Every September, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), sponsors National Recovery Month to increase awareness of behavioral health conditions. This observance promotes the belief that behavioral health is essential to overall health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people can and do recover from mental and substance use disorders.

Having been in the juvenile justice field for more than 39 years, I have witnessed the positive reality of recovery. Youth who embrace recovery achieve improved mental and physical health and form stronger relationships with their family members, peers, and neighbors. We need to raise awareness that recovery is possible.

Mental and/or substance use disorders affect young people of all ethnicities, ages, genders, geographic regions, and socioeconomic levels. They need to know that help is available. Youth can get better, both physically and emotionally, especially with the support of family and a welcoming community. We invite family members to participate in their young person’s treatment. Families and community partners are encouraged to communicate frequently, ask questions, and share ideas and resources.

Youth in the Community
DYS supports the juvenile courts in providing local programs, including a wide range of mental health and substance abuse services, to treat youth and prevent delinquency. RECLAIM and other community initiatives support communities in research-supported programs. The Behavioral Health/Juvenile Justice (BH/JJ) initiative is a cohort of evidence-based programs designed to identity and divert justice-involved youth with mental health and substance abuse disorders into community-based treatment. Funding for BH/JJ is provided by DYS and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services with administrative oversight provided by DYS to 9 local programs serving 12 counties. Local project partners at a minimum include the Mental Health and Drug Alcohol Board, juvenile court and a behavioral health provider. Since 2006, the initiative has served more than 4,000 youth.

Youth in Our Care

There are vital resources available to youth in our facilities and on parole. Cognitive behavioral therapy is offered to all youth in efforts to change how they think, feel, and act. Specialized mental health services are provided for youth who have psychiatric disorders. Each facility provides specialized juvenile sex offender assessments and treatment. All youth receive substance abuse education. Based on each youth’s individual needs, youth may also participate in one or two phases of substance abuse treatment. In addition, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups are available thanks to community partnerships.

Additionally, parole staff help youth continue treatment as they transition back into the community. They help meet the individualized needs of each youth, whether through access to outpatient, inpatient, halfway house, residential, and other treatment programs; and recovery services, including assessment, screening, case management, drug testing, spiritual support, recovery skills, relapse prevention, transitional housing, and transportation help.

Offering support to those experiencing mental and/or substance use disorders can make a huge difference. Together we can help our young people realize the promise of recovery.