

In our own words:

'I am able to cope'

*Submitted by **Krystal**, St. Joseph's Health PROS Program in Syracuse. Krystal has been in the PROS Program since August of 2018 and this is her story.*

I came to PROS from the recommendation of my therapist and Department of Social Services worker. I am the mother of six children who are all in elementary school: I have three sets of twins and I saw the stress of everyday life as well as losses in my life start to take a toll on me. I also had a lot of anger. While working on my classes in PROS, Anger Management, Self Esteem, and an Anger Workbook for Women, I was able to see myself as worthy and as a success. I am now able to be the success and the person I want to be.

I am now working taking care of others. I work almost full-time as a personal care assistant. Some days are hard, but I am able to cope with anything that happens. I am also able to be more patient and have less anger while I am homeschooling my kids through this pandemic. I know now that I can do these things and that I can always have support through PROS.

Editor's Note: *Finding the inner strength to care for both ourselves and for others is an impressive achievement! We wish Krystal continued success and thank her for also sharing with us.*

'I was the Exception'

Suzanne, who attends CoveCare PROS, shares her reckoning with her alcoholism. We thank her for opening up about facing her challenge.

I was an exception all right. Me an alcoholic? No way, no how. Not me, never in a million years, will I ever be like them. Like my dad or those people on the other side of the bar that waste away time foolishly spending their energy and money on sitting around getting screwed-up by booze. I will stand on the other side of the bar serving, working my butt off making money, and consuming drinks on their expense.

I am an exception to the rule. I will do this differently, I am different, I am not one of them I am an exception. I can drink all night and get up in the morning to run a 5k race and win first prize without any consequence. I am numb, I do not feel any pain, I am an exception to alcoholics. I can rise in the a.m., get everything done in a day – make school lunches, go to work, drive a school bus, instruct trainings at the gym, drop by the school for the kids, take



them to the doctor, be back in time to teach a class at the gym at the end of the day, and have dinner ready for them. Keep up with the housework, attend their sporting events, and at times drive the team on the school bus. I am an exception all right. I worked out extremely hard so I could keep in shape to compete in the next triathlon.

As a trainer I liked to think I practiced what I preached to keep my muscles in line. I forgot that along the way the one thing I was leaving behind and ignoring was my spirituality. I had none. I thought to myself at the end of each day: "GEE! I deserve a drink or two or three every night. I am an exception."

I was so exceptional I could drink to midnight, rise at five in the morning and start a school bus to drive 60 children to school without a fatality. It is not a problem, and no one knows how tired I am. I am an exception. Nothing will ever happen because being tired and hungover never meant anything to me.

I was immune to it. I started to feel that was my norm. Alcohol is never going to slow me down or get in the way of my life or harm anyone else. I can drive my boys and their friends to and from half-in-the-barrel and not worry about ever getting into an accident or trouble with the law, because I am an exception. I have this, I am so good at it, I am a professional I can handle anything. If I had a problem, it was not because of drinking. My life is manageable. Right? I was just incredibly lucky I suppose. I could binge on as much wine and booze as I wanted then to eat the sugar, vomit, and never worry about having a heart attack because I am an exception. I am the strongest person I know.

Bullsh*t. What insanity and poor judgment to live by. No one is invincible. I thought I could keep on going and nothing would ever harm me or anyone else. But it does. Alcohol or any substance can be a killer when it is abused

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The Remarkable Resilience of Rehabilitation Service Providers

From all across the state, OMH has heard of the incredible responses necessary in 2020 to engage and help our clients thrive. The sharing of ideas during regional PROS calls has been tremendous!

While each region of the state tackles “when to re-open in person” at a different pace, the degree of thoughtfulness on how to do so safely and wisely is evident. Many of you have measured out appropriate social distancing and some have used colorful duct tape to mark where chairs should be placed and people should stand. Others have greeting stations, so every client is met at entry for a temperature check, and given a clean mask if they need one. We are hearing that participants have been eager to comply as they understand it is the only way the program can remain open safely.

Some clients lost jobs when the pandemic first hit and programs quickly shifted to provide guidance on how to apply for unemployment and update resumes. Now we are learning that there are participants who are finding jobs more easily than before as Insta-cart and other delivery services and stores search for eager workers. One participant even earned enough to buy himself a newer car! Programs across the state are proving that it is quite possible to keep employment supports a viable PROS focus.

