

Together AZ

MAY 2026

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Inspiring Success on the Road to Recovery

The Midnight Deadline: Why I Chose to Stay

By Matthew Griffin

Life isn't just a series of random choices; it's a mission. For those of us who have served — whether in the military or law enforcement — we are trained to complete that mission at all costs. But what happens when the mission gets too heavy? What happens when the weight of the world you've seen finally begins to crush the person behind the badge?

I've spent the better part of my life in the shadows. My career began as a Navy Search and Rescue Swimmer, where I learned to dive into the chaos of the ocean to save lives. Later, I transitioned into law enforcement, eventually becoming an undercover narcotics detective. I have seen the darkness of this world up close — the devastation of the opioid crisis, the violence of the streets, and the human wreckage that remains in their wake. For years, I believed I was fine. I thought the "mask" I wore to survive undercover was just part of the job.

But the toughest fight I ever faced wasn't in the streets or the open sea. It was the battle inside my own head.

In March of 2017, I was done with this world. The "cost of the mask" — the fractured identity, the hypervigilance, and the imposter syndrome that comes with living a double life — had finally broken me. I felt like a "gray" version of the man I used to be. I wrote my suicide note and scheduled my "earthly exit" for midnight on March 17th. I truly believed I had nothing left to offer my family, my sons, or my community.

A chance phone call just hours before that midnight deadline stopped me in my tracks. It was a moment of grace that forced me to realize that even when the "undercover" role follows you home, you have to fight to find the man behind the uniform again. You have to choose to stay when quitting feels like the only logical exit.



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"A chance phone call just hours before that midnight deadline stopped me in my tracks."

My journey back from that edge, which I share in my memoir, *The Journey to Midnight*, taught me that my trauma wasn't a dead end. Instead, it was a roadmap. I realized that my lessons could be blessings and could help others who were lost in their own darkness. Today, I believe that by sharing our stories, we take the power back.

If you are currently in that dark place where the world has gone gray, I want to share the three pillars that saved my life.

Midnight Deadline continued page 7



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Becoming Your Own Lighthouse

By Ryan M. Sheade, LCSW

There is almost always someone in our life who feels like a lighthouse.

They are the steady beam when the fog rolls in. The voice we call when we are unsure. The person who reminds us who we are when we forget.

A parent. A spouse. A mentor. A friend. A grandparent.

Sometimes we do not even realize how much we have oriented our internal compass around them until they are gone. And when they leave or die, the ocean does not politely calm itself. It churns. It darkens. It feels disorienting.

You reach for the light.
And it is not there.

When the Lighthouse Goes Dark

When someone meaningful exits your life, there is grief. Of course there is grief. But beneath the grief is something else that can feel even more destabilizing: the loss of orientation.

Lighthouse continued page 9

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Publisher's Note

By Barbara Nicholson-Brown

The Weight of Silence

Asking for help seems simple enough, but it's often the hardest word to say. I call it the "50,000-pound word." For years, that word sat like lead on my chest, making it nearly impossible to say it aloud. But when I finally found the courage to ask, the crushing pressure was instantly lifted.

In active addiction, I was paralyzed under that weight. It wasn't just one thing that kept me quiet; it was the web of lies I kept telling myself:

- **Pride and Ego:** My inner critic insisting I should be "strong enough" to handle it alone.
- **The Fear of Shame:** The terrifying thought if people knew the truth about my drinking, etc., they would respond with judgment. (by the way I was not fooling anyone)
- **The Grip of Addiction:** Addiction flourishes in the dark. My alcoholism acted as a silent partner, convincing me isolation was my only safety and silence — my only friend.

I know my addiction fed on my fear, using it as a shield to keep me from the very light that could help me. Today, even with years of recovery, I need to stay humble, honest and willing.

Breaking the silence and asking for help isn't a confession of weakness; it's a declaration of war against the things that keep us hidden. It is the first, most vital step toward reclaiming a life addiction tries to take away.

As we recognize **Mental Health Month**, we need to keep the conversation in the light and bring our fears out of the shadows — because we are better together. I look forward to seeing you at the SEEDS Conference on May 15!

To our contributors who poured their insight into this edition for Mental Health Awareness month—thank you.

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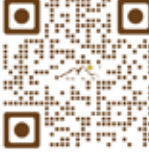
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In gratitude and memory of **William B. Brown, Jr.**

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The views and opinions presented in articles are those of the individual authors. Content is for informational purposes only. Seek professional help for addiction related issues.

Published Monthly Since 1991

Mental Health **Can't Wait:** Break the Silence, Ignite Change

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a national observance that has been recognized since 1949, but its message has never been more urgent. In the United States, nearly 1 in 5 adults is living with a mental health condition, and more than 1 in 20 experience a serious mental illness that significantly interferes with daily life.

Behind these numbers are our neighbors, coworkers, friends and family members — people whose struggles are often invisible, but deeply real.

At Behavioral Health Connections Arizona, we have the privilege of working alongside dedicated professionals who care for individuals and families navigating these challenges every day. We see both the weight of unmet need and the extraordinary resilience of those who seek treatment. In every story, there is strength — and there is hope.

Yet the gap between those who need care and those who receive it remains significant. Recent data shows that tens of millions of Americans require mental health treatment each year, but many do not access it due to stigma, cost or uncertainty about where to turn. At the same time, we are seeing concerning trends: rising rates of anxiety, depression and suicide, particularly among young people, alongside increasing demand for crisis services across the country.

The message is clear: mental health can't wait.

Encouragingly, there are also signs of progress. Awareness is growing. More people are talking openly about mental health than ever before, and innovations such as telehealth have expanded access to care. Integrated, trauma-informed treatment approaches — addressing mental health, substance use and physical health together — are helping individuals achieve more sustainable recovery. And importantly, we know that treatment works. Positive outcomes are not just possible; they are happening every day.

Mental Health Awareness Month is more than a moment — it is a call to action. Each of us has a role to play in breaking the silence and igniting change:

- Listen and show understanding. If you suspect a loved one is struggling, start with compassion. Listening without judgment can be the first step toward healing. Encourage them to seek professional support.
- Share resources that save lives. The **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** provides free, confidential support 24/7 via call, text or chat.
- Act in an emergency. If someone is in an acute medical emergency or immediate danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.
- Support the future of mental health care. We must inspire and invest in the next generation of mental health professionals who can meet the growing need for care.

