PCHS

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CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

Amandeep Kaur CEO, PCHS

Reflecting on a Year of Collaboration, Resilience, and Community

As we approach the end of another remarkable year, I am filled with gratitude and pride for the incredible milestones we have achieved together. This year has been a testament to the power of collaboration, resilience, and our shared commitment to fostering a thriving and inclusive community.

On November 30th, we hosted our 11th Annual Friends of PCHS event at the Terry Miller Recreation Centre. This gathering brought together community members, volunteers, staff, and our Board to celebrate our collective achievements, report to the community, and engage in meaningful dialogue about the future of PCHS. Every year, this event exhibits PCHS's values: inclusion, excellence, accountability, and innovation, as well as community-driven solutions to advance our mission. Thank you to everyone who joined us in making this event a resounding success.

December was a month of meaningful engagements and celebrations. On December 12, the Circle of Care workshop, organized by the PCHS Addictions program at our new location—60 West Drive, Brampton—brought together families of individuals facing substance use challenges. This workshop fostered trust, improved communication, and enhanced cultural understanding, providing valuable tools to family members and friends seeking to support their loved ones. Such initiatives are at the heart of what we do, embracing the "Family as the Client" philosophy and creating pathways for better opportunities and stronger relationships within our community.

On December 13, 2024, our entire PCHS family gathered at Caledon's stunning Royal Ambassador venue to honour our employees. The day was filled with fun games, great food, and cherished moments that strengthened our bonds and celebrated the unwavering dedication of our staff. Your hard work and commitment do not go unnoticed, and I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your contributions.

The holiday season also brought opportunities to spread joy and unity. On December 22, the CNC Program and settlement team hosted their third annual holiday toy drive, welcoming 56 newcomer children and families. This event, filled with festive activities and gifts, exemplified the warmth and support that define our community spirit. Similarly, the PCHS Mental Health team's third annual Toys for Tots initiative brought smiles to countless children and families, reflecting our commitment to fostering joy and connection during the holiday season.

Reflecting on these accomplishments, I sincerely thank our dedicated staff, supportive partners, Board of Directors, and resilient community members. Together, we continue to break barriers, foster inclusivity, and create opportunities for all. Your support and trust in our mission inspire us to do more and reach further.

As we look ahead to 2025, let us continue to build on our strengths. Together, we can overcome challenges and achieve PCHS's Vision of healthy and thriving diverse communities.

With gratitude and best wishes for a joyous holiday season and a prosperous New Year!

Project Khushi - Winter Drive 2024

By Fariha Abdul Muqeet, Preventative Care Specialist, SHPP

The SHPP team at PCHS successfully organized the third annual Project Khushi holiday drive, a heartwarming initiative rooted in the essence of "Khushi," meaning joy in many South Asian languages. This year, the two-day event took place on Day 1 at Gore Meadows Community Centre and Day 2 at Malton Community Centre, bringing joy and support to over 180 registered families in our community.

Understanding the challenges families face during the holiday season, Project Khushi continues to serve as a beacon of hope and collective giving. The event featured thoughtfully organized stations to address immediate and diverse needs. Warm winter jackets, gloves, hats, and socks for kids and adults were distributed, alongside female sanitary products, essential hygiene kits and diapers. Children received toys, coloring packs and candies, creating a joyful atmosphere for all.

The success of Project Khushi highlights the dedication of the SHPP team, the generosity of volunteers, and the spirit of community engagement. Together, we celebrated not just the distribution of essential items but also the sense of unity and happiness shared by everyone involved.

Project Khushi remains a testament to the power of compassion and collective action, inspiring a stronger, more connected community each year.

Impact of Project Khushi

This holiday season, Project Khushi proudly served

207

clients

We are grateful for the opportunity to make a meaningful impact in our community during this special time of year.

Faces Behind Project Khushi

A Cozy Winter Evening of Creativity, Fun, and Learning at the Malton Youth Hub

By Simran Dhillon, Youth Worker

The Malton Youth Hub recently hosted a memorable winter evening filled with creativity, fun, and cultural exploration for newcomer youth. Designed to foster learning and connection, the event featured engaging hands-on activities and plenty of opportunities for socializing in a relaxed environment.

The evening kicked off with a hot chocolate station, where participants learned how to create their own personalized hot chocolate drinks. With various toppings like marshmallows, whipped cream, and sprinkles, the youth had a blast experimenting with different flavors and designs, while practicing practical skills like following recipes and measuring ingredients.

