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Living in Recovery Program Director Julie MacDonald, left, and Program Coordinator Dylan Lundgren (Anastasia Stanmeyer).

Open Doors, Open Hearts

LIVING IN RECOVERY AND THE GEORGE B. CRANE MEMORIAL CENTER WORK TIRELESSLY TO HELP THOSE STRUGGLING WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

In the heart of the Berkshires, no one has to walk alone on the path to recovery from substance use disorder (SUD). The recovery community in Pittsfield is bolstered by several compassionate, community-rooted organizations that meet people where they are in their journey of recovery, walking beside them as they heal and providing invaluable resources. At the heart of the Pittsfield recovery network are the George B. Crane Memorial Center and Living in Recovery—two distinct yet deeply interconnected community organizations that are redefining what recovery support can look like in the Berkshires. Whether someone is seeking emergency detox resources, housing support, fellowship groups, or simply a safe place to share a coffee and a conversation, these grassroots nonprofits

are bridging the gap with open doors, peer-led programs, and crucial support services. Both centers are dedicated to helping individuals and families overcome SUD and build sustainable, joyful lives in recovery—one relationship at a time. As we honor those lost on International Overdose Awareness Day (August 31) and look towards National Recovery Month, we are shining a light on the efforts of Berkshires-based recovery organizations making a difference in the lives of those who need it most.

George B. Crane Memorial Center

On a quiet corner of Linden Street in Pittsfield, a community-based organiza-

tion serves as one of the most vital hubs for SUD recovery support in Berkshire County. Named in honor of one of Pittsfield's most respected attorneys and recovery advocates, the George B. Crane Memorial Center is a recovery haven with no intake process, no prerequisites, and no judgment—just open doors, open hearts, and a warm welcome for anyone who walks through in need.

"People can walk in without insurance, without housing, without anything—and still get help," says Kellie Meisl, the center's Community Liaison. "If they need detox, we help them get a bed. If they need a phone call made, an SSI application filled out, or housing support—we're here for that, too."

The George B. Crane Memorial Center operates on a simple yet transformative

principle: Recovery doesn't just happen inside meetings or treatment centers, it happens in the uncertain hours in-between. The center exists to support people not only in formal recovery settings, but in those fragile moments of transition when loneliness, fear, and unmet needs can easily derail progress.

At the heart of that effort is Meisl, who is available for walk-ins and personal appointments five days a week: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. While the posted community liaison hours are officially listed as 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Meisl often arrives early and stays late, typically keeping the center open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. or later to accommodate whoever may walk through the door.

"People don't relapse or reach crisis on a schedule," she says. "If someone needs us, we do everything we can to be available."

If the center is closed, support doesn't end. Board President Aaron Elzner has his personal cell number posted on the walls of the building, and he answers it at all hours. "If someone's sitting outside the ER at 2 a.m. with nowhere to go, they call me," he says. "We make sure they're not alone."

Whether someone arrives in active substance use, recently discharged from a short-term, inpatient detox center, or in early recovery but facing housing or employment insecurity, the center provides real-time assistance in bridging the gap to essential services. Meisl has conducted in-person outreach services to dozens of community organizations throughout the Berkshires to build an extensive referral network. She knows the names and direct contact information of many caseworkers, clinicians, and program directors across multiple sectors—ensuring that when someone walks in needing help, they're not just handed a pamphlet; they're connected to a person who can help.

If someone is in active substance use and ready to seek treatment, the first step is often medical detox, where severely chemically dependent individuals are monitored while they go through supervised withdrawal, which is sometimes assisted through medication. The center helps individuals make contact with the

McGee Recovery Center, the detox unit at Berkshire Medical Center operated by Berkshire Health Systems (BHS). Meisl or Elzner will place the call, advocate on behalf of the individual, and help arrange transport if needed. If no detox bed is available, they liaise with staff at BHS Emergency Services to triage the situation and help determine next steps.

Once stabilized, individuals may be eligible for Berkshire CSS (Clinical Stabilization Services)—a short-term residential treatment program that functions as a bridge between detox and longer-term recovery housing. From there, depending on bed availability, clients may transition into programs at Greylock Recovery or Alternative Living Centers (ALC). Meisl is often in direct contact with program intake coordinators and caseworkers to help secure placements.

But in many cases, there are delays. There may be no immediate bed, no insurance, or no place to stay in the meantime. That's where the Crane Center steps in. "We've had people come in straight from detox, holding their hospital bag," says Meisl. "If they've been turned away from shelters or crisis beds, they wait here with us. We'll make calls. We'll advocate. We will continue to support them until the next step is possible."

A Legacy of Recovery

The story of the George B. Crane Memorial Center began in 1977, when a group of Pittsfield residents—including attorney George B. Crane—founded the SIOGA Club, short for Sobriety Is Our Greatest Asset. The SIOGA Club offered a safe space for people in recovery to gather, find community, and support one another. When the club's original building was destroyed in a fire in 2004, community members came together to rebuild, led by local general contractor Doug Malins.

