

Rally Cheers Addiction Recovery, Seeks Freedom from Stigma

SEPTEMBER 13, 2016 by [ROSE HOBAN](#) in [CHRONIC DISEASE](#), [FEATURED](#), [MENTAL HEALTH](#), [SUBSTANCE USE](#) with [0 COMMENTS](#)

The annual event brought together advocates and former addicts, looking for increased visibility for successful recovery from substance use.

By Rose Hoban

The crowd assembled in downtown Raleigh on Saturday was rowdy, cheering and whistling for each person on the stage. But the occasion was not the Hopscotch music festival, which was a couple of blocks south, it was the 5th annual Rally for Recovery, a gathering to celebrate the many ways that people stay free of drugs and alcohol.



Marchers from the Recovery Rally walk past the Old Statehouse in Raleigh on Saturday. Photo credit: Rose Hoban

About 200 people gathered on the mall across from the General Assembly building to hear speakers, register to vote, learn about services, and even cheer on a parallel rally taking place in the United Kingdom.

[Looking for a Recovery Month event in your town? Click here.](#) “We’re getting together to acknowledge and recognize the support of the community businesses who have given people second chances, public officials who have fought to change policy that discriminates and creates barriers for people in recovery finding employment,” said Chris Budnick, who heads [Healing Transitions, a drug and alcohol treatment program in Raleigh](#). “We’re here to show that not only does recovery benefit individuals, but it changes families, neighborhoods and communities.”

Not anonymous

Groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous have been around for more than 70 years, and in those groups the paradigm for getting sober is to attend meetings and keep addiction mostly a secret.

But what makes the recovery movement different is an embrace of “whatever works” for someone to achieve sobriety: it could be AA or it could be talk therapy or it could be [medication-assisted treatment](#) with buprenorphine. And

members of the recovery movement are advocating for more access to an array of treatments in order to meet the needs of each person who wants to recover.



James Griffin, from High Point, was at his first Rally for Recovery. Photo credit: Rose Hoban

“[Recovery] is multidimensional... there’s so much to recovery” said Courtney Cantrell, who, until recently, was the head of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services for the Department of Health and Human Services. “It’s knowing that people can choose fuller lives and we can wrap supports around them to help them get to the lives they want to be living.”

And, unlike in AA, recovery advocates are anything but anonymous: Saturday’s event took place across the street from the General Assembly building and featured a lively line-up of speakers who pumped up the crowd.

At times, passing motorists would honk, which roused more cheering.



Marchers from Saturday’s Rally for Recovery walk past the Old Statehouse on Hillsborough Street. About 200 people marched a mile-long route that wound through downtown. Photo credit: Rose Hoban

Then the assembly took a mile-long walk holding large signs reading “I am a person in recovery” and “Addiction is not a crime” snaking around downtown Raleigh, crossing Fayetteville Street, and circling the Old Statehouse.

“I am walking to make a change to let people know that you can recover and we vote and buy homes and can be happily married,” said Stacy Englert, who was walking with her husband of 14 years, Michael.

Both are in recovery.

Advocating for acceptance

One honoree at Saturday’s event was Wake County Commissioner Jessica Holmes, who advocated for eliminating the checkbox question about prior criminal convictions on job applications for Wake County positions.

“I know what it feels like to live in a household where someone you love, someone you look up to struggles with substance abuse,” she said, her voice cracking.

“As an elected official it’s my responsibility to make sure that a mechanism is put in place so that you can be successful,” Holmes told the crowd “More than that, once you kick that habit, once you’ve overcome that struggle, you deserve, you are worthy of a second chance.”



Dot Turton, from the British organization Faces and Voices of Recovery held up her phone so the crowd could exchange greetings with people in Liverpool which was holding a the UK National Recovery Walk at the same time. She said the recovery movement in her country could learn a lot from the efforts in the “good old U S of A.” Photo credit: Rose Hoban

Budnick noted that many people who attempt recovery have criminal records because of prior involvement with drugs or alcohol, everything from convictions for driving under the influence and public intoxication to forging checks and robbery. Those records often keep people from getting jobs, renting apartments, or establishing credit, which is why Recovery Communities is pushing for the state to also [“ban the box.”](#)

“For a lot of folks, getting into recovery is half the battle; finding a life once in recovery is the other half of it,” Budnick said. “They think ‘I can finally get over this hump,’ and then they can’t even get a job working fast food.”

“We understand how difficult it is for people in recovery to get back on their feet. It’s hard to find a place to live and meaningful employment,” George York, president of real estate management company York Properties said to applause. “We do our best to be an employer who works with individuals who truly want to embrace their recovery.”

Then York continued: “My sobriety date was January 5, 2001.”

The crowd went wild.