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and for this compulsive extremist, I had to come to terms with the truth about myself and my actions. I have alcoholic behavior and thinking no matter what I decide to pick up and use – food, drink, men, money, drugs, etc. It is the spiritual principle of the program that creates the psychic change in us that teaches us to think, act, and react better than we used to.

Today, I am an alcoholic bulimic and drug addict. However, this does not define me. I am recovering from these addictions because I have found a solution today and I am here to tell you about it. This is proof that it really works. Since coming into the program, I have adopted many tools and skills to stay sober from my compulsive and impulsive behaviors.

- I attend AA meetings because I want to, not because I have to.
- I seek out help when I need it and do not fear asking for it.
- I use the phone as my tool when needed.
- I stay connected to people in the program and not to those that are a risk.
- I read literature, inspirational quotes, and listen to positive affirmations and meditative sounds to keep my head filled with positive thoughts and a grateful attitude.
- I pray to my HP and keep myself open to new ideas and ways of living my life.
- I meditate and use yoga as the way to balance my body and mind.

Telehealth has proven to be a strong engagement tool for some participants. New client referrals are increasing as many in the community struggle with their anxiety and depression that is exacerbated by social isolation. Telehealth is helping those new to PROS who may have been hesitant to walk into a classroom of strangers, giving them the opportunity to ease their way to face-to-face engagement. Many providers speak of those clients who rarely talked in groups who are now very open during telephone calls.

The challenge continues on how to get clients the necessary technology to fully use telehealth, including finding unlimited minutes. Several PROS providers across the state sought out grant funding from local community sources and have been able to purchase tablets or phones to lend, and some have been able to pay for phone plans. Another has found that if they contact the phone service provider with the client and explain how necessary it is to be connected to support/services, they have been able to arrange for an increase of the client's free minutes.

All of this has required a flexible, nimble staff that has used its creative energy to the fullest to act as advocates and role models who are inspiring clients to persist during this challenging pandemic. OMH cannot adequately express our appreciation of all you do. Thank you!

- I am mindful of when, what, and how much I put into my mouth in terms of a balanced diet.
- I exercise because I enjoy it and it is healthy for me, not because I am enslaved to it. I am careful not to overtrain as I did before. It is more about balancing the activities I enjoy today.
- I attend CoveCare workshops that cover CBT/DBT education.
- I am in touch with my therapist Deb two times a week.
- I study yoga therapy online with Breathingdeeply school with intentions to be a certified yoga therapist.
- I use the Refuge Recovery approach following the eight-fold path of recovery as another way to explore a safe and secure means through the ends of suffering.
- As I continue to stay active as a certified personal trainer and a y12sr, leader this helps me stay connected to others in the field of health and therapeutic developments to ensure that I have the best possible chance to work with those suffering or not suffering.
- Finally, I have earned a CASAC degree that will help me further my career as a counselor in an alcohol and substance abuse treatment center with the intention to combine yoga and therapy to empower the bodies and minds of all who are willing.

I am grateful in my life today because of my willingness to change, to follow the 12 steps and stick with the winners of this program. Thank you to you all who have been there for me and continue to be there in my journey of sobriety.

Fun and Games in the Time of Quarantine at St. Joe's PROS

Submitted by **Kathryn Murphy**, PROS Program Director at St. Joseph's Health PROS in Syracuse.

COVID-19 has been a stress and a great change for everyone in America, more so is true in the world of mental health services. PROS has been immensely impacted, as the heart of PROS was always the sense of community and the togetherness that both staff and clientele share on a daily basis. The working together every day is what makes PROS, PROS.

When COVID hit and the state of New York went into shutdown, St. Joseph's Health PROS was faced with a decision: do we close our doors, or do we do our best to stay open? We choose the latter. We heard the call for care, and we answered it. We experienced a drastic temporary staff reduction, yet found ways to continue to remain available to serve our participants. Like so many other areas of service, furloughs were a necessary step to keep services open and running while also being as fiscally responsible as possible.

We worked closely with the Office of Mental Health to develop ways to stay in touch with our clients while being socially distanced and also offering groups and classes in-house to small numbers of people. The two Recovery Coaches that remained (Carl and Shawn) put their heart into their work day-in and day-out. From "Music in the Mornings" to playful contests to "Re-Name the Staff Members," (my favorite was the Three Amigos) - Carl and Shawn worked tirelessly to keep PROS a safe, fun, and accepting place during a period of trial and fear.

