Recovery NOW for New Jersey and its Residents
the desks in your office building, the line at the grocery store, in the audience or on stage at a graduation ceremony. Among the faces of the employees, shoppers, students and proud parents will be scores of individuals who have — or are in recovery from — a mental illness or an addiction disorder. Statistics show, for every five individuals, one will have a mental illness. For every 10 adults in New Jersey, one will meet the criteria for a substance use disorder.
You probably won’t know who they are. Those with behavioral disorders usually look no different than those they sit beside and they do not wear clothing that announces their disease. And, because of ongoing stigma, they are very unlikely to share the story of their illnesses with anyone but the closest of friends and family members.

The doctor tending to your broken leg may have been addicted to opiates. Your child’s piano teacher may be diagnosed with bipolar disorder. They often face life’s challenges and make the difficult climb toward sobriety, recovery and productive lives quietly and without fanfare.

Throughout New Jersey, if you search hard enough, you can find the stories of adults and children who have chronic diseases that could have destroyed their lives, left them disabled and unemployed or killed them. But they turned for help to small New Jersey businesses.

The success of these firms is critical to the recovery of New Jersey and of our citizens. The state, battered by a struggling economy and overwhelming budget deficits, needs the tax dollars saved by these businesses. And the hundreds of thousands of citizens impacted by mental illness and addiction disorders desperately need treatment, services and support in order to work toward wellness, reconnect with their families, find employment and achieve lives of recovery.

New Jersey and its citizens need the not-for-profit community mental health and addiction treatment providers, small businesses that improve their communities, provide services and save resources. These companies do not measure their success by profits earned, rather by lives saved.
Measuring Success by Lives and Tax Dollars Saved, Rather than Profits Earned

Started more than 30 years ago as an outgrowth of a 60-person organization, this $28 million a year company now employs more than 240 people full time, with more than 150 part-time and per-diem employees. It operates 50 programs in more than half of New Jersey’s counties, delivering services to 18,000 clients.

Although a relatively small business, it has a powerful impact, saving tax dollars, preserving the environment, improving communities, providing housing, supporting the education of children and saving lives. The sales of its subsidiaries exceed $1 million.

However, there is no one becoming wealthy as a result of the enormous success of this business. Care Plus NJ Inc. is a non-profit company that plows its earnings and efficiencies back into its programs. Its Board of Trustees focuses the company’s mission on the provision of excellent mental healthcare and the life-long support needed by individuals and their families to ensure that they achieve their full potential.

It is among the 170 private, not-for-profit NJAMHAA member companies delivering mental health and addiction treatment and services throughout the state. These organizations, which include hospitals, employ approximately 95,000 New Jersey residents and serve about a half million adults and children with mental illnesses and/or addiction disorders annually. Funded by a variety of payers, these companies provide services more efficiently and at less cost than state government.

These firms save New Jersey billions in taxpayer dollars each year, through reduced need for institutions, hospitalizations, jails and prisons, and disability and unemployment payments. For example, the annual cost to treat one patient at Ancora Psychiatric Hospital is in excess of $160,000, while the highest level of community residential services costs the state less than half that amount, with less intensive services only costing a few thousand dollars, according to the state budget.

Providing access to high-quality mental health and addictions treatment and services reaps tremendous returns. According to a national study, for every $1 expended for community treatment of depression, $3 is saved in other costs, such as disability, hospitalization and loss of productivity. The returns on addiction treatment are even greater, with a return of up to $12 for every $1 spent, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

As noted in Governor Chris Christie’s Privatization Task Force report, the community mental health system is one “of the numerous privatization successes in New Jersey.”

Like so many of New Jersey’s small businesses, Care Plus NJ Inc. and other community not-for-profits are being strangled by the multitude of overwhelming and conflicting policies, regulations, inspections and fines imposed by state government.
New Jersey’s Privatization Success

Non-profit community mental health and addiction treatment organizations are small businesses vital to the local community and are valuable assets in New Jersey.

These businesses save taxpayers more than $1 billion annually through reduced costs in institutions, hospitals, the criminal justice system, disability and unemployment.

They also save other employers billions in reduced sick time and improved productivity.

These organizations directly serve more than a half million of New Jersey’s adults and children and indirectly improve the lives of their families and friends.

