

FEATURED TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT

Council for Prevention opens new Glens Falls recovery center

Lisa Reider

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GLENS FALLS – Council for Prevention, which offers a variety of substance abuse prevention and recovery resources in Washington and Warren counties, recently opened a new facility, the Hope & Healing Recovery Community Center, at 37 Chester Street, Glens Falls.

According to the Center’s website, the Glens Falls location offers “recovery support with peers; mutual aid meetings; harm reduction information, supplies, and training; recovery-safe social events; [and] a place to rewire our harmful thought patterns.”

The Center includes a team of Ashley Livingston, Richmond Principe, Drew Aldrich, and Mikayla Montero.

Principe shared a bit about the Center’s mission and his own journey toward becoming a street outreach coordinator. He noted that oftentimes the issues of mental health and substance abuse only hit home when a family member or someone close is affected, and he works to provide those families with the information they need to help navigate the situation.

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Hope & Healing is peer-driven, letting people work at their own pace, unlike some of the more clinical rehabilitation centers, Principe explained.

Reflecting on his own growth, Principe said, “I haven’t always been as compassionate,” adding that he now “leads with love” and tries to be a “safe person,” offering a safe place for people in need.

He pointed to his 8-year-old son, Little Richmond, as being his wakeup call, and a reason to work toward bettering himself. “Now time can be measured,” he said.

“He watches everything,” Principe said of his son, and the importance of leading by example. “It’s not, ‘do as I say,’ it’s ‘be the man you see me as.’ And I work to be a father he can be proud of.”

He brings his son to outreach events, and other volunteer opportunities, providing Little Richmond with a positive example of what being “a fair member of society” looks like. “My greatest accomplishment is how proud my son is of me.”

Principe added that he was in survival mode at his son’s age, and he expressed gratitude for his son’s innocence and youthful energy. He also tries to teach Little Richmond to speak up about his emotions and communicate his feelings.

“It’s easy to be mad,” he said, explaining that you have to sit in those emotions and explore “why,” rather than react.

Principe was already looking for ways to contribute to his community when he joined the team at Council for Prevention in Hudson Falls. Aside from his work as a street outreach coordinator, he also holds a parenting class at the Washington County prison, holds SMART Recovery meetings at the college, and just helps out whenever he sees someone in need — whether it’s a driveway that needs snow blowing or someone on the side of the road with a flat tire.

Earlier this month, a woman took to Facebook to praise a good Samaritan who just happened to be Principe. “Yesterday [a family member] got a flat tire. Once he called me, I was there in what seemed like 5 seconds to my kid’s aid, to help put the donut tire on, which I had never done before. We stood in the pouring rain watching a YouTube how to change a tire.

“This stranger pulls up, with all the right equipment and the most positive perspective on life I’ve heard in a long time. He didn’t have to pull over in the downpour and help us, but he did without hesitation.

“He gave me some business cards and told me he just opened up a recovery center in Glens Falls and if I knew anyone that needed some help, to send them his way. The very least I could do is promote his outreach center... Rich, I see you! Thanks for being a great human!”

Principe said he didn’t expect the woman to then share his business card on social media, or the story, and that he was mostly grateful that his son was in the car at the time to witness the act of kindness.

“I had serious character defects that I had to work on... accountability, reliability... Volunteering was a big part of my journey... seeing people do it was eye opening.” He said he lived in a world where someone doing a favor for you meant you owed them something later, but seeing people “do things out of the kinds of their hearts” changed his way of thinking. And being able to do that full time under the umbrella of Council for Prevention was a “growing experience.”

Principe acknowledged that he had his own troubles in his youth, including jail, what he calls “lived experiences” that now help him connect with the peers he’s hoping to help. “Most people want to hear from someone who’s been there,” he said.

When he reaches out to someone in need, he says he tries to be as genuine as possible, “and that’s relatable.” But it’s important to be there for the person, he said, even if that means sitting in silence for hours until they’re ready to talk, to work with them at their pace and “meet them where they are.”

“When you’re in survival mode, you can recognize a safe person. It might be a bottle of water or a three-hour conversation... I want to be that person.”

The rewards for such efforts are clear. “Seeing guys on day one, then six months, then eight months, then they’re getting their car back, jobs...I try to celebrate wins because there’s a dark side... jail, institutions, death.”

Bringing the Hope & Healing Recovery Community Center to Glens Falls was a feat as well. The building was completely renovated, which Principe said took about a year and half. By March of this year, they were able to hold a few meetings, and on Friday the Center held its grand opening. Principe said the community has been mostly supportive, with some folks stopping in for information, or to drop off donations. Being in Glens Falls gives them more exposure, which is the key to letting people know that such resources are available to them, he explained.

“Recovery taught me, if you see someone who needs help, take a couple minutes [to lend that helping hand].”

Principe also praised the Hope & Healing team, including Ashley Livingston, who he described as “a rock star” and a “mentor to all of us.”

He added, “On behalf of Hope & Healing, we’re excited to be that place of recovery and [to] connect with the community.”

Hope & Healing is open Monday through Saturday, offering day and evening meetings, as well as various outings and other programs, including a mom’s group on Mondays and a Mindfulness session on Wednesdays. A calendar of events is available on the Hope & Healing website (sites.google.com/view/hopeandhealingrecovery/home) and Facebook page. For more information, visit the website or call 518-480-5499.

Hope & Healing is made possible in part by more than \$500,000 in annual funding through the New York State Opioid Settlement Fund, provided by the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports.

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