If you or someone you know is struggling, our team is here to provide the help you need. Know this: you are not alone. Call **480-418-3357** for a level of care assessment or visit behavioralhealthaz.com for more information.

Let's commit to speaking openly about mental health.

Let's replace stigma with understanding, silence with conversation and barriers with access to care.

Lacey Dabelow
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Via Linda Behavioral

Taiwan Savage
CEO

Palo Verde Behavioral

*Source: National Institute of Mental Health

Mental Health Awareness Month Toolkit

For more than 20 years, SAMHSA has joined the tradition every May, raising awareness, sharing resources, and supporting the individuals and communities who need it most.

Check out what SAMHSA is doing! Share materials, and remember that we all play vital roles in caring for our mental health!



The Toolkit is a One-Stop Shop

The toolkit offers comprehensive resources in a central location that you can download and share. Key messages include: Social media content, graphics, and promotional materials designed for your audiences and media channels.

Messaging that encourages acceptance and support of people living with a mental illness.

Download the digital toolkit:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/about/digital-toolkits/mental-health-awareness-month>

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MAY — Mental Health Awareness Month and the *Benefits of Being Crafty*

By Amy Tilley, PsyD

Every May, the National Alliance on Mental Illness recognizes mental health awareness month. Their theme this year is “**Turning Silence into Connection,**” with the goal of lowering the stigma that surrounds mental illness. Mental Health America’s theme is “**More Good Days, Together,**” focusing on connection, community, and meeting people where they are at, to provide a supportive community to all who are in need.

These themes got me thinking about the different ways of connecting with our own communities. The first Saturday in May is National Scrapbooking Day. Now, why on earth would I write about this? Well, it is a hobby of mine that I’ve rekindled after a several year hiatus. And it connects with the themes for mental health awareness month. Connection and community are a vital part of everyone’s mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

I am a big proponent of experiences over things (who needs more stuff, anyway?) When I travel, it is more important to me to book excursions and adventures than to spend money on trinkets and T-shirts. One of the main things I do when I travel is take my DSLR camera, so that I can capture the memories that I am making with loved ones. When I get back, I then plan my next scrapbook album...a way to permanently capture the memories that I created with family and friends.

Scrapbooking is an analog hobby, something that pre-dates smartphones and digital everything. As I got into this hobby about 15 years ago, I realized there is an entire community that is involved in creating lasting memories while having fun at the same time. I’ve formed lifelong friendships through this hobby and made new connections along the way. It is a way to connect with others while using the creative side of my brain and leaving the real world for a day, as I immerse myself in the memories of going through photographs, putting them on paper and journaling about the wonderful memories made.

All of this got me to think about the health benefits of being creative, crafting, and having a community that shares the same hobby. Crafting is for all ages, races, genders, and ethnicities...anyone can do it. Crafting can take many forms: creating beautiful artwork, pottery, sewing, knitting, crocheting, card making and scrapbooking, and the newer trend of diamond dotting. Getting involved in a group of people with similar interests has immediate mental health benefits, including stress relief, increased life satisfaction, to long term cognitive protection.

Stress reduction: engaging in repetitive motions in crafts (like knitting or crocheting) can calm your nervous system and lower your blood pressure. This mimics a meditative state. It increases the production of dopamine, that “feel good” neurotransmitter that is responsible for pleasure and enjoyment.



iStock Credit: elenabs

"Connection and community are a vital part of everyone’s mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being."

Increased Life Satisfaction: engaging in a hobby allows you to plan for the future, having something on your calendar to look forward to. This gives you a sense of purpose and meaning to your life.

Cognitive protection: working on a craft engages multiple regions of the brain, improving your memory and problem solving, and concentration skills. The long-term benefits may help reduce cognitive decline in older adults. Completing a scrapbook, for example, is precision-focused, fosters positive memory recall by requiring you to get the photographs in the order that the event happened.

Fostering Social Connection: many of these analog hobbies had a resurgence during the COVID-19 pandemic. People needed a way to connect differently, and some felt a sense to give back to the community. There were many social circles that engaged in making masks to send to healthcare workers for protection.

Building a community and fostering connections allow us to have more good days, together. Engaging in a shared activity and experience brings us together, creating lasting memories and friendships. It bonds us in a way that is different from the other relationships that we have in life. Being crafty and creative engages our brains in a healthy way, and when we complete a project there is a sense of accomplishment and joy. It can act as a natural anti-depressant and stress reliever, bolstering our mental health. What will you do today to be creative, crafty, and build up your community and connections with others?

Amy Tilley, PsyD, has 20 years in the mental health and addiction recovery field. Her clinical interests include working with young adults and adults diagnosed with cooccurring conditions. Visit desertstarARC.com or call 520-638-6000.



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12-Step Advantage over Benevolent *but* Addicted Families

By Dr. Marlo Archer

“It was not until I stepped into the 12-Step community that I realized the safety and protection I felt in my family was really protecting all the addictions, not the people.”

On Saturday mornings, various members of four generations of my father’s family drifted in and out of my Grandmother’s kitchen. We eagerly congregated around the table to “spill the tea” and “get” all the “scoops.” She shared the location and condition of family members serving in the military. She could tell you whether or not your aunt passed her Real Estate License exam, and she knew why your cousin would not be coming to the Memorial Day picnic and who would have to apologize before that day to change that.

Not only did she make strong coffee and decadent chocolate waffles, but she also served plates of platitudes. A generous purveyor of unsolicited advice, Grandma told you whether or not she liked who you were dating, what she thought you’d be able to do with your intended college major, if your current work behavior was likely to get you fired, and exactly what type of person your outfit, shoes, or accessories made you look like.

Despite her “no holds barred” approach, we generally all felt loved, mostly accepted, and reasonably safe. Compared to how we all felt in the rest of the world - at our jobs, with our ex-spouses, raising our kids, that kitchen table offered a sanctuary where we could feel the temporary bliss of relative peace and accord.

Every week, we’d keep coming back, regardless of any corrective feedback we might have been given last time and in spite of what got said about people who weren’t there, because most of what Grandma shared from her own experience and strength had the immediate feel of undeniable truth, and the feel that the intent was to advance family members towards success.

For example, when she said that my cousin’s boyfriend was a “dink,” everyone agreed, but no one had wanted to say it out loud. When family members were feuding, she was quick to say which side was “being stupid,”



iStock credit: czarny_bez

although she still loved and accepted both and encouraged the injured party to be patient for the offender to come around. When she informed me that my 18-year-old cousin was making as much money as a UPS driver as I was as a 26-year-old Ph.D., I didn’t love hearing it, but I would have never guessed that on my own and it prompted me to request a raise.