Governor Chris Christie’s Privatization Task Force called the community mental health system one “of the numerous privatization successes in New Jersey.”

New Jersey government and businesses could save billions more by improving access to treatment and support services.

Despite the good work of these non-profit businesses, there is a large unmet need for mental health and addiction treatment services in New Jersey.

- Only 7 percent of those with a substance use disorder have access annually.
- Only 30 percent with a serious mental illness receive treatment and services.

Non-profit community mental health and addiction treatment providers are straining under increased demand and regulatory requirements and decreased resources.

Millions are wasted on paperwork and regulatory burdens. One provider spent 432 staff days to deal with site inspections, time that should have been devoted to providing treatment.

While increased funding is needed, the system still can be greatly improved without new dollars by providing flexibility, reducing regulatory burdens, encouraging innovation, focusing on the coordination of care and maximizing the use of privatization.

State government should create a short-term task force to explore opportunities to save resources in state government and community through efficiencies and reinvest in service delivery.
For every $1 invested in mental health and/or addiction treatment, as much as $12 in other costs can be saved.
The John DeStefano Story

To those who meet him, John DeStefano is a dynamic man full of life and laughter. He is chief engineer at a busy North Jersey hotel, where he oversees a staff of six and keeps the large facility operating smoothly. This New Jersey native is connected to his family, loving his role as a grandfather to two young girls and is committed to helping others in need.

To see him, you would never know that three decades ago, John was lost and desperate, with a history of addiction to heroin and then cocaine. John started his spiraling descent in the streets of Paterson at the young age of 12, when he began drinking alcohol. By his late teens, he was shooting heroin and jailed twice. He entered rehabilitation and remained in recovery for several years, but he eventually returned to drinking and abusing cocaine. His successful flooring business collapsed under the weight of his destructive addiction and John found himself homeless and indigent.

Like the millions of others with an addiction to an illegal drug, John faced the great likelihood of repeated imprisonment and could have expected to die in less than 20 years.
But in October of 1984, John arrived at Turning Point, a non-profit organization that provides compassionate treatment for men and women who are addicted to alcohol or drugs, regardless of their ability to pay. He entered a residential program for a month and continued his involvement after he moved out, finding the structure and motivation he so desperately needed to return to a life of sobriety.

“I was out of control and desperate. It turned my life around,” says John. “They helped me understand the disease concept and my counselor was somebody I knew. We had run in the same place, doing the same things, and seeing him look like a million dollars... gave me a lot of hope.”

This time, the recovery stuck. John began organizing sobriety dances and alumni and 12-step meetings. Within several years, he was invited to join Turning Point’s Board of Trustees. Today, he is continually bringing his story to others facing the same devastation he once experienced.

“I’m sure it gives them hope... there’s a connection. And it keeps me green, makes me remember the pain. You can see the desperation in their faces... they think their lives are over. It brings me back and I need that for me, so I don’t forget.”

This story of a life lost and then found is told thousands of times throughout New Jersey each year. Non-profit addiction treatment organizations provide treatment and support services to more than 50,000 of the state’s residents annually. They offer residential, acute care, outpatient treatment and support services.

And while these organizations help restore the lives of so many, the vast majority of the 800,000 New Jersey adults with a substance use disorder do not access the treatment they need, according to the New Jersey Department of Human Services. It is estimated that for every person treated, another is turned away because of a lack of openings.

The cost to society of untreated substance abuse, including alcoholism, is astronomical, with a cost of more than $350 billion each year nationally, which includes expenditures related to health care, unemployment, lack of productivity, crime and accidents, according to the National Institutes of Health. In New Jersey, the gap between the need for treatment and the services available costs the state more than $3 billion in Medicaid, criminal justice, public employee health plans, child welfare and other programs. Factoring in the costs of problem gambling, which impacts approximately 3 percent of the adult population and can lead to financial ruin, theft and suicide, the tremendous impact of addictions is clear. This enormous burden affects all of society - those who have an addiction disorder and those who do not.

Too often, stigma stands as a barrier to treatment, with many in society viewing addiction as a failure of character and leaving those in need afraid to ask for help. But like other chronic diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, addiction has both genetic and environmental roots. Genetic factors account for between 40 to 60 percent of an individual’s susceptibility to addictive behaviors and other factors, such as physical or sexual abuse or other trauma, also play a major role.