Next, everyone expressed their creativity at a cookie decorating station, where they used colorful icing and fun toppings to decorate cookies. This activity allowed the youth to explore their artistic side and develop patience and attention to detail, all while enjoying each other's company.

After all the fun, participants enjoyed a delicious Subway meal and gathered to watch a family-friendly movie. With popcorn, snacks, and drinks, everyone relaxed and bonded over the shared experience.

In addition to the fun activities, the event offered an opportunity to learn about winter holiday traditions from different cultures around the world. This cultural exploration encouraged cross-cultural understanding and helped build a sense of community among the participants.

The evening at Malton Youth Hub was the perfect mix of creativity, learning, and fun, offering the youth a chance to develop new skills, make lasting memories, and build friendships in a welcoming environment.

Bracelet Making Drop-In Activity

The Newcomer Youth team hosts a Bracelet Making Drop-In Activity every Friday at the Malton Youth Hub, providing a flexible and creative space for youth to unwind, connect, and express themselves. This all-day drop-in program allows participants to join at their convenience—whether during their lunch break, after school, or whenever they have free time.

Youth had the opportunity to craft unique bracelets using a variety of materials, all provided at no cost. The activity encourages creativity, attention to detail, and self-expression as participants experiment with colors, patterns, and textures to design personalized pieces. It's not just about making bracelets—it's about fostering a sense of community, as youth engage in conversations, share ideas, and build friendships.

These sessions offer a relaxing and therapeutic environment, helping youth de-stress while developing their artistic skills. By creating a welcoming and inclusive space, the program supports newcomer youth in feeling connected and valued as they navigate their new environment.

By Disha Mehta, Youth Worker, Newcomer Settlement Program

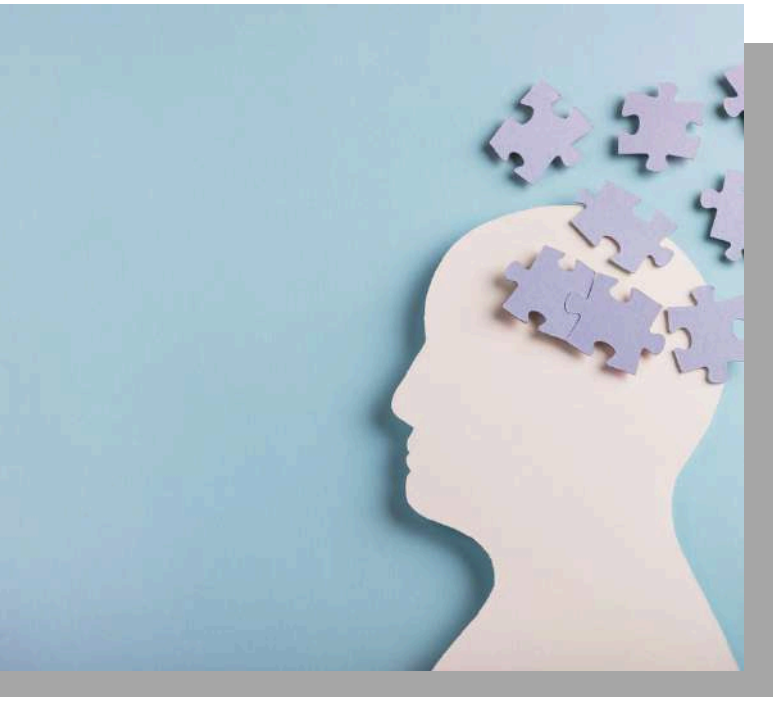
Create Your Own Mental Health Toolkit

By Deepinder Singh, Registered Practical Nurse, Sahara Mental Health Program

The holiday season can be a wonderful time filled with joy and celebration, but for many, it also comes with added stress, emotional strain, and challenges like loneliness or financial pressure. To help you navigate this season in a healthy way, we encourage you to create your own Holiday Mental Health Toolkit—a personalized set of strategies and tools to maintain your emotional well-being.

Why a Toolkit?

Having a toolkit empowers you to take proactive steps to manage stress and nurture your mental health. It's a collection of activities, practices, and resources tailored to your needs, giving you a plan when holiday pressures arise.



What to Include in your Toolkit?

