

Battling addiction internally, in the public

By Jenna Piper
Co-editor

Starting last fall semester, Laramie County Community College collaborated with Recover Wyoming, a non-profit organization that offers services to people in recovery from addiction.

Every second and fourth Tuesday of every month, Recover Wyoming has been coming to LCCC and offers a peer-led, all-recovery meeting to students and the community.

Laura Griffith, creator and executive director of Recover Wyoming, and her staff lead these meetings. Griffith herself, to the surprise of many who meet her, is a long-term recovering alcoholic.

"It has been pretty sparse in attendance, but it doesn't really matter," Griffith said. "We meet people and we hope to impact them a little, a lot, we don't know. We just make ourselves available."

Griffith says that her road to recovery has been a circular story of miraculous opportunities. She said she never imagined that Recover Wyoming would even last a year when she created the organization in 2010.

But behind every creator is a backstory. Griffith's begins in her mid-30s as a single mom of a 3-year-old and a 7-year-old, working as a project director for educational opportunities at the University of Wyoming.

Griffith said she first got in trouble with alcohol when she was found inebriated



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Leaps of faith:

Laura Griffith, executive director of Recover Wyoming, is from Lusk, Wyoming, and has been in charge of the non-profit organization for eight years.

Recover Wyoming is located at 1603 Capitol Ave. #405 and can be reached at (307) 421-7261. The next all-recovery meeting at LCCC will be at 2 p.m. on March 27 in the College Community Center, room 179.

at an event she was in charge of. When the university found out, Griffith was sent to treatment.

Over the next 12 years, Griffith said she was in and out of residential treatment, the highest end of treatment available, six times because she had a chronic problem of relapsing.

"It was just amazing because I so underestimated the power of addiction, and the power of what my brain will do to get a drink and what it will tell me," Griffith said.

Griffith said she went into a long-term treatment and stayed sober for six months, a move that was imperative to her sobriety. She said her mind, however, is forever altered even after 15 years of sobriety.

"I really understood that I was powerless against alcohol and that I just won't get in the ring and fight with it anymore," Griffith said. "I can never win. It will beat me every time."

With four DUI's on her record, Griffith said that when she applied for the Wyoming Department of Health as a temporary receptionist her office had no idea that she was restricted from driving for several years. Ironically, it was funding and programs from the Department of Health that got Griffith through treatment.

All the department knew was that she was a skillful receptionist with a bachelor's in

communications and a master's in adult education, Griffith said. When the position as the women's treatment coordinator in the behavioral health division opened, Griffith decided to clean up her resume and attempt an interview for the job.

Griffith said that recovery requires complete honesty and transparency, so she told the interviewers that if she got the job, she would not be able to check out a state vehicle and that she was once part of their recovery programs.

In return, Griffith said the department celebrated her recovery and was proud to have her on staff because she was the example the department wanted to set.

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promoted to block grant coordinator, which managed \$4 million for treatment programs, and several years later she was promoted again to treatment manager, which meant managing a \$150 million budget for mental/substance abuse programs in the state.

Griffith was also one of 18 people in the nation to be selected to be part of a group called Leaders in Recovery. With this group, Griffith travelled to multiple cities such as Dallas, Detroit and Philadelphia to observe the recovery programs available in larger populations.

This is when Griffith said she recognized that while she was grateful for the opportunities the department provided her, she was not doing what she was truly passionate about.

"I realized that I wasn't doing what my heart was really wired to do, and that's to work with people to help them achieve long-term sobriety," Griffith said.

Griffith left the department in October of 2010, and by that Christmas she said she came up with the organization's name (Recover Wyoming), made herself executive director, got business cards and started to spread the word.

Her first office was a table at Starbucks

where Griffith said she met with people to discuss Recover Wyoming's possibilities.

After grouping together a board of directors and receiving non-profit status, Recover Wyoming's first recovery center was located at the old Halladay Motors showroom on Lincolnway.

Fast forwarding eight years, Recover Wyoming is now located in the Majestic Building on Capitol Avenue and provides services to approximately 3,000 people, according to Griffith.

What makes Recover Wyoming a diamond among a thousand rubies is that they honor all pathways to recovery and not just one, such as the 12-step programs, faith-based programs or incarceration.

"We see people struggle with addiction through all those different doorways, and we were to be a different kind of doorway for them," Griffith said.

Griffith said she considers Recover Wyoming a hub for addicts because the organization can refer people to the different programs in town. Even though the staff can never tell what the magic will be for someone's recovery, Griffith said they can offer a person multiple options until they find a path that works for them.

All the staff and board of directors of Recover Wyoming are in recovery, which Griffith attributes to Recover Wyoming valuing transparency and honesty.

"I chose that at an early stage of my recovery, and I have to be public about it and that's OK," Griffith said about her own recovery. "I just realized a long time ago that nobody or nothing could hurt me worse than alcohol did."

Griffith said that there have been complaints about Recover Wyoming's location downtown because some people don't want addicts in that part of society. This is why Griffith said she believes the discussion about recovery is so important because addiction is a real part of society and it is everywhere in Cheyenne.

Admitting that relapsing is always a possibility, Griffith said that she has built a tight bubble around herself with her family and Recover Wyoming. If she were to relapse, Griffith would not only lose her job but would cause pain to those she cares about and loves. However, Griffith says that with her tight bubble, she has learned to reach out when she has urges to take a drink to stop that thought process.