Lack of resources also contributes to limiting access to treatment and services. Thousands of individuals seek treatment each year, but lack the necessary insurance or money to pay for it themselves and cannot find a state-funded opening. Yet investment in addiction treatment would produce immediate savings to government.

For example, providing treatment to low-risk, non-violent drug offenders saves New Jersey an average of $28,000 in prison expenses annually per person, according to a report on the state Drug Court program. Additionally, the study found that Drug Court graduates were much less likely to be reconvicted of a drug crime than those who didn’t go through the program, 8 percent versus 43 percent. And the likelihood of these individuals improving their education, obtaining medical benefits and getting a job also dramatically increased, with 87 percent employed by the time of graduation from the program.

The benefits of treatment for society would also be found in reductions in hospital costs, homelessness, unemployment, crime and dysfunctional families. For the hundreds of thousands of individuals in recovery like John, who now holds a challenging job, pays taxes and offers support to others, the benefit of treatment is even more obvious.
The tribulations and temptations of the teenage years can draw a good child into a life of trouble.

How the family, community and government respond can mean the difference between another 50 years of crime and dysfunction or success and contribution to society.

At 17 years of age, Steven recognized he was making bad choices. He was using drugs and had violated his probation by not reporting in as required. However, rather than being sent to a juvenile justice facility, he was put on in-home detention and enrolled in the Robins’ Nest Grounded program.

The program, which works with the Juvenile Justice Commission and Family Court to reduce the number of detention placements and maintain public safety, provided Steven with the supervision, structure and support he needed. Through the in-home detention program, he received counseling, which often includes anger and stress management and skills development in problem-solving, decision-making, conflict resolution and other important areas.

Steven’s family also received support, with training in how to effectively deal with a child with behavioral problems and round-the-clock telephone access to a Youth Monitor to help diffuse crisis situations and case management services, working with the school system and other entities to ensure Steven was on the right path.

While in the program, Steven enrolled in Graduate Equivalency Degree and Cognitive Learning programs and is learning how to meet his responsibilities. “Home detention made me focus on what’s important, such as school, a job and complying with probation,” says Steven, who is now scheduled to start classes at Salem Community College and hopes to use his education and newfound life to become a counselor to help kids just like him.

Programs like Grounded produce immediate savings, by costing New Jersey $2,426.50 per child annually versus the nearly $124,000 cost of detention in one of the state’s Juvenile Justice facilities. But, the savings do not end there. According to the Anne Casey Foundation, young people who end up confined in locked detention centers and training schools can expect dramatically increased odds of a lifetime of imprisonment, addictions, chronic health problems, failed families, low wages, unemployment and lack of education.

By contrast, for children who go through alternative programs, the prognosis is much more hopeful. Community-based programs that focus on strengthening families and helping children learn coping skills dramatically reduce the percentage of youngsters re-entering the criminal justice system and increase those who pursue education and careers.

The Robins’ Nest mission is, “Protecting children, strengthening families, and empowering our communities through innovative, life-enhancing services.” This is accomplished through a wide array of quality community-based residential and in-home services that encourage and empower children to become responsible members of their community. Over the years, the organization has developed core values that have guided the organization’s growth, development and services. At the present time, the organization is committed to keeping children safe; providing culturally sensitive services, which reflect compassion, acknowledge strengths and respect individual differences; ensuring quality in service delivery and other aspects of the agency’s functioning and providing the kind of services we would want available for our own children.
NJAMHAA represents 170 non-profit community based mental healthcare and addiction treatment organizations. Utilizing a variety of funding sources, these agencies employ thousands of dedicated and compassionate employees who serve more than 500,000 adults and children throughout New Jersey each year. These organizations provide an array of services to assist individuals with mental illnesses and behavioral health problems and their families. Housing, employment, substance abuse treatment, counseling, coping strategies, and foster services are only a few of the many programs designed to help individuals with mental illnesses and addictions recover.

For more than 60 years, NJAMHAA has been a tireless advocate for the countless individuals who have a mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder and remains committed to improving their lives and recovery.