1 Stress Management Tools:

- Practice mindfulness or meditation to stay grounded during overwhelming moments.
- Use breathing exercises to quickly calm your mind and body.
- Keep a journal to reflect on your thoughts and release pent-up stress.

2 Emotional Wellness Tools:

- Write a list of affirmations or things you are grateful for to shift your focus to the positive.
- Create a playlist of soothing music that brings you peace.
- Schedule time to connect with friends or loved ones who support your well-being.

3 Healthy Boundaries:

- Practice saying "no" when commitments become too overwhelming.
- Set clear limits for how much time and energy you will devote to social gatherings or holiday tasks.

4 Physical Wellness Strategies:

- Stay active with regular walks, yoga, or stretching to reduce stress and boost endorphins.
- Get enough sleep, even if your schedule feels packed. Prioritize rest to maintain your emotional resilience.
- Fuel your body with nourishing foods, while also enjoying holiday treats in moderation.

1. Crisis Resources:

5 Crisis Resources:

- Identify local or virtual mental health supports, like hotlines or community programs, in case you need extra help.
- Know when to reach out for professional support if feelings of stress, anxiety, or depression become too much to handle.

How to Get Started?

Take 15-20 minutes to sit down and write out what works best for you. Your toolkit does not have to be perfect—it just needs to reflect the strategies and resources that help you feel more in control and supported. Consider keeping it in a journal, your phone, or even as a note on your fridge as a visual reminder.

The holidays can be challenging, but with the right tools, you can make them a time of balance, connection, and self-care. This season, give yourself the gift of mental health and emotional well-being. You deserve it.

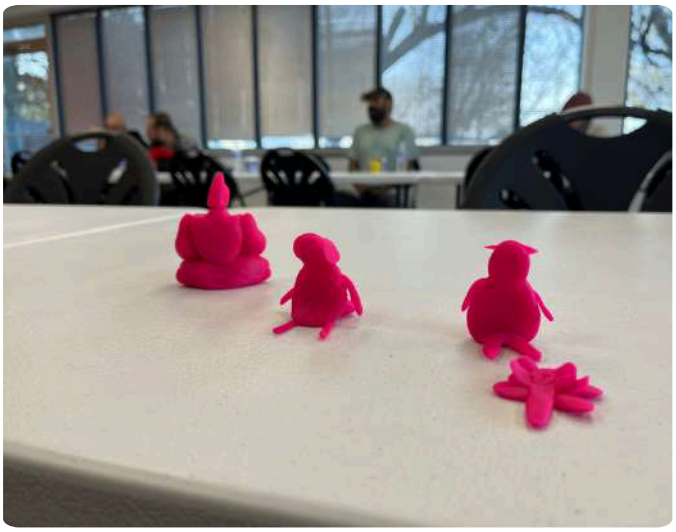
CIRCLE OF CARE

Building Bridges with Families of Addiction Clients

By Kawaljeet Bains, Addictions Case Manager

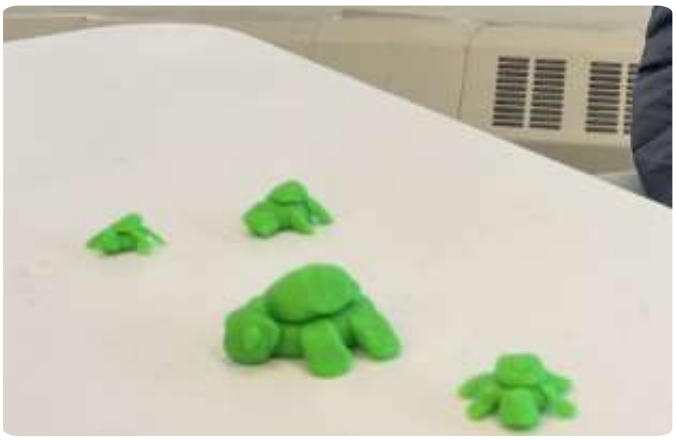
At 60 West Drive, Brampton, PCHS (Punjabi Community Health Services) hosted a transformative workshop, Circle of Care, to support families of addiction clients in fostering better communication and stronger relationships.

The session addressed unique challenges such as stigma, cultural expectations, and generational gaps that hinder emotional connections within families. Through open discussions and practical strategies like emotion validation, respectful boundaries, and compassionate communication, participants explored ways to build trust and empathy.



