that you can be healthy, do your job, and help take care of others. Practicing self-care can help you manage your stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Consider all of the ways you can care for yourself to improve your overall health and well-being:

Physical self-care. Physical care includes how much physical activity you get, how you're fueling your body, how much sleep you're getting, and how

you're caring for you physical needs.

Social self-care. This can involve the people you spend and enjoy time with. It's easy to neglect socializing with your friends and family when life gets busy, but close relationships are important to your well-being.

Mental self-care. Involves practicing acceptance and self-compassion, as well as doing things to keep your mind sharp, like puzzles or learning about something new that interests you.

Spiritual self-care. Nurturing your spirit can involve anything that helps you develop a deeper sense of meaning, understanding, or connection with the universe. This could include religious services, meditation, or praying.

Emotional self-care. Emotional self-care is important for dealing with uncomfortable emotions such as anger, sadness, and anxiety. Practice activities that help you acknowledge and express your feelings regularly and safely.

Recreational self-care. This can include things like special activities or hobbies. It's important to make time for things that interest you and bring you joy. Recreational self-care practices can be time spent alone or with others.

Environmental self-care. Taking care of the places around you is important. Make sure workspaces are clean, organized, and peaceful. Declutter your living space, explore new places, or take a walk outdoors.

8th Lodge Receives Awards

In September, **Step By Step's 8th Street Lodge** was awarded the **2023 Fairweather Lodge of the Year** and 8th St. member **Johanna B.** was awarded the **2023 Fairweather Lodge Member of the Year** by the **Coalition for Community Living (CCL).**

CCL provides support and ensures adherence to the fidelity standards for Lodges

across the nation. **Dr. George (Bill) Fairweather** first designed the Lodge model in California in 1963 after seeing that his patients with serious and persistent mental illness were less likely



Top, l. to r.: Douglas H., Lisa K., Michael H. Middle, l. to r.: Santo V., Crystal Childs, Sean F. Bottom l. to r.: Johanna B., Thomas F. and Aimee Santee. Giselle T. absent from photo.

to require rehospitalization when they lived and worked together in the community as a group, rather than individually. Lodge members support each other in their mental health recovery and share the responsibilities of household management. Each member contrib-

utes their time, skills and talents to create a family style interdependence in the home. Employment is an essential element with an understanding that participation in gainful employment supports mental health recovery as

well as the cooperative contributions to the expenses of the home.

Over the past year, through health issues, gaps in employment, new careers, changes in custody arrangements, etc., the 8th Street Lodge members have consistently found ways to build each other up and help one another to focus on moving forward. In the process, the 8th Street Lodge members have demonstrated interpersonal growth, built stronger internal relationships, increased confidence in decision-making, and have provided endless support for one another through difficult situations. They have chosen to rise above these challenges to work together to embrace the authenticity of the Fairweather Lodge Model. What an outstanding accomplishment!

The Healing Power of Listening

Janet Romero, Vice President of Operations, shares: *“As if it were yesterday, I recall being five-years old sitting on the swing set in our backyard with my cousin Brad who was ten years older than me. As we sat quietly, not even swinging, he listened to what I had been up to. With each story I shared, he would respond with such genuine interest and curiosity. I can't*

recall even one story I shared with him, but I can recall feeling such a wonderful connection with him. That experience occurred 56 years ago. Being heard is a powerful experience.”

For the next year, Step By Step is concentrating on communication for our transformation to be Trauma-informed, Resilience-oriented and Eq-

uity-focus (TRE). Although we will continue to work on getting messaging and information out to everyone, the emphases will be on hearing as many voices and thoughts from the Step By Step team members as possible. Listening is about caring. Listening is about not judging.

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Direct Support Professionals Week 2023

Direct Support Professionals make a profound impact on the lives of people with disabilities. The dedication, compassion



Western Region hosts Washing UP.



DSPs and individuals Eat UP at the annual Picnic .



L. to r: Southeast Region's Prince Gamor, Malynn Smith, Rosa Alamanza, Prinze Whyee, and Jestina Smith.

and untiring efforts of these heroes deserve appreciation. In recognition of their contributions, in 2008, the United States Congress proclaimed a week in September to raise awareness and celebrate the extraordinary work of Direct Support Professionals. This year's **Direct Support Professional Recognition Week** was **September 10-16**.

At Step By Step, we are thankful for our DSPs and understand that they are the heart and soul of our agency, providing unwavering care and support! They empower others to reach their goals and lead fulfilling lives, day in and day out. We applaud the important work they do.



Packages ready to be delivered to DSPs in the Northeast Region.

Throughout the Agency's regions, the goal during this year's DSP week was to showcase the amazing and often unsung work of our incredible direct support professionals and

demonstrate just a small fraction of the recognition they deserve throughout the year.

Denise Cavanaugh, Vice President of Western Region Operations, shares: "Thumbs UP to our Western Region DSPs! The Western Region took the opportunity to **Lift UP** our DSPs and draw attention to all of their hard work and dedication they demonstrate on a day-to-day basis."

The celebration week started with coffee and doughnuts to **Wake UP** DSPs. On Tuesday, Western Region Residential Program managers showed their appreciation to DSPs by **Washing UP** their vehicles. On Wednesday, the Events Committee **Packed UP** "Emergency Stash Kits" in Step By

Step drawstring bags that included Agency tee-shirts, along with lots of snacks and goodies. The tee-shirts reminded staff to "Start Small. Dream Big. **Never Give UP.**" Thursday, DSPs were encouraged to have their **Cameras UP** to take a selfie or group shot in their new shirts. DSPs were invited to **Eat UP** at the Annual Western Region Summer Picnic held on Friday.