As lovely as that all was, it had a major drawback in that the acceptance each family member was afforded automatically included acceptance of any addictions that person had that they could indulge while also still holding a job, paying their bills, and being able to perform household chores.

All of us were addicted to caffeine. That was not a problem, just an intelligent way to enhance performance. We pretty much all ate food that was mostly sugar and fat. Also not a problem as long as you could still carry 2 folding chairs, a casserole, and some presents to a baby shower. Ninety-five percent of us smoked cigarettes. It wasn’t celebrated, but it was condoned, provided you were over 15 and didn’t get caught by cops or teachers.

When family members graduated to more harmful addictions (and ALL OF US DID), it was never seen as a problem until it caused some other problem. My cousins and I and our aunts and uncles abused alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, credit cards, sex and relationships, video games, pornography, gambling, binging and purging, and thrill-seeking. The most enterprising of us also added workaholicism to the mix and held it as the highest priority. Until you got arrested, none of that was really discussed, and, if you managed to keep your job despite having gotten arrested, that was cause for celebration, not for serious self-examination.

It was not until I stepped into the 12-Step community that I realized the safety and protection I felt in my family was really protecting all the addictions, not the people. In a 12-Step program, you’re not going to get unsolicited advice, but people will share with you their experience, strength, and hope. You will be loved, but your behavior will not be overlooked and unconditionally accepted. People will speak truth to your face, not behind your back. Neither years in program nor years of age give anyone license to make rules or dictate traditions. No one is an ultimate authority. Group decisions are made with humility and trust in a Higher Power. Although nothing replaces the feelings of familial love and acceptance, my 12-Step family is actually much safer for me than was the family I was given through birth. You may find the same is true for you. Anyone can visit an Open 12-Step meeting, just to see how they feel. There is no obligation to join or return.

See you in the Rooms!

Dr. Marlo Archer, CGP, C-DPS, TEP
Learn more at www.AzPsychodrama.com



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The Power of Perspective

One of the keys to making good decisions is to shift your perspective. When you are in the middle of a mental health crisis, your brain tells you that this pain is permanent. It tells you that this is who you are now. I've had to learn to remind myself that the cloud hanging over me is just that—a cloud. This too shall pass. It is a temporary state of weather, not my entire life. By making choices that align with your long-term goals and values—rather than your immediate feelings—you can begin to steer yourself out of the storm. Slowly you'll begin to find the storm was sent to break you, it was sent to build you.

"Depression makes the simplest tasks seem impossible. When I was at my lowest, the idea of "recovery" felt too big to touch. Each day make one small, consistent change."

Small Steps Toward Big Change

Depression makes the simplest tasks seem impossible. When I was at my lowest, the idea of "recovery" felt too big to touch. Each day make one small, consistent change. Even when "feeling down," you can take one small step. It might be as basic as getting out of bed, taking a shower, or reaching out to a single friend. These are tactical wins that build the momentum necessary to survive.

Choosing Self-Care Over Self-Destruction

Feeling down often tempts us toward impulsive, self-destructive choices. We want to numb the pain because we feel out of control. Instead, I've learned to channel those heavy emotions into self-care. Opting for a healthy meal, engaging in physical activity, or allowing yourself a moment to breathe can change the chemistry of your day. These choices are an act of rebellion against the darkness.

Join the Conversation

I am still on this journey, and I want to walk it with you. On Friday, May 15, 2026, I will be at the 32nd Annual SEEDS Conference hosted by Mental Health America of Arizona. This year's theme, "**Care That Grows With Us**," focuses on advancing care at every stage of life.

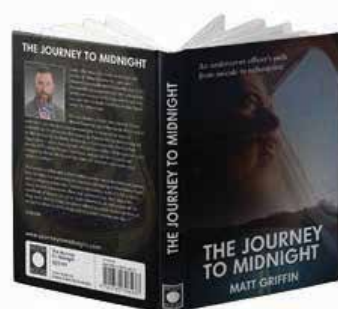
Come grow with me at ASU SkySong in Scottsdale to discuss how we can find the "treasure in the trauma" together. Whether you are a first responder, a veteran, or someone simply looking for hope, your mission isn't over. Everyone has their own "midnight", but there is also a morning. Reach out, take that one small step, and choose to stay.



Matthew Griffin is a U.S. Navy veteran, former narcotics law enforcement professional, and author whose work explores the hidden strength that can emerge from adversity. Drawing from over two decades of service in high intensity environments, Matthew brings a grounded and deeply human perspective to trauma, resilience, and post traumatic growth.

In his keynote, **The Treasure in the Trauma**, Matthew challenges audiences to reconsider how we understand suffering, healing, and transformation. His message bridges lived experience with hope, reminding us that trauma does not have to define a life story. Instead, it can become the catalyst for growth, purpose, and renewed connection across every stage of life.

Matthew's book *The Journey to Midnight: An undercover officer's path from suicide to redemption* is available at Amazon and fine bookstores everywhere.




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Walking the Journey Together: Insights for Those in Recovery and Those Who Guide Them

By Ramsen Kasha, MBA, MS, LPC

Recovery is rarely a straight line. Some days feel like progress, and others feel like setbacks, but one truth remains: no one has to navigate this path alone. Mental Health Awareness Month reminds us that healing thrives in connection, whether you're managing your own mental health journey or supporting someone who is.

For individuals in recovery, the challenges are both internal and external. A difficult conversation with a loved one, an unexpected trigger, or even a day that just feels "off" can shake confidence. It is also common to experience ambivalence in the process, wanting change while simultaneously feeling pulled toward familiar patterns. But progress doesn't have to be monumental to matter. Small, intentional actions such as journaling for ten minutes, practicing a grounding technique, or simply reaching out to a friend can become powerful anchors in daily life. Over time, these small steps create momentum, building resilience that carries forward into bigger victories. It becomes even more crucial to celebrate these stepping stones as the successes they are when we realize how easily the mind can magnify small setbacks into something much larger and seemingly more drastic.

Providers, family members, and peers play an equally critical role. Listening without judgment, reinforcing effort over outcome, and meeting individuals where they are can turn ordinary moments into meaningful opportunities for growth. While there is no universal playbook, we clinicians draw from evidence-based approaches such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, and Motivational Interviewing to help individuals navigate distorted thinking patterns, regulate emotions, and work through ambivalence. When these approaches are delivered within a supportive and collaborative environment, they become even more effective.

