

Midwest Conference on Problem Gambling and Substance Abuse

From Stigma to Strength:

Changing the Story of Addiction, Recovery, and Gambling-Related Harm

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Person in Long-Term Recovery • January 25, 2016

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Connection Changes Everything



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Raise Your Hand If...

Raise your hand if you've ever worked with someone who:

- Relapsed
- Didn't think they needed treatment
- Thought they could do it alone
- Didn't believe recovery was possible



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I Wasn't Supposed To End Up In Rehab

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The Story We Tell About Addiction

Choice **Weakness**

Failure **Selfish**

Criminal **Unmotivated**

©2015 PR. Substance Use Disorder & Gambling Disorder are recognized disorders.

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August 2015



DUI

©2015 PR. Substance Use Disorder & Gambling Disorder are recognized disorders.

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I Thought I Was Better Than Rehab

I don't need rehab.

I can stop on my own.

I don't have a problem.

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75 Days

75 Days



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8

“

The last time my grandmother saw me in person, I was drunk.



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I Didn't Fall Off The Wagon



*I Fell Down A Steep Mountain
Of Jagged Rocks*

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God Will Wreck Your Plans



*"God will wreck your plans when He sees your plans
are about to wreck you."*

January 12, 2026

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**I Went To Rehab To Save My
Life**

I Left Having Found My Purpose

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February 2016

Moved Into An Oxford House

*Thought I was moving into housing.
Actually moved into a supportive community.*

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Recovery Happens In Community

Recovery happens around dinner tables.
Relationships.
Belonging.



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*The opposite of addiction is not sobriety.
The opposite of addiction is connection.*

— Johann Hari

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Recovery Gave Me More Than Sobriety

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| 2016 Recovery Begins | 2016 Oxford House | 2017 World Council | 2017 FORA Board |
| 2018 Treatment Field | 2019-2022 World Council Chair | 2023 Executive Director | 2026 1 st Pregnancy! |

Table 1: From Stigma to Strength

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Stigma Doesn't Disappear When Recovery Begins

Recovery Opens Doors

Stigma Keeps Closing Them

Housing + Employment + Community Resistance

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Stigma Lives Next Door

Neighborhood resistance.
The Oxford House story.
Connection breaks down barriers.

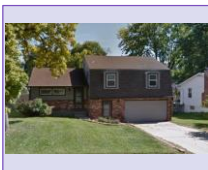


Table 1: From Stigma to Strength

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What Addiction Really Looks Like

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Parent | Veteran | Student |
| Teacher | Executive Director | Neighbor |
| Healthcare Worker | Person In Recovery | ME |

Table 1 From Helms to the Right

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It's Not A Choice

DSM-5-TR Recognized Disorders

- ✓ Substance Use Disorder
- ✓ Gambling Disorder

Brain science. Not moral failure.

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The Numbers

48.5
Million Americans met criteria for Substance Use Disorder

>70%
Do not receive specialty treatment

Recovery is real. Recovery is possible.

Source: SAMHSA 2020

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Gambling Disorder Matters Too

- DSM-5-TR Recognized Behavioral Addiction
- Shared stigma with Substance Use Disorder
- Shared barriers to treatment and recovery
- Shared recovery principles and approaches
- Connection and community are equally vital

Table 1 From stigma to strength

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Mental Health Matters

Co-Occurring Disorders Are Common

What We See

- Substance Use
- Gambling
- Missed Appointments
- Relapse
- Behavior

Vs. What We Don't See

- Trauma • Anxiety • Depression
- Grief • Shame • Childhood Adversity



Treat the whole person.

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People Are Doing The Best They Can

With What They Have

Curiosity over judgment.

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We Cannot Treat People We Judge

Connection over judgment.

TABLE 1 From *Wages to Dignity*

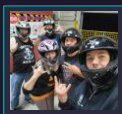
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“

*People are hard to hate close up.
Move in.*



— Brené Brown



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Recovery Is Happening

- Recovery Is Real
- Recovery Is Happening
- Recovery Works

More than 22 million Americans identify as being in recovery.

Recovery outcomes improve when people have:

- ✓ Community
- ✓ Housing
- ✓ Employment
- ✓ Support




TABLE 1 From *Wages to Dignity*

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I've Seen The Light Come On

People finding recovery.
Hope is real.



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Borrowed Hope

Sometimes People Can't Believe In Themselves


Until They Can.

We Believe For Them.

— Pause. Let this land.

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Keep Going



Keep Going

Recovery is possible. Connection matters.

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Resources

- SAMHSA National Helpline
- 988 Crisis Lifeline
- Oxford House
- National Council on Problem Gambling
- Friends of Recovery Association

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Recovery is possible. Connection matters.

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