

# CONNECTIONS

## ANNUAL APPEAL

FALL

2017

Founded in 1985 as a subsidiary of Ingleside Homes, the original mission of Connections Community Support Programs, Inc. was to help older adults with lifelong histories of institutionalization to move into the community. Our mission expanded in 1988 to include homeless services and addiction treatment. Today, Connections is one of Delaware's largest nonprofit organizations that helps our state's most vulnerable citizens.

**Connections has expanded its use of peers as mentors and recovery coaches in the past year, with great success. Here are some of their stories.**



### Alli

Recovering from an opioid use disorder is a challenging process, and Alli understands how even more complicated that path can get when pregnant. When her partying turned into dependence on heroin, Alli came to Connections for treatment in March 2014, and she's been drug-free ever since.

However, she became pregnant 10 months after getting clean. The 24-year-old saw her son as positive force in her recovery, but many other expectant mothers struggle with the stress.

That's why Alli helped form a new program specifically designed for pregnant women with opioid use disorders in recovery at the Connections clinic in Millsboro. As a recovery coach for expectant mothers, a position that she describes as "part sponsor/part case manager," Alli works one-on-one with some of the most vulnerable women and children who receive family-centered services at the clinic.

Alli's personal experience gives her a deeper perspective to help women with the challenges that occur when addiction intersects with pregnancy and motherhood. She takes her clients to doctors' appointments, drives them to meetings, and watches their kids when needed – anything to get these women and their children on the right track.

Relapses can come from personal or financial stress, and Alli said many women don't have the support networks they need in their lives. Her job boils down to being there for the women who need it most.

*"I wish we had something like this when I was going in every single day,"* Alli said. *"That would have been awesome, having somebody who you can look up to, having somebody who's on your level."*

For Brian, the sixth time's the charm. He visited the Connections Withdrawal Management Center for its five-day program a half a dozen times in 2016 to try to get clean from heroin.

*"I never came in for the right reasons,"* Brian said. *"You know, I came in to stay on probation, or keep my kids, or whatever the problem was at that time. I was trying to put a Band-Aid on it. I never really got down to my core problems."*

The 32-year-old had been using since he was 13, starting with alcohol and marijuana. He then progressed to cocaine, then Percocet and OxyContin, and eventually heroin. At the end, Brian said he was using more than 50 bags of heroin a day.

When Brian went in for the sixth time that December, he connected with the center's individuals in recovery from addiction who are hired to share their advice with new clients, and he was inspired to change.

Now, with 10 months clean, Brian works as a peer at the Withdrawal Management Center where he first got his start. He does everything from working security detail to running small groups, but his main goal as a peer is to provide guidance to newcomers to the program.

At home, Brian's recovery has helped his relationships with his fiancé, 6-year-old daughter, 4-year-old son, and two stepdaughters.

*"I can be a father,"* he said. *"I can be a son. I can be a fiancé. I can be a lot of things I couldn't be before because I was locked in that mentality."*



### Brian



## Charles

Charles has seen first-hand how the lack of resources for military veterans can lead to mental health issues and homelessness. After he returned from deployment as a nuclear biological chemical specialist in 1990, he settled in Las Vegas — but after his divorce, he found himself living on the street.

*“When I ended up being homeless, it was straight ‘What do I do; Where do I go,’” he said. “I literally did not know what to do.”*

A veterans program in New Mexico helped Charles before he moved to Delaware to be near his daughter. He found a place to stay at Marcella’s House, Connections’ residential facility for formerly homeless veterans.

A month later he was hired as a peer. Charles lives at the house while acting as a guide to others in the program, helping these men find employment, driving them to interviews, and teaching them computer skills.

*“They can see the success of somebody who’s gone from completely down-and-out to doing something. They look at their case managers like someone who’s over them. But I’m equal to them.”*

Without a program to make the transition from soldier to civilian life easier, some veterans don’t have resources to assimilate, and often struggle with PTSD or substance use problems. Through his own experiences, Charles understands the particular issues that homeless veterans face.

When Charles leaves Marcella’s House at the end of the year, he wants to continue his passion for helping those who have served.

*“If you served your country, you should absolutely not have to be living on the street,”* he said.



## Flo

At the height of her struggle with bipolar disorder and PTSD, Flo couldn’t bring herself to get out of bed, but many people told her to pull herself up by her bootstraps and get over it. Now the director of the Connection Wellness Club and Peer Support Services, Flo hopes to break down this stigma surrounding mental health.

*“People think it’s a character problem when, in fact, it’s something going on in your brain,”* she said.

After a family intervention, Flo learned to manage her mental illness with medication, a support group, and therapy, but she lost her job. Once she was back on her feet, she became accustomed to working again by volunteering at the SPCA and the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Flo was hired as one of the state’s first peer specialists. She was then recruited to Connections, which was a turning point in her life. Connections’ use of peer support services shows its faith in the people it serves, Flo said.

*“The peer specialists can point out to consumers their growth, how well they are doing and how far they’ve come.”*

Flo coordinates the peer specialists who are provided through a contract with the state’s PROMISE program, offering support to individuals with severe and persistent mental illness throughout Delaware. She also manages the Wellness Club, a social place for people with mental illness to gather and find support that is vital to their recovery.

*“When you have a mental illness, you’re kind of fighting for your mind,”* she said. *“You’re fighting for your life. But you can’t do it alone.”*



## William

William is proof of what hard work can achieve. He’s been going to the Connections Skill Center in Newport since July 2013 for help with his intellectual and developmental disabilities. Now he’s employed and has his own car, which he drives to work every day.

William’s family and the staff at the Skill Center are ecstatic.

*“They’re very happy with me and proud of me,”* he said.

At the Skill Center, William works on personal goals, such as improving his money management skills, and goes on community outings with other adults with similar disabilities. The Skill Center aims to help people with disabilities become more independent and integrated in the community. Many of the clients also want to find employment, so staff members work closely with them and local businesses to find good fits.

William initially provided janitorial services at the Connections clinic in Newark through Connect to Work, Connections’ social enterprise business that employs the agency’s clients in various fields. The Skill Center also helped William find work at a local store. Now, he’s working 20 hours a week at a janitorial job with the National Guard via a contract with Connect to Work.

William said his life is now better than ever. Since William has made so much progress in his time with the program, he often helps newcomers at the Skill Center.

*“I just help them relax, take it easy,”* he said. *“The staff will help them, and if they need anything they can ask me.”*



## OUR MISSION

Connections Community Support Programs, Inc. provides a comprehensive array of health care, housing, and employment opportunities that help individuals and families to achieve their own goals and enhance our communities.

For more info or services call  
Toll-free: (866) 477-5345  
Toll-free: (302) 442-6622  
3821 Lancaster Pike  
Wilmington, DE 19805  
[www.connectionsncsp.org](http://www.connectionsncsp.org)