Programs in the **Southeast Region** also celebrated by having activities on each day during DSP week. Events/activities included a live, virtual Wawa gift card drawing, gift baskets sent to homes/specialized gifts for other programs, SBS tee-shirt giveaway, and a hoagie day.

Jeff Sherwood, Southeast Mental Health Service Director, said: "Overall, this was a great week to give back to our DSP staff and thank them for the important service that they do every day."

The Healing Power of Listening (continued from page 3)

Margaret Wheatley wrote an article soon after 9-11 about what it means to truly listen. TRE embraces the importance she places on listening. This portion of her article captures TRE's goal to focus on hearing one another. "I have a T-shirt from one conference that reads: "You can't hate someone whose story you know." You don't have to like the story, or even the person telling you

their story. But listening creates a relationship. We move closer to one another."

It is our desire for our team members and individuals in services to have experiences of genuinely being heard.



Step By Step, Inc.



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Kristen Stoddard Lehigh Valley MH Service Director

Congratulations to **Kristen Stoddard**, who has been appointed as the next **Lehigh Valley Mental Health Service Director**.

Kristen brings a wealth of knowledge, experience and skills to the position. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), a Certified Trauma-Competent Professional through Lakeside Global Institute and has completed Step By Step's Leadership Development Program.

Kristen's first contact with Step By

Step was as an Outpatient therapist in 2015 and then returned in 2020 as the Program Director for the Long Term Structure Residence (LTSR). She developed the first and only LTSR program for Step By Step and worked with consultants and various resources to ensure the service being developed was trauma-informed and tailored for people with justice involvement. Her responsibilities have expanded to include an apartment-based service for people with justice involvement, as well as developing

counseling services for people residing in Lehigh County Jail. Beyond Step By Step, she previously owned and operated her own business and provided clinical services and supervision for multiple Drug & Alcohol and Mental Health providers in the states of Utah and Pennsylvania.

Kristen will work with **John Mooney** prior to him stepping down from this role on December 29, 2023. Lehigh Valley MH Services are in good hands with Kristen at the helm.

Autumn Picnic Held in Southeast Region



L. to r.: **Orville Griffiths**, DSS and **Toni Fernandes**, Fiscal Assistant.

Autumn Picnic for all individuals, which was held at the Clifton Heights office.

Programs were invited to come together and celebrate autumn at the picnic. Various happenings were available, such as a DJ with a photo booth, a food truck, and an art booth that invited individuals to make a fall decoration to take with them.

booth with several activities that centered around creating and finding ways to decrease stress.

Jeff Sherwood, Southeast Mental Health Service Director, states, "We planned the picnic well in advance and it allowed all of our programs in the Southeast to get together. The positive feedback I have received has demonstrated the importance of continuing to provide larger group activities to our individuals."

In October, **Step By Step's Southeast ID and MH Divisions** coordinated an

The picnic was also represented by the **Southeast TRE team**, who had a

Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough." –Oprah Winfrey



Leave a Legacy

By making a contribution to the Step By Step Foundation

Your contribution to Step By Step will be used to wisely enhance our education, training, health and rehabilitation services for those in need. Please consider making a gift to the Step By Step Foundation. Opportunities to leave a legacy and commit resources to help the agency continue to

serve those in need are plentiful. And, they can be important components of tax planning.

Call us at (570) 270-7909 or visit www.stepbystepusa.com to learn more about charitable giving through the Step By Step Foundation.

(The Step By Step Foundation is registered with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations.)

2023 Step By Step Foundation Golf Tournament Recap

We are delighted to present a formal recap of the 2023 Step By Step Foundation Golf Tournament, an event that demonstrated remarkable support and community engagement. The success of this year's tournament was truly outstanding, and we extend our gratitude to all who played a part.



Eric Lindey, Step By Step President/CEO, proudly displays the end result of his hot dog-grilling skills.

major sponsors **Concord Agency, Inc.**, **Great American Insurance Group**, and **Dowd Family Fund of the Luzerne Foundation**, for their unwavering support.

We also thank our tournament volunteers **Patti Blazaskie** (Tournament Coordinator), **Eric Lindey**, **Corny Romanowski**, **Paula Jump**, **Mary Beth Farrell**, **Tina McCarthy**, **Diane Kendig**, **Colleen Kustrin**, **Susie O'Donnell**, **Jenny M.**, **Mark D.**, **Jason H.**, **Donna Callahan**, and **Maurie Christian-Buckingham**.



l. to r.: **Jason Willetts**, **Matt Mitchell**, **Rich Daly**, and **Carter Willetts**

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to our esteemed sponsors, whose generous contributions were pivotal to the event's success. We express our deepest gratitude to our tournament sponsor **Howell Benefit Services**, and

Looking forward, we invite you to mark your calendars for the **2024 Step By Step Foundation Golf Tournament**, tentatively scheduled for **Monday, August 26, 2024**, at the **Huntsville Golf Club** in **Dallas, PA**. This promises to be another remarkable gathering in support of our mission! For inquiries and further infor-

mation, please do not hesitate to reach out to Patti Blazaskie at pblazaskie@stepbystepusa.com or call (570) 829-3477 ext. 7909.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to our entire Step By Step community for your continued dedication and support. Together, we look forward to creating a brighter future.



Celebrating over 40 years of excellence

Step By Step, Inc.

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We're on the web at
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Karen Zomerfeld, Editor. For more information on contents in this newsletter, please contact info@stepbystepusa.com. Special thanks to the following employees for newsletter contributions: Lesley Corey, Melanie White, Justin Hyman, Janet Romero, Denise Cavanaugh, Jeff Sherwood, and Patti Blazaskie.