Programs like ours aim to bring these elements together in a way that feels both structured and engaging. In addition to traditional group therapy and skills-based work, incorporating recreational therapies such as art, music, and tai chi offers alternative pathways for expression and regulation that are easily replicated at home. These modalities can be especially impactful for individuals who may struggle to verbalize their experiences, allowing insight and emotional processing to emerge in more accessible and often more sustainable ways and honoring the reality that we rarely learn and communicate in just one way.



iStock Credit: Rawpixel

"Ultimately, walking the journey together is about shared responsibility, mutual respect, and steady, evidence-informed support."

Outpatient mental health programs, in particular, offer a unique bridge between independence and clinical support. Clients are empowered to practice coping strategies in real-life environments while still having consistent access to professional guidance. This real-time application allows for more meaningful skill generalization, as challenges that arise outside of sessions can be processed, reframed, and integrated into ongoing treatment. For providers, this model supports continuity of care and creates opportunities for more individualized, responsive interventions.

One of the most important lessons for both clients and providers is that recovery is as much about the process as it is about outcomes. While measurable milestones such as sustained sobriety or symptom reduction are important, they do not fully capture the effort required to show up consistently, tolerate discomfort, and re-engage after setbacks. These moments, though less visible, are often where the most meaningful clinical work occurs and where long-term change begins to take root.

Supporting mental health is not a one-way street. Those of us who guide others are often reminded daily of the resilience that exists within the people they serve. A client who leans into discomfort rather than avoiding it, a peer who offers support in group, or a family member who practices patience instead of control; these moments contribute to a therapeutic environment where growth is shared and reinforced across all levels of care.

Mental Health Awareness Month offers an opportunity to reflect on this shared work. For those in recovery, it may be a time to reconnect with supports, revisit coping strategies, or consider structured programs that provide both accountability and flexibility. For us providers, it is a chance to deepen clinical practice, seek consultation, and remain grounded in the purpose behind the work.

Ultimately, walking the journey together is about shared responsibility, mutual respect, and steady, evidence-informed support. Recovery is complex, but it is also deeply human. When individuals and their support systems move forward as a team, each step, whether taken in a therapy session, a group room, or even through a creative or movement-based practice, becomes part of a larger story of resilience. Programs like ours at Sahara Wellness Center are designed to support that process, offering a balance of clinical structure and experiential healing that meets individuals where they are.

In the end, the journey is worth it. Every step, every effort, and every moment of engagement builds toward a more sustainable sense of balance and well-being. And often, it is through consistent support, meaningful connection, and the willingness to try again that lasting change begins to unfold.

Ramsen Kasha, MBA, MS, LPC, has been in the field of addiction treatment and mental health since 2000. He is Chief Clinical Officer at Sahara Wellness Center. **Visit <https://saharabehavioralhealth.com/sahara-wellness-center>**



The image shows a promotional graphic for the Scottsdale Providence Recovery Center. At the top left is a circular logo with a stylized mountain range and a person figure. To the right of the logo, the text reads "SCOTTSDALE PROVIDENCE RECOVERY CENTER". Below this, a large, tall saguaro cactus is silhouetted against a bright sun setting or rising over a desert landscape. The sun creates a lens flare effect. Overlaid on the bottom half of the image is a semi-transparent white box containing the text: "It's not the end, it's the beginning." Below this, in smaller text, it says "Comprehensive and compassionate care for mental health and substance use". At the bottom of the box, the phone number "480-210-1734" and the website "www.scottsdaleprovidence.com" are listed. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner of the box.

Lighthouse from page 1

For years, maybe decades, you outsourced clarity.

You ran decisions through them. You calibrated your worth through their affirmation. You steadied your anxiety through their presence.

That is not weakness. That is attachment. That is being human.

But when the external lighthouse disappears, you are left with a hard and sacred invitation: Can you become your own?

The Difference Between Support and Substitution

It is healthy to lean on people. It is not healthy to hand them the job of defining you.

There is a subtle but profound difference between receiving light from someone and relying on them to generate your direction.

Many of us, especially those who grew up scanning for stability, learned to locate our sense of self in someone else's steadiness. If they are calm, I am safe. If they approve, I am worthy. If they stay, I matter.

When they leave, those borrowed coordinates collapse. And that collapse hurts. But it also reveals something powerful.

You have been navigating all along. You simply forgot that you were.

Grief as a Turning Point

When a meaningful person dies, we often say, "I do not know who I am without them."

That sentence is honest. But it is also unfinished. What if the real work of grief is not just missing them, but integrating them?

Not clinging to their beam. But absorbing it.

The wisdom they offered. The strength they modeled. The love they reflected back to you.

Instead of standing on the shore waiting for their light to return, you begin asking: What did they see in me? What did they believe about me? What parts of them live inside me already?

You do not replace them. You internalize them. That is how the light continues.

Becoming Your Own Lighthouse

Becoming your own lighthouse does not mean becoming hardened or self-sufficient in a performative way. It means developing an internal structure that can hold you steady when waves hit.

It means asking yourself:

What are my values?

What do I believe about love, integrity, courage?

What kind of human do I want to be, even when no one is watching?

It means learning to soothe your own nervous system. To make decisions without constant external reassurance. To tolerate loneliness without abandoning yourself.

This is not an overnight shift.

It is slow. It is uncomfortable. It can feel unfair. But it is also maturity in its truest form. You are no longer steering only by borrowed light. You are generating your own.

You Can Still Miss Them

Becoming your own lighthouse does not dishonor the one you lost.

You can ache for them. You can wish they were here. You can still hear their voice in your head. But now, when the fog rolls in, you do not panic in the dark.

You pause. You breathe. You ask yourself what they would say. And then you answer yourself.

That is integration. That is growth. That is love that has moved from external to internal.

A Final Truth

At some point in every life, we all face this transition.

A parent dies. A relationship ends. A mentor retires. A season closes.

And the question quietly (or not-so-quietly) emerges: Who am I without their light?

The bravest answer is this: I am someone capable of carrying it forward.

You were never meant to live forever navigating by someone else's beam.

You were meant to become luminous too.