With the help of volunteer labor, the Pittsfield Sheriff's Office, and grassroots donations—including funds contributed by Malins himself—the new building opened its doors in 2010. A year later, it was rededicated in Crane's name.

"George wasn't just a brilliant lawyer,

he was a man in long-term recovery who used his experience to help others," says Aaron Elzner, who is also in long-term recovery. "Judges would refer cases involving substance use directly to him because they knew he'd go beyond the legal work—he'd help people heal."

The center is more than just a building with meeting rooms and Community Liaison services. It is a community—a place where people can rebuild their lives with dignity, connection, and purpose. While the center hosts a full calendar of peer-led 12-step meetings, it is not affiliated with any single path to recovery. Its ethos is inclusive and holistic, offering support for every kind of recovery journey—whether rooted in abstinence-based programs, medication-assisted treatment, harm reduction, or community-based healing.

In addition to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, the center supports a broad range of recovery pathways. Culturally specific and trauma-informed programming includes BIPOC Voices in Recovery, a support group for Black, Indigenous, and all people of color navigating sobriety, stigma, and systemic barriers. The center works closely with Berkshire Pride and other LGBTQ+ organizations to ensure that services remain inclusive and affirming of gender and sexual orientation diversity.

Creative healing plays a role, as well. Every Monday, the "Art for Recovery" program offers a judgment-free space for individuals to process emotions through artistic expression. Facilitated by award-winning art educator Amy Schirmer, the workshop is open to all and emphasizes mindfulness, communication, and self-discovery through creativity. On August 8 from 1 to 3 p.m., the George B. Crane Memorial Center, in collaboration with the Central County Community Outreach Specialists will host "Feet on the Street!" The event connects outreach workers in Pittsfield with each other and members of the community.

The center also collaborates with agencies like Berkshire Community Action Council to help individuals access emergency financial assistance. In recent months, Meisl helped secure grants for multiple community members to cover



George B. Crane Memorial Center Board President Aaron Elzner, left, and Community Liaison Kellie Meisl (Anastasia Stanmeyer).

overdue bills and prevent loss of housing or utilities—an often overlooked but essential aspect of recovery support. “There’s no single path,” Meisl emphasizes. “Our job is to connect people to the resources that align with their values and needs—and then walk beside them.”

The Mission Continues

In 2022, the center received a federal ARPA grant through the city of Pittsfield, allowing them to fund Meisl’s community liaison role. With it, they’ve expanded partnerships, conducted outreach, and connected countless individuals to housing, health-care, employment, and critical recovery services. But that funding ran out in June 2025—and future operations depend on private donations and grants.

“If someone writes a check, it’ll go towards keeping this place open,” Elzner says. “It’ll fund more hours, more outreach, maybe even small grants to help someone pay an electric bill, get a phone, or buy a fan during a heatwave.”

Without it, they risk losing the Community Liaison position—a critical bridge to life-saving services.

“This space allows people to build trust, to be seen and heard, and to take the first steps toward change,” Meisl adds.

As the SUD crisis continues to impact families and communities across the Berkshires, the George B. Crane Memorial Center remains a sanctuary of compassion, advocacy, and resilience. Through every transition, detox, court date, and housing waitlist—it is there. And in Pittsfield, that can make all the difference.

Living in Recovery

In the center of downtown Pittsfield just off Main Street, a colorful, inviting space buzzes with conversation, laughter, and healing connection. The atmosphere feels like a casual family gathering—relaxed, connected, and welcoming. Living in Recovery, a recovery support center is redefining what a recovery community can look like. Rooted in peer leadership and fueled

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by community voices, it's a sanctuary where every individual—no matter their background, path, or pace—can begin to rebuild their life with support, dignity, and choice.

More than just a name, Living in Recovery embodies a philosophy. "We don't just want people to survive," says Program Coordinator Dylan Lundgren. "We want them to thrive." Here, recovery isn't confined to chemical abstinence or defined by a single, traditional, 12-step fellowship, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. It's explored through multiple modalities, including spiritual, secular, traditional, and alternative.

Members can participate in "All Recovery" meetings, which welcome people of all recovery backgrounds, as well as specialized offerings like Recovery Dharma (Buddhist-based principles), and The Spirit of Recovery (focused on mindfulness, Yoga Nidra, and inner healing).

At the heart of it all is peer support. Staff and volunteers share their own stories and struggles, helping others move through their own. "When someone

walks through the door, they're not met with forms or judgment," says Program Director Julie MacDonald. "They're met with, 'Hey, come in. Want a cup of coffee? Sit with us.'" Every major decision—from purchasing new furniture to planning monthly events—is voted on by members at community meetings. Seven stipend-supported leadership positions help guide operations, and numerous volunteer roles—from custodial to outreach—give members a way to invest in and take ownership of the space.

"We're not just helping people recover," says Living in Recovery community member Shane Ott, "we're helping them rediscover who they are."