These games and fun times lifted the PROS' community spirits. "Music in the Morning" was a play on "Name that Tune." A different client was the DJ in the morning and would play a list of chosen songs in an attempt to stump their peers. Different genres of music were selected; the most difficult was show tunes as far as I am concerned.

"Re-Name the Staff Members" was a fun guessing game that all could participate in. Clients were given the opportunity to assign a new nickname to a staff member anonymously through our suggestion jar. A winning nickname was chosen by who could accurately guess which staff it belonged to and how funny it was. This was done for each of the staff weekly by vote over breakfast. This nickname then replaced the staff's name on the wall in reception. These folks got very creative!

With the ability to have more staff return fast approaching, and more classes being offered in-person and online, the saying that has been on our minds most has been, "Tough Times Don't Last but a Great Team Does." Thank you to the staff and clients at PROS for keeping the light, the love and most importantly the humor in PROS. The fun is where the growth happens.



NYAPRS' 2020 Rehabilitation and Recovery Academy Goes Virtual!

NYAPRS will hold its 11th annual Rehabilitation and Recovery Academy virtually this year. The theme is "Reimagining Recovery and Rehabilitation Services."

NYAPRS hosts this annual opportunity for community rehabilitation providers to come together to discuss the state of the field and share best practices. Although we can't meet in person this year, NYAPRS will continue to offer an outstanding program, and we look forward to hearing your stories of inspiration and innovation.

The Academy provides Continuing Education Units for professionals who require them. For 2020, we hope that even more PROS staff will be able to participate than usual because there will be no travel expenses involved.

The Academy will take place across three days, November 12, 13, and 18. Each day will feature powerful themes to include Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Skills Building, Systemic Racism and Health Inequity, and Resilience. NYAPRS has experience offering top notch virtual conferences, including opportunities for breaks and social experiences, so OMH is confident that the experience will be well worth investing the time.

Watch your inbox for forthcoming registration information or check <https://www.nyaprs.org>.



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Telemental Health Services

This year, through temporary flexibility provided under an Executive Order, all PROS providers rapidly learned how useful telehealth can be to engage participants. In order to prepare to continue offering telemental health services on a **permanent** basis, PROS With Clinic Treatment programs should review the **Streamlined Process to Permanently Add Telemental Health as an Optional or Additional Service** on their license.

In July 2020, OMH streamlined the process of applying to permanently offer telehealth; details can be viewed [here](#). OMH updated the November 2019 Telemental Health Services Guidance document to remove the requirement of a notary signature on the Telemental Health Attestation - Appendix 1, and to make the attestation form itself fillable. These documents can be found on the [OMH Telemental Health Services webpage](#).

An overview of the evolution of telemental health in PROS can be viewed on the [OMH Telemental Health Services webpage](#). At this time, OMH is reviewing possible options to make permanent some of the expanded flexibility used during the pandemic. Stay tuned for further developments.



Resources



The Center for Rehabilitation & Recovery (CRR), though the Coalition for Behavioral Health, provides training and technical assistance to PROS programs. Examples of upcoming webinars include the topics of PROS group curriculum planning and remote supervision. For more information, go to: <https://www.coalitionny.org/updates>

The CRR training team continues to host a weekly PROS Zoom meeting to co-create a space for mutual aid among PROS programs navigating blended service provisions during the pandemic. If you would like to join us, please email Natalie Lleras, Associate Director of Training and CRR, at nlleras@coalitionny.org. The CRR team has also recently partnered with NYC PROS programs, Diane Goldberg PROS, Zucker Hillside, and SPOP (Service Program for Older People), to address trauma-responsive interventions and team resilience and self-care.

PROS TIP SHEET: Accessing OMH Databases - The Bureau has recently revised this informative tip sheet that can help newer staff understand how to interface with the multiple platforms OMH providers use - CAIRS, NYESS, PSYKES, NIMRS and MHPD. A copy of this tip sheet was attached to the original email that sent this newsletter; if you would like to request a copy please email laura.davis@omh.ny.gov.

ePACES Self-Help Guide Available - All PROS Directors and their billing staff should have [this](#) handy for reference about Medicaid enrollment issues

PROS Newsletter Archive: PROS Newsletter began in Fall 2016. To check previous editions, you can view the entire PROS Newsletter collection on the NYAPRS Clearinghouse: <http://pros.nyaprs.org/resources>.



Office of
Mental Health

This newsletter is written by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and Care Coordination at the New York State Office of Mental Health.

Please distribute to all PROS staff.