Ryan M. Sheade, LCSW, has spent more than two decades walking with people through life's most difficult terrain. He is a seasoned clinician, educator, and speaker. Ryan is Founder and Clinical Director of **Integrated Mental Health Associates**. Visit www.integrated-mha.com to learn more.



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Hushabye Nursery partners with Carnegie Hall through their Lullaby Project at the Weill Music Institute



At Hushabye Nursery we are working with alumni moms and caregivers to create original lullabies that promote postpartum attachment and bonding. Development Consultant, Betsy Ganz — also a working musician — is writing songs alongside families who have received care at Hushabye Nursery and Arizona Women’s Recovery Center. Together, they transform personal experiences into gentle, meaningful songs for their children. The process centers each individual voice, helping express love, hope,

and presence through simple melodies and honest language.

Through guided prompts and collaborative songwriting, moms and caregivers reflect on what they want their children to feel — especially during moments of absence, stress, or uncertainty. Betsy supports them in shaping these reflections into lullabies using accessible musical structures and encouraging singing. The act of writing and singing becomes a form of emotional regulation and reconnection, reinforcing attachment and offering a lasting expression of care.

This work extends beyond music—it is a continuation of Hushabye’s mission to support long-term healing and family stability. By inviting alumni moms back into a creative, affirming space, the program builds confidence, community, and identity as tools for sustained recovery. These lullabies become lasting artifacts of resilience—simple, repeatable rituals of love that strengthen the bond between mother and child while honoring each family’s journey.

We’ve also connected with the Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra (another Lullaby Project partner) and are planning a collaboration with a Hushabye mom in northern Arizona.

As a joyful addition, we are sourcing guitars for moms who were once musicians but lost their instruments along the way. The goal is to place a guitar in the hands of anyone ready to reconnect with their music. Our wonderful partners at Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery are helping repair donated guitars as we work to match them with our Lullaby Project musician moms. Visit www.hushabyenursery.org.

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From the Mat

May Momentum: Growth You Can Feel

Mindfulness, Movement, and Staying the Course in Recovery

By Alexandra Daffner



Submitted photo

"Through simple movement and breath, yoga helps regulate your nervous system, even when things feel unpredictable."

May has a different energy than April. Where April invites a reset, May asks for follow-through. The days are brighter, life feels fuller, and there's a quiet invitation to keep going—to build on what you've already started. In recovery, this stage matters.

Because once motivation fades, what's left is practice. Not perfect practice, not inspired practice — just consistent, honest effort. This is where growth starts to take root in a real, sustainable way. Mindfulness and yoga can anchor you here as something to return to.

Mindfulness in this phase isn't always about slowing everything down — it's about staying with yourself as life speeds up. Schedules get busier. Emotions can feel less predictable. There's more opportunity to either stay present or slip into autopilot. **Mindfulness gives you a choice.**

It might look like catching yourself mid-thought when your mind starts spiraling and gently redirecting. Or noticing tension in your body before it turns into a reaction. Or recognizing when you need a pause instead of pushing through. That awareness creates space. And in recovery, space is everything.

Yoga supports this in a physical way. It brings you out of your head and back into your body—something that can be easy to lose as life fills up again. Through simple movement and breath, yoga helps regulate your nervous system, even when things feel unpredictable.

And it doesn't have to be long or intense to be effective. A few intentional stretches in the morning. A moment to breathe between tasks. Even standing still and noticing your feet on the ground. These small resets help you stay connected instead of drifting.

Because drifting is subtle. It doesn't feel like a major setback—it feels like skipping the small things that were helping. Ignoring your breath. Rushing through your day. Reacting instead of responding. Over time, those shifts can pull you away from the stability you've been building. May is a good time to notice that—not with judgment, but with honesty.

Are you still showing up for the practices that support you? Are you giving yourself moments to pause? Are you staying connected to your body, your breath, your recovery support system?



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If not, it doesn't mean you've failed. It just means it's time to come back. Recovery isn't about never drifting—it's about returning, again and again.

Growth is more visible this time of year—and in recovery, that can feel both encouraging and uncomfortable. Progress can bring new challenges, fears, and vulnerability. That's normal.

Growth asks you to keep going, even when things feel unfamiliar. This is where community and routine matter. Whether it's a yoga class, a meeting, or a space where you can be real without pressure, staying connected helps you stay grounded.

As May unfolds, think less about starting over and more about continuing. Keep it simple. Keep it steady. Stay with yourself through the ups, distractions, and in-between moments.

That's where real change happens—in the quiet decision to keep showing up. One breath. One movement. One moment at a time.

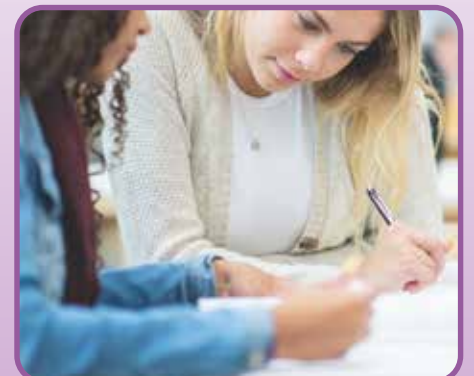
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Spiritually Fit Co-Op is an inclusive, community-focused yoga studio that strives to eliminate barriers for people on their healing journey. For class times and daily schedules visit www.spirituallyfitco-op.com

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AWRC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that qualifies for the Arizona Charitable Tax Credit, QCO Code 20058.

Axiom Care and McCain Family celebrate the Opening of the John McCain Veterans Center

Axiom Care, a Phoenix based provider of behavioral health and recovery housing since 2012, is pleased to announce the opening of the **John McCain Veterans Center**, a 60-bed transitional housing program designed to serve veterans navigating challenges related to substance use disorders, mental health conditions, trauma and homelessness.

The center is located on the campus of Victory Place, a 200-apartment Veteran-focused affordable housing community established in 2001 by Cloudbreak Communities. At a ribbon-cutting ceremony on March 11 were United States Marine Corps Veteran Jim McCain and his mother Ambassador Cindy McCain, wife of the late U.S. Senator John McCain.

The partnership between Axiom Care, nonprofit Axiom Community of Recovery and Cloudbreak Communities Victory Place is the first step in a collective vision to combine short-term recovery services with long-term accessible and affordable housing, and follow-up outpatient supports geared toward the unique needs of veterans. It's not enough to provide four walls, we must provide community.

"Anyone who has worn the uniform knows that when you serve, you become part of something bigger than yourself. You have a mission, you have your brothers and sisters beside you, and you have a very clear purpose. But, when the uniform comes off, that clarity can disappear. For many veterans, the transition from civilian life to service, and back to civilian life, is not a straight road," said Jim McCain. "It can be confusing, isolating and overwhelming. Some carry physical wounds, many carry invisible ones, and too often they try to carry those burdens alone," he said.

The John McCain Veterans Center provides a recovery-oriented continuum of care where low-income veterans struggling to navigate the challenges of substance use disorders, mental health conditions, trauma and homelessness can live in a structured setting and engage in Axiom Care's outpatient mental health and substance use treatment services, to gain the stability and support needed to transition to long-term housing on the Victory Place Campus.

"The culture of the military teaches you resilience, toughness and endurance – and those qualities are important, but sometimes they make it harder to admit when you need that support. Recovery is not something you do alone; it



From left: U.S. Marine Corps Veteran Jim McCain, Ambassador Cindy McCain, Sharon Harper, Dr. Oliver Harper, Governor Doug Ducey (Submitted photo)

"When a veteran walks through these doors, they won't just find a place to live. They will find a place to rebuild, to belong, and to believe in their future again."

takes a community, it takes structure, it takes accountability in yourself – and it takes people who understand where you've been. That is why what Axiom Care has created here matters," McCain continued. "It represents stability for someone who has lost it, dignity for people who have been forgotten, and a path forward for veterans who are ready to rebuild their lives."

"My husband would be very proud of what this place stands for, proud of the veterans who will find hope here, and especially proud of our son's involvement," said Ambassador Cindy McCain.

"When you hear the word service, as Arizonans and Americans, one family immediately comes to mind, the McCain family," said Governor Ducey. "John McCain embodied that word throughout his life, from his service in Vietnam to decades in the United States Senate, he lived by a simple but powerful ideal of putting country first. What makes the McCain story so remarkable is that John's commitment to service did not end with him. Cindy and their children have carried that legacy forward with the same dedication and sense of purpose, when it comes to committing something bigger than oneself. I have been very fortunate in my own life and career to know John McCain, to work alongside Cindy McCain and to see their children continuing that tradition of service. The John McCain Veterans Center is another important chapter in that story."

"I grew up in a family of veterans including my father who served in World War II," said Axiom Care Co-Founder Vern Johnson. "I also grew up watching my dad live with PTSD, long before we knew what it was or how to treat it. Those experiences stayed with me and are a big part of why Axiom Care exists, and why we have this program today. Our vision for Axiom Care began in 2012 with a simple but urgent mission to make compassionate and effective recovery care available to all Arizonans, especially those who are often left behind. My background as a social worker helped shape who we are today, dignity centered, evidence-based and focused on long term recovery."

Support services provided by nonprofit partner, Axiom Community of Recovery (ACR), include peer support, case management, housing navigation, workforce development and creative healing through its Art of Our Soul studio.

"When a veteran walks through these doors, they won't just find a place to live. They will find a place to rebuild, to belong, and to believe in their future again. If we do our job right, they will leave knowing one thing — their service mattered, their life matters, and their future still belongs to them," said ACR Executive Director Nick Koury.

In closing, Jim McCain quoted his father, "Americans never quit, we never surrender, we never we never hide from history, we make history," and continued, "*So, for those of you, the Veterans who have already proven you know how to fight, sometimes the next fight is simply rebuilding your life. Go and make your history.*"

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The Spiral of Overfunctioning: How to Benefit Your Relationships by Doing Less

By Denise Ramsay, LPC

The “ant spiral of death” is a phenomenon where blind army ants, which rely on pheromone trails to navigate, get trapped in a mechanistic, circular march that results in exhaustion, and eventually, death, from dehydration and starvation. Sadly, nature offers several such examples of how different species can engage in instinctually driven behaviors to a regrettable extreme: incorrect avian imprinting, sheep off a cliff, beached whales and dolphins, moths to a flame, and deer caught in the headlights. Not surprisingly, humans are no exception.

Like ethology, psychology has shed a clarifying light on the different ways innate forces drive repetitive human behaviors. Attachment research, for example, highlights the human need for love and belonging, which blindly compels us to cling to our caregivers as children, and to strive for interdependence as adults. When this drive to form meaningful bonds is fraught with difficulty, we can, eventually, find ourselves in one of two general types of behavioral spirals: overfunctioning or underfunctioning.

Subconsciously motivated by anxiety, self-worth issues, and the fear of abandonment, overfunctioning is a habitual behavioral pattern of taking on excessive responsibility that results in burnout, relationship imbalance, and the constriction of one’s identity. Typical signs of overfunctioning include:

- **Taking Over:** Doing tasks for others, micromanaging, and being the primary planner or fixing potential problems on everyone else’s behalf.
- **Emotional Labor:** Assuming responsibility for other people’s feelings, happiness, and well-being.
- **Constant Fixing:** Offering premature advice, finishing sentences, managing others’ choices/schedules, constantly mediating conflicts, and difficulty with delegating and trusting others to complete tasks or letting others learn from their mistakes and failures.
- **Exhaustion:** Feeling consistently overwhelmed, frustrated, irritable, and burned out.
- **Relationship Imbalances:** The more you do, the less the other does. The less the other does, the more you feel you have to step in. The more you step in, the more the other person backs off. Eventually, this codependent dynamic of overfunctioning and underfunctioning becomes routine (*the more the more*), resulting in an accumulation of resentments and widening emotional distance.

Conversely, motivated by general anxiety, fear of failure, and personal insecurity, underfunctioning is a habitual behavioral pattern of taking on minimal responsibility paired with an over-reliance on others that results in a lack of self-confidence and personal agency, a dependency on others, and a restricted quality of life. Typical signs of underfunctioning include:

- **Dependency:** Relying heavily on others for emotional, financial, logistical, and other forms of support.
- **Passivity & Procrastination:** Lacking initiative, avoiding decisions, remaining unorganized and rudderless, failing to follow through on tasks, and being generally irresponsible and undependable.
- **Emotional Dysregulation:** Easily overwhelmed and emotionally reactive (i.e., explosive or shutdown and withdrawn).
- **Learned Helplessness:** Acting as if one is unable to make choices or perform basic tasks, even when capable; refusing to learn or try; acting like a victim and blaming others.

Unlike most other species, humans can inhibit instinct in favor of reasoned choice, allowing for greater adaptability and progressive change. Since awareness is often curative, the first step to changing these patterns is knowing which extreme you edge toward when under relational stress. The way out of the spiral then becomes a matter of clear intention and deliberate practice applied consistently in your day-to-day encounters with those who challenge you most.

For those who tend toward overfunctioning, I offer the following steps as a means to encourage you out of the spiral and back toward healthy interdependence.

1. Develop a high-resolution awareness of HOW you do what you do. Are you:

- Doing for others what they can – or can learn how – to do for themselves.



iStock Credit: Jacob Wackerhausen

- Making excuses for others’ lack of effort.
- Focusing on others rather than prioritizing your own needs.
- Rushing to fill silences, or to distract during uncomfortable moments.
- Using a wall of words, always providing the answer, or giving unsolicited advice.
- Apologizing for things that are not your responsibility.
- Feeling responsible for others’ emotions.
- Taking all the blame rather than sharing responsibility.
- Discouraging initiative in others by being overly critical or perfectionistic.

2. Get curious about WHY you do what you do. Ask yourself:

- What fears arise when I consider doing less?
- Did I learn early that my value was contingent upon what I do for others?
- Did my identity get limited to my family role as the hero/rescuer child?
- What behaviors were discouraged in my family-of-origin that consequently got underdeveloped?
- What familial, societal, or religious expectations and norms did I observe growing up, especially about responsibility and caretaking?
- What am I getting from this pattern that makes it hard to let it go?
- When did this pattern begin in my current relationship?

3. Share your feelings and needs, while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

- Get honest by using responsible communication skills, such as “I” statements, to share how over functioning is hurting you and the relationship.
- Distinguish between helping versus enabling.
- Don’t hesitate to use the word “no” (in all it’s different forms) or negotiate terms to include mutually collaborative effort.
- Learn to tolerate the disappointment of others and don’t tolerate guilt tripping.
- Note the difference between a real emergency versus poor planning and stop participating in the chaos.
- Prioritize and protect time for self-care with pride and confidence.
- Teach people how to treat you by sharing what makes you feel valued and fulfilled in the relationship.

4. Practice acceptance.

- There is no such thing as perfection, nor one perfect way of doing things. Make room for differences and give others enough space to find their own unique ways forward.

Overfunctioning continued page 14

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Willow Healing Center Introduces New Name and Brand Reflecting Full Scope of Women's Treatment

Willow Healing Center at The Meadows, formerly known as Willow House, has introduced a new name and expanded brand reflecting the evolution of its women's residential treatment program.



Historically recognized for its specialized work in relational and intimacy issues and trauma, Willow Healing Center is expanding its focus to support women more fully across a broader range of mental health and behavioral health challenges.

Willow Healing Center provides care for women experiencing relational and intimacy disorders, including love and sex addiction and avoidance, trauma, such as betrayal trauma and PTSD, eating disorders, mood and anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, and co-occurring conditions.

For women, by women, Willow Healing Center is now guided by an all-female leadership team shaping a program designed specifically for women. "Our work has always focused on the underlying patterns that drive behavior, especially those rooted in trauma and attachment," said Dr. Whitney Howzell, VP of Inpatient Programming. "This evolution reflects that focus, expanding how we support women across a broader range of clinical needs while continuing to deliver whole-person care."

As part of this transition, The Meadows Eating Disorder Program has been fully integrated into Willow Healing Center, which now serves as the organization's residential eating disorder program within a women-only environment.

Care at Willow Healing Center is grounded in The Meadows Model, a core pillar of The Meadows Approach to Care, which addresses the underlying patterns driving emotional and behavioral challenges to support long-term, whole-person healing.

Women receive individualized care that integrates relational, mental health, and substance use treatment within a single program, supported by both specialized and shared therapeutic experiences.

Willow Healing Center remains a women-only program, offering a safe, inclusive, and affirming environment designed to support deeper healing and connection.

The updated name and brand position Willow Healing Center as a leading inpatient treatment option for women seeking care for both primary concerns and co-occurring conditions.

For more information about **Willow Healing Center**, visit **WillowHealingMeadows.com** or call **877-421-6414**.



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Learn more at quailrunbehavioral.com



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Overfunctioning from page 13

- Like the butterfly, we must all struggle out of our own chrysalis to develop the necessary strength for success. Don't inadvertently rob people from the necessary emotional discomfort and struggle inherent in this process.
- Replace the false belief that your value is contingent upon how much you do, with one that is more accurate and healthier.
- Accept that a healthy relationship involves interdependence, not unilateral giving.
- Acknowledge that you have needs, wants, and limitations. Give up control in favor of asking for help, receiving graciously, and asking others to step up.

It can feel difficult to stop overfunctioning, especially when it leads to positive reinforcement from others or when it seems necessary to keep everything from collapsing. Over time, however, the imbalance of overfunctioning inevitably becomes problematic, leading to the breakdown of individual and relational health. This path, like the circular path of the disoriented army ants, has an unavoidable fate.

So, as you effort your way back into balance, remember that the objective is not to become less caring or dependable. Rather it is about distributing responsibility more equitably and treating yourself with the same consideration that you give others. It's about relinquishing control, martyrdom, and fear, so that you can embrace authentic connection and shared growth. It's about moving from an unconscious, primal march for survival to one that ensures it.

Denise Ramsay's therapeutic style supports a gentle, patient, and experiential approach to self-understanding that is holistic – focusing on mind, body, and soul. Learn more at www.pcsintensive.com

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TGAZ Recovery Partners

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Agave Ridge	480-780-0211	agaveridgebehavioral.com
Aurora Behavioral Health	877-870-7012	auroraarizona.com
Axiom Care	602-782-9500	axiomcareofaz.com
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Dr. Marlo Archer	480-705-5007	DrMarlo.com
Gifts Anon	480-483-6006	
Horizon Recovery Center	480-219-7098	horizonrecovery.com
Hushabye Nursery	480-628-7500	hushabyenursery.org
The Meadows	800-632-3697	themeadows.com
Mens Teen Challenge	520-792-1790	tcaz.org
Mental Health America of Arizona		mhaarizona.org
Mercy Care 800-631-1314	602-222-9444	mercyareaz.org
NorthSight Recovery	833-787-9718	northsightrecovery.com
Psychological Counseling Services (PCS)	480-947-5739	pcsintensive.com
Scottsdale Providence	480-210-1734	scottsdaleprovidence.com
Scottsdale Recovery Center	888-663-7847	scottsdalerecovery.com
Scottsdale Serenity	480-906-2067	scottsdalserenityrehab.com
Sharon Youngblood	520-331-1483	
Sierra Tucson	800-842-4487	sierratucson.com
Spiritually Fit- Co-op	602-809-0854	spirituallyfitco-op.com
Brough Stewart, MC, LPC, NCC	602-316-3197	
Steps to Recovery/Konnect	928-649-0077	konnectwellness.org
Valley Hospital	602-952-3939	valleyhospital-phoenix.com
Via Linda Behavioral Hospital	480-476-7210	vialindabehavioral.com
Virtue Recovery Center	866-338-6977	virtuerecoveryuncitywest.com
Teen Challenge AZ	602-708-9475	tcaz.org