Bridging the Gap

Lundgren, an active community recovery advocate, describes the center as a bridge: "There's a gap between inpatient treatment and real life. Without something in the middle, people fall through." Living in Recovery fills that gap with structure and spontaneity,

safety and joy. Yoga classes, sound baths, and grief support groups meet people where they're at emotionally and spiritually. Social events—like Lake Day, recovery-themed dinners, open mic nights, and game nights—offer a sense of belonging and normalcy.

Living in Recovery member Shane Ott's "Coffee & Canvas" art group, which meets on the first Thursday of each month, is one such cornerstone. "Some folks have never picked up a paintbrush before," Ott says. "And then they leave with a painting. It's empowering. It reminds them they're capable of more than just surviving."

As the membership grows, so do their opportunities. Through a collaboration with MassHire, members can participate in paid internships that pave the way for careers in the recovery field. Ott himself is completing a certification program at Berkshire Community College, hoping to become a licensed alcohol and drug counselor. "This place gave me a purpose," he says. "Now I want to help others find theirs."

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A Vision of Hope

Living in Recovery opened its doors in 2018, seeded by a heartfelt donation from a Berkshire County family who lost their son, Joseph Botz, to a prolonged battle with alcoholism. That gift sparked the beginning of a vision: a recovery center not based in clinical care or mandatory programming, but built by and for individuals with lived experience with SUD.

That initial funding allowed the nonprofit ServiceNet to serve as the center's fiscal host, giving Living in Recovery a financial structure while allowing it to remain entirely peer-led. "Everything from our furniture to our programming is decided by our members," says MacDonald. "This isn't a top-down model. It's bottom-up. It's community first." While Living in Recovery is entirely peer-led and community-driven, it operates with the essential administrative backing of ServiceNet, a regional nonprofit human services agency. ServiceNet serves as the center's fiscal host, managing grant administration and financial oversight while allowing Living in Recovery full autonomy over its programming and day-to-day operations.

"ServiceNet holds the contract with the state's Bureau of Substance Addiction Services," explains MacDonald. "But the heart of Living in Recovery—every event, every group, every decision—is shaped by our members." This relationship ensures that Living in Recovery meets state and grant compliance requirements while preserving its grassroots spirit. It's a model that combines structural accountability with peer empowerment—proving that recovery can be both professional and profoundly personal.

Under MacDonald's guidance and with the support of Dylan Lundgren—both of whom are in recovery themselves—the center has blossomed into one of the most dynamic recovery resources in the region. From its kitchen to its community rooms, every square foot radiates purpose.

A Space of Safety and Celebration

While Living in Recovery is serious about support, it's just as committed to cele-

bration. "We believe joy is an essential part of recovery," says MacDonald. "We host dances, movie nights, fishing trips. We go to museums. We take trips to other recovery centers. And sometimes, we just eat pizza and talk." The center's physical space reflects this balance—comfortable, colorful, and filled with the kind of warmth that invites you to stay. There's a stage for live performances, a full kitchen for cooking classes and shared meals, and multiple common areas for workshops and conversation.

Each September, Living in Recovery commemorates National Recovery Month with a lineup of powerful events. It begins on August 31 with an International Overdose Awareness Day vigil held on the Pittsfield Common, honoring lives lost with a multi-faith memorial service and a candlelit name reading at Park Square. From there, the energy shifts to celebration. Their annual Revel in Recovery event will be held for the first time as a full-fledged block party next to their headquarters on McKay Street on September 14 from 1 to 6 p.m. (complete with live bands, art displays, and a kids' zone). A week later, Living in Recovery will host a community Wellness Day featuring renowned sound bath practitioner Kelvin Young on September 21, with more details set to be announced through their social media platforms. The way the staff of Living in Recovery sees it, events such as ones scheduled for this September are designed to make recovery visible, joyful, and communal. "It's a chance for people to see that recovery isn't just possible—it's beautiful," says Lundgren.

When asked what they'd say to someone struggling with substance use who's afraid to seek help, the message is simple: just walk through the door. "There's no pressure, no expectations," says MacDonald. "You don't have to be ready. You just have to come. We'll meet you wherever you are." And for those who aren't struggling themselves but know someone who is—or want to better understand the crisis—there's a place for them here, too. "SUD affects everyone," MacDonald says. "And recovery belongs to all of us." Whether it's a pool game, a yoga session, or a community dinner, Living in Recovery makes one thing abundantly clear: recovery isn't just about abstaining from substances. It's

about rebuilding connection—to others, to joy, and to oneself. ■

To Support the George B. Crane Memorial Center, visit or call 413-464-7066 or email thegbcmc1@gmail.com.

To learn more about Living in Recovery, visit them at their Pittsfield location or visit: livinginrecoverypittsfield.org.

For updated calendars, events, or recovery programming, call 413-570-8243, or visit their Facebook page.

For tickets to Benjamin Lerner: Performer, a fundraiser for both of these organizations at Barrington Stage Company on September 3rd, visit:

