

## WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program

### Community Advisory Board Interview

Keith Murphy is a member of the Community Advisory Board for the [WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program](#), offering valuable guidance, expertise, and support to our WinR interns and fellows.



**Q. To start, please tell us about Recovery House and describe your roles there.**

A. The [Rutgers University Recovery House](#), which started in 1988 as one of the first collegiate recovery residences in the country, supports Rutgers students in recovery from severe substance use disorder. We look to have students who are at least 90 days into abstinence-based recovery for admission.

Students may also take medications to help assist them in their recovery if that is their pathway; however, we expect students to not engage in substances outside of a doctor's care while at Recovery House. This is crucial aspect of the effectiveness of the model in providing a safe, sober space for students who may otherwise be hard-pressed to find such a space in a college environment.

There are many nuances to my role as a Senior Substance Abuse Counselor at Recovery House. I can be a coach, or a counselor, a mediator, etc., but my job primarily is to support students in their recovery and mental health journey while they work towards their degree. This often involves being a bridge between parents, students, teachers, as well as the broader administration. While the role requires juggling a lot of hats in a multidisciplinary space, my overarching role is to be positive role model and influence in the lives of these students in recovery.

**Q. What inspired you to pursue this type of work?**

A. As a person in recovery, I get great joy out of seeing people flourish in life as a result of resolving or working to resolve their addiction related issues. I give great credit to students, especially marginalized students that were here during the pandemic, who worked hard to explore their truths and change the dynamic around issues related to race and gender identity.

More than that, I didn't know help was available as an undergraduate student when I was struggling to make good choices around my own cannabis and substance use—so it's real honor to be able to come back to Rutgers, and work in and create systems for students who feel unseen and unheard.

**Q. What are the unique strengths of a CRP (Collegiate Recovery Program) especially from a social and restorative justice perspective?**

A. Great question. The strengths of the CRP are as follows:

1. Community and connectedness with other folks in recovery
2. Longevity of the program
3. Clinical support by highly trained staff
4. Material, financial, and housing support

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5. Administrative backing/support
6. National and regional recognition
7. Committed students
8. Early intervention resulting in improved outcomes
9. Protective factor of getting a college education

#### **Q. Recovery House is located on a college campus. What are the unique challenges of working within a larger educational institution?**

A. Another great question. Amongst some of the challenges I've witnessed, stigma surrounding young people in recovery is probably the greatest. This is deep-rooted within the institution, with the administration often pathologizing students in recovery or looking at recovery as simply the cessation of substance use. Stigma is also perpetuated by other students, and those in recovery often have legitimate concerns about being "outed" and/or feeling different. Another major ongoing challenge can be the larger bureaucracy of needing to promote the program, generate financial support, and constantly face the question of does the cost outweigh the benefit? Finally, given the nature of a college environment, there is a significant lack of broader community activities that support sober students.

#### **Q. How does your lived experience influence your work supporting others, particularly students?**

A. To be honest, sometimes having lived experience is great and other times it's a barrier. It can be great because I have firsthand knowledge of what it was like navigating recovery in an inhospitable system. At the same time, my experience is not their experience, yet I can fall into the trap of thinking I know all about them. Also, there is an age difference and my life experience in addiction and in recovery may not always be relatable, but it reminds to me to work harder to understand their experience and forge meaningful connections.

#### **Q. As a member of the WinR CAB, what would you like to see happen as a result of the WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Student Internship/Faculty Fellowship Program?**

A. I'm going to keep this part simple. I would like to see the research generated from WinR Addiction Advocacy Research Internship/Fellowship Program translate into usable data, dollars, and support for the most vulnerable and marginalized in society. I believe it is the position of the academy to work to functionally and immediately improve the lives of people. Often research doesn't make it out of someone's desk drawer and in front of the folk who have the most power and authority to make informed changes. Sadly, so much of our lives is wrapped in culture wars and is blind to what and who really matters.

*Keith Murphy, LPC, LCADC, is a Senior Substance Abuse Counselor at Rutgers University's Recovery House. In this role, he provides counseling for college students living with mental health and substance use challenges as they work towards their degree. Keith shared his wealth of experience, and his insights on the value of collegiate recovery programs as crucial early intervention in the journey that is recovery.*

*The interview was conducted by Tanya Lalwani.*

**Disclaimer:** The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the Center of Alcohol & Substance Use Studies.