A creative clay activity added a moment of joy and nostalgia, reminding everyone that healing includes rediscovering lightness and connection. The workshop emphasized the importance of trust, understanding, and adapting cultural norms to strengthen family bonds.

Special thanks to all participants and the PCHS team for creating a space for growth and healing, paving the way for healthier, more resilient relationships.



World HIV/AIDS Day

By Navdeep Kaur, Community Health Ambassador, SHPP

HIV/AIDS Today

HIV continues to be a major global public health issue, having claimed an estimated 42.3 million lives to date. Transmission of the virus remains ongoing in all countries worldwide. By the end of 2023, an estimated 39.9 million people were living with HIV, with 65% of them residing in the WHO African Region. In that same year, approximately 630,000 people died from HIV-related causes, while an estimated 1.3 million people acquired HIV. (WHO, 2024)

What is HIV?

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the immune system, specifically the body's white blood cells. These cells play a key role in helping the body fight off infections and diseases. Over time, if left untreated, HIV destroys many these cells, weakening the immune system and making it harder for the body to fight off infections and other illnesses. **Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)** occurs at the most advanced stage of infection. (WHO, 2024)

Signs & Symptoms

HIV progresses through different stages, each with varying symptoms. In the early stage, known as acute HIV infection, symptoms may appear 2–4 weeks after exposure, often resembling flu-like symptoms:

- Fever
- Headache
- Rash
- Sore throat
- Swollen lymph nodes

HIV Screening

HIV can be tested two ways; one is a standard laboratory test, and the other is a rapid HIV testing (point of care & self-testing).

In Canada, HIV screening uses fourth-generation tests that detect both HIV antibodies and the p24 antigen. These tests can detect HIV as early as 15 to 20 days after exposure, with 95% of cases identified by 35 days. The window period can last up to 12 weeks. If a test is reactive, confirmatory testing is done to ensure an accurate diagnosis.

Rapid HIV test kits for point-of-care (POC) or self-testing use a finger prick and provide results in minutes. These tests detect only HIV antibodies (third generation) and have a longer window period than standard tests (fourth generation), which can last up to 12 weeks. Some people may test positive as early as 20 to 30 days after exposure. Reactive results are preliminary and require confirmation with standard lab testing.

If a test is negative and exposure was within the past 12 weeks, repeat testing is recommended. For more details, consult local public health guidelines. (Government of Canada, 2024)

Understanding Arthritis: A Growing Concern in Canada and Among South Asians

By Savita Saini, Preventative Care Specialist, SHPP

Arthritis, a condition characterized by inflammation of the joints, affects millions of people worldwide, with over 6 million Canadians living with this chronic disease. Arthritis can significantly impact quality of life, causing pain, stiffness, and reduced mobility. Among the various types of arthritis, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis are the most common, although conditions like gout and psoriatic arthritis also contribute to the burden.

In Canada, the prevalence of arthritis is rising, particularly as the population ages. Seniors, who make up a large portion of arthritis patients, often experience additional challenges managing the condition alongside other health concerns. For South Asians in Canada, the situation is particularly nuanced. This demographic shows higher rates of diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular conditions, which are often associated with an increased risk of developing arthritis. Cultural factors, dietary habits, and lack of awareness further compound the issue, making it crucial for tailored healthcare interventions.

Preventative care and management are vital in addressing arthritis effectively. Lifestyle modifications, such as maintaining a healthy weight, engaging in regular low-impact physical activity, and adopting a balanced diet rich in anti-inflammatory foods, can help reduce the risk of developing arthritis or manage symptoms for those already diagnosed. For South Asian communities, integrating traditional foods and practices with evidence-based approaches can be particularly effective.

Access to healthcare is another key component. In many cases, South Asian immigrants may face barriers such as language, cultural differences, or limited awareness of available resources. Community health organizations play a critical role in bridging these gaps by offering culturally sensitive programs, workshops, and support groups. These initiatives educate individuals on arthritis prevention, symptom management, and the importance of early diagnosis.

Treatment options for arthritis include medications, physical therapy, and in severe cases, surgical interventions. However, a holistic approach, combining medical care with emotional and community support, ensures better outcomes. Mental health support is also essential, as chronic pain from arthritis often leads to anxiety and depression.

Arthritis is more than just a physical condition; it impacts individuals, families, and communities. By promoting awareness, fostering early interventions, and addressing the unique needs of diverse populations such as South Asians in Canada, the burden of arthritis can be reduced, and the quality of life can be improved.