Helplines

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)	602-264-1341
Al-Anon	602-249-1257
Tucson Al-Anon Information	520-323-2229
Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA)	aca-arizona.org
Bipolar Wellness	602-274-0068
Child Abuse Hotline – Support & Information	800-422-4453
Cocaine Anonymous	602-279-3838
Co-Anon	602-697-9550
CoDA	602-277-7991
COSA	480-385-8454
Crisis Help Line – For Any Kind of Crisis	800-233-4357
Crisis Text Line	Text HOME to 741741
Crystal Meth Anonymous	602-235-0955
Debtors Anonymous	800-421-2383
Domestic Violence	800-799-SAFE
Families Anonymous	602-647-5800
Fentanyl Anonymous	520-338-9307
Food Addicts foodaddicts.org	435-764-1461
Gamblers Anonymous	602-266-9784
Gam-Anon 602-303-7876	National Hotline 844-475-4213
Grief Recovery	800-334-7606
Heroin Anonymous	602-870-3665
Marijuana Anonymous	800-766-6779
NDMDA Depression Hotline – Support Group	800-826-3632
Narcotics Anonymous/Phoenix	480-897-4636
Narcotics Anonymous/Casa Grande	520-426-0121
Narcotics Anonymous/Flagstaff	928-255-4655
Narcotics Anonymous/Prescott	928-458-7488
Narcotics Anonymous/Tucson	520-881-8381
Nar-Anon Family Groups	(800) 477-6291
National Youth Crisis Hotline	800-448-4663
Overeaters Anonymous	602-234-1195
PAL (Parents of Addicted Loved Ones)	480-300-4712
Parents Anonymous	602-248-0428
Phoenix Metro SAA	602-735-1681
RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network)	RAINN.ORG
Rape Hotline (CASA)	602-241-9010
Sexaholics Anonymous	602-439-3000
Sexual Assault Hotline 24/7 English & Spanish	800-223-5001
Sex/Love Addicts	602-337-7117
Sex/Love Addicts Tucson	520-792-6450
Sex Addicts Anonymous	602-735-1681
S-ANON	480-545-0520
Teen Life Line	800-248-8336

Additional Resources

ACT Counseling & Education	602-569-4328	actcounseling.com
AZ. Dept. of Health	602-364-2086	
AZ Holistic Approach Counseling	602-529-1967	
Arizona Opioid Assistance Helpline	888-688-4222	
Birches Health	833-483-3838	bircheshealth.com
Eric's House	855-894-5658	
Desert Drug Dog	602-908-2042	
Hunkapi Programs	480-393-0870	
Kid in the Corner	kidinthecorner.org	
EMPACT/La Frontera	800-273-8255	
I Am Teen Strong	480-396-2409	
Mental Health Center of America	602-704-2345	
NotMYKid	602-652-0163	
PAL Parents of Addicted Loved Ones	palgroup.org	
Recovery Café	480-530-7090	
TERROS Health	602-685-6000	

Refuge Recovery

Wednesday, 6:00-7:00 pm, Red Tree Meditation Center, 1234 E 16th St. Tucson
Saturday, 5:00- 6:30 pm, *Palo Verde room* Saint Philip's in the Hills Episcopal Church. 4440 N Campbell Ave., Tucson

EDA Meetings

Sat. 10:30 am New Freedom Meeting — Pigeon Coop. 4415 S Rural Rd, Ste 8, Tempe AZ. Step and big book study.

Thur. 7:00 P.M. New Happiness Meeting Crossroads 2103 E Southern, Tempe. Rotating format- Step, Topic, Big Book, Speaker.

TUCSON		
ACA	aca-arizona.org	
AA	520-624-4183	
Al-Anon Info Service	520-323-2229	
Anger Management	520-887-7079	
Behavioral Awareness Center	520 629 9126	
Co-Anon Family Groups	520-513-5028	
Cocaine Anonymous	520-326-2211	
Cornerstone Behavioral Health	520-222-8268	
Cottonwood Tucson	800-877-4520	
Crisis Intervention	520-323-9373	
Narcotics Anonymous	520-881-8381	
Nicotine Anonymous	520-299-7057	
Overeaters Anonymous	520-733-0880	
Recovery in Motion	520-975-2141	
Sex Addicts Anonymous	520-745-0775	
Sierra Tucson	800-842-4487	
Suicide Prevention	520-323-9372	
Teen Challenge	888-352-4940	
The Mark Youth and Family Care	520-326-6182	
Workaholics Anonymous	520-403-3559	

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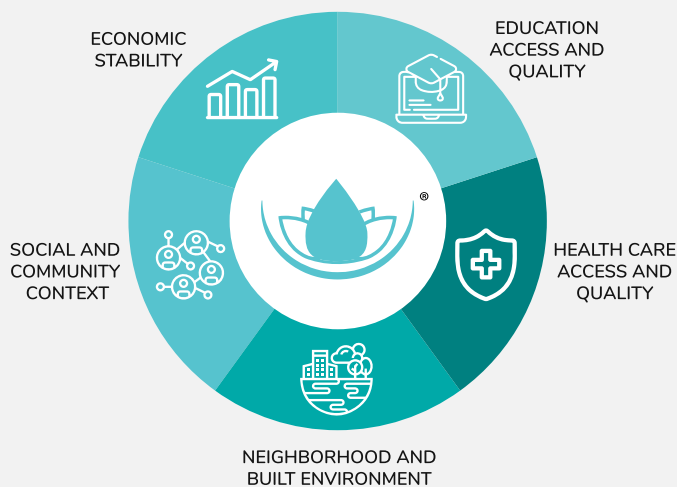
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