Understanding Substance Abuse Continuum in Client's Recovery and Relapse Prevention

By Anum Tahir, Addiction Case Manager

The Substance Abuse Continuum is a vital tool in the recovery and relapse prevention process, especially for individuals with substance use disorders (SUD). It helps clients understand their substance use behaviors, the progression of addiction, and how they can take responsibility for their recovery journey (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Recognizing where they are on the continuum fosters self-awareness and self-regulation, which are essential for long-term sobriety and relapse prevention.

The continuum outlines stages such as experimentation, occasional use, regular daily use, misuse, and substance use disorder (SUD). Understanding these stages enables clients to recognize their behaviors, identify risks, and make informed decisions about their recovery. This awareness allows clients to intervene before progressing further into addiction, empowering them to take control of their journey (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Psychoeducation plays a crucial role in recovery by helping clients understand the reasons behind their behaviors and the effects on their lives. By learning about the continuum, clients can reflect on their actions, recognize when they are at risk of progressing to the next stage, and practice self-regulation. The goal of recovery is not only abstinence but also the development of adaptive behaviors that support a healthier life.

The continuum also promotes client autonomy, encouraging individuals to define their relationship with substances and take charge of their recovery. This process helps clients move away from identifying solely as "addicts" and fosters intrinsic motivation to change their behavior (Baker, 2002). Counselors play a key role in helping clients navigate these stages, providing support, coping strategies, and addressing the underlying causes of substance use.

The Substance Abuse Continuum serves as a constant reminder during recovery, helping clients monitor their behavior and make timely adjustments to prevent relapse. It equips them to stay aware of warning signs such as cravings and social pressures, and to intervene before they return to problematic use. By promoting awareness, self-regulation, and proactive decision-making, the continuum supports clients in achieving long-term sobriety and healthier, self-directed lives.

Holidays Celebrations with our Seniors

By Meharleen Gill, Geriatrics Placement Student

At PCHS, we had the joy of celebrating the holidays with our beloved seniors in our support groups. These celebrations are a meaningful way to help alleviate isolation among our seniors and foster a strong sense of belonging.

The holiday festivities with our seniors' groups were an absolute blast! The Geriatrics team beautifully decorated the venue, creating a warm and festive atmosphere. Our seniors embraced the holiday spirit, wearing Santa hats and dressing in cheerful red and green. The event featured delicious snacks and lively holiday music that brought smiles to everyone's faces.

It was truly a heartwarming celebration, filled with laughter, joy, and togetherness!

Wrapping Up Another Successful Year of Giving: Annual CNC Holiday Toy Drive

By Harmandeep Bath, Newcomer Settlement Program

On December 22, the Care for Newcomer Children (CNC) Program and the settlement team hosted their third annual holiday toy drive. We welcomed both newcomer children and parents to join in a festive celebration and participate in holiday-themed activities and enjoy refreshments.

The event offered a variety of fun and creative holiday activities, including painting, writing letters to Santa, and gingerbread house making. Families gathered in a warm, welcoming environment, making cherished memories and enjoying the spirit of the season together.

As they were leaving, each child in attendance was handed a special gift. Every gift was comprised of an educational and developmentally appropriate toy. A total of 56 children, along with their families, attended the event. The toy drive provided a much-needed opportunity for families to connect and enjoy the holiday season, especially during a time when many are adjusting to life in a new country.

The settlement team was honored to host this special event and felt privileged to bring so many smiles to the faces of children in attendance. The success of the event reinforced the organization's commitment to supporting newcomer families and making the holidays brighter for those who may be far from home. With hearts full of gratitude, the settlement team looks forward to continuing its efforts to bring joy and community spirit to those in need!

Annual Employee Appreciation Day

On December 13, PCHS came together to celebrate our Annual Employee Appreciation Day, a special occasion to honor the dedication and hard work of our staff.

The day kicked off with a welcoming breakfast, setting the tone for a vibrant and interactive event. Our CEO shared inspiring remarks, expressing heartfelt gratitude for the team's efforts throughout the year. A delicious lunch followed, complemented by a series of fun activities and games that encouraged staff to mingle, collaborate, and form new connections.

This day was all about recognizing the contributions of our employees, boosting morale, and fostering a sense of unity. It was a celebration of teamwork and appreciation that reminded us all of the value each person brings to the PCHS family.

Our 2023-2024 Impact Report is Here!

Please click on the following image to view the report.

WELCOME

NEW STAFF

Simarjot Kaur
Youth Worker, Newcomer Settlement Program

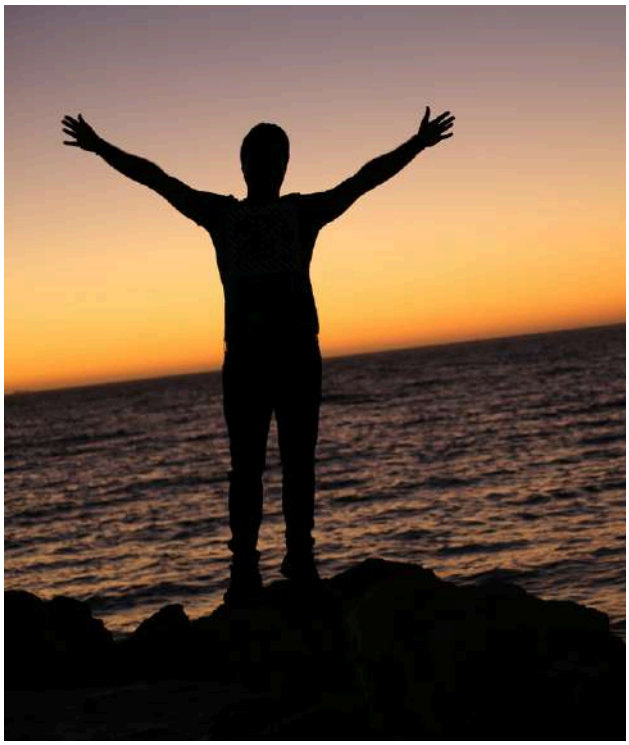
Michael Donia
Case Manager, Sahara Health Promotion and Prevention Program

Kamalpreet Kaur
Case Manager, Sahara Health Promotion and Prevention Program

Jasmin Tiwana
Case Manager, Sahara Addictions Program

Client Testimonial

Dear PCHS Addictions Team,



I wanted to take the time to acknowledge the incredible guidance and support I've received through the sessions. PCHS helped me recognize and take accountability for my dependency on alcohol and the dangerous behaviors—like DUIs—that I repeatedly found myself charged for. Before starting psychoeducation classes with Punjabi Community Health Services, I felt like a burned-out light bulb that had once shined too brightly. I kept desperately trying to switch myself back on, over and over again, only to realize I was living in darkness and couldn't fix it on my own.

Although I had tried sobriety once before and succeeded for many years, this time, with your guidance and encouragement, I was finally able to admit to myself that I am an alcoholic. I accepted that I am powerless against alcohol and will be for the rest of my life. I stopped lying to myself and started taking accountability for my actions.
The psychoeducation and supportive sessions helped me learn about my emotions and understand my inability to recognize them—something I now know was one of the main reasons I turned to alcohol.

I have been working with PCHS for over six months now. Initially, I was referred to the program by my lawyer, as I needed a letter of completion following my third DUI charge in six years. Through substance abuse counseling, I began to see the connection between my charges and my maladaptive behaviors. With PCHS's encouragement, I even started attending AA meetings, where I found a sponsor and a supportive group of people who have become my daily support system. Their help has been crucial in managing my urges and cravings.

My lawyer even mentioned that he was shocked—and impressed—by the significant turnaround I have made, not only in my actions but also in my way of thinking and speaking about recovery and alcohol use.

Client Testimonial

I am proud to say that I am three months sober and counting. The supportive counseling sessions with PCHS have equipped me with the tools and self-awareness to recognize when I need help. If it were not for PCHS teaching me the why behind my drinking and helping me understand how behaviors are formed—whether maladaptive or functional—I would have continued in the destructive cycle of DUIs. PCHS created a non-judgmental and empowering environment where I never felt forced to quit. It wasn't until months into the sessions that I chose to do so—and that choice was mine alone.

Before starting these sessions, I used to make fun of people who received sobriety chips. Now, getting mine is the highlight of my month. I attend daily AA meetings, and these sessions have even reconnected me with my uncle and my family, whom I had lost touch with over the years.

Thank you, PCHS Addictions Team, for guiding me on my lifelong journey toward sobriety—one day at a time. As they say, anyone can handle the burdens of today.

Kind regards,
S M

22ND ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY GALA

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