

RECOVERY ROAD

WOOD
MARCHANT '84
ON SUBSTANCE
ABUSE
RECOVERY
AND HELPING
COLLEGE
STUDENTS
OVERCOME
THEIR
ADDICTIONS



Photo credit: Reese Moore

Wood Marchant's '84 life has come full-circle. The healing that brought him out of pain is now his catalyst for helping others.

Wood recently became director of the new Collegiate Recovery Program at the College of Charleston. The program, which launched in the fall semester of 2016, is specifically for students at the College who are recovering from addiction. Supported and sanctioned by the College, this is the first collegiate recovery program, or CRP, of its kind in South Carolina.

Wood spent most of the past decade working at drug and alcohol treatment centers, where he saw varying trends of substance use. "I didn't know much about CRPs but knew people were getting sober at younger ages," he says. "The drug and alcohol combination helped folks hit their 'rock bottom' quicker."

Although Wood's career path led him to this point, it was his own recovery that brought him to the field of social work.

In college, Wood was like most of his friends: engaged in academics, extracurriculars, and substance use. Unlike most of his friends, he didn't stop getting drunk and high after college.

"I knew for about eight to 10 years that I had an issue (with addiction)," he says.

Often recovery is depicted as someone hitting rock bottom in a dramatic fashion and waking up the

next morning to make the decision to begin recovery. Wood says his progression was more gradual. It was while he was in advertising school in Atlanta that he realized he couldn't do it anymore. "I wasn't able to be as bright; I couldn't find the words that I needed to be a copywriter in this competitive advertising field. I realized the drugs and alcohol were holding me back."

At first he tried to get sober on his own, but he soon realized that quitting one substance would lead him to use more of another. "After working in the field of addiction and treatment for years, I realize now it's a brain disease; it's a mental illness," he says. "Your focus is on what you need to feel comfortable in your own skin, and the drugs and alcohol become part of your survival."

Wood decided to quit smoking pot and drinking alcohol altogether with the help of a therapist and a daily recovery program.

Not long after Wood became sober, he began teaching at Charleston Day School, where he taught several future EHS students, including Margaret von Werssowetz Waters '06 and Frances deSaussure Murray '06, who both now work at Episcopal, and students as young as Caroline Hagood '12. The only thing harder than teaching seventh and eighth grade students was getting sober, he jokes.

Wood quickly transitioned from teacher to student again when he went to the University of South Carolina for a master's degree in social work. He wanted to continue working in an educational setting after he graduated, but instead found himself working at an HIV clinic at the Medical University of South Carolina. "I knew

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nothing about HIV, but I knew that was an underserved and growing population in the rural South," he says.

After five years there, Wood continued to feel a call to do more specific drug and alcohol treatment. He began a private practice before becoming the lead inpatient counselor for the Charleston Center, the county's treatment center. "It was a fantastic job. I learned how to meet people where they were. You see that not every treatment style works for every patient," he says.

He also learned therapeutic techniques at the center that he uses today at the CRP, including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), motivational interviewing, and motivational enhancement therapy.

Recovery continues to be part of his daily life. "I can't tell you the blessings that being in recovery have brought," he marvels. Actually, he can.

MAYBE SHARING A LITTLE BIT OF MY STORY WILL ALLOW OTHERS TO COME FORWARD.

In 2001, a father of one of his students passed away. The funeral was at St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Charleston. "He was successful, had a beautiful family, a wonderful life. But hearing how ready he was to go where he knew he was going after he passed — he was ready to be with the Lord. It offered me something I didn't know I was missing." What Wood found that day at the church was another step in his recovery process. "He (the deceased man) found peace at that church, and that's something I knew I needed to look for," he says.

After attending St. Michael's for a few months, Wood found something else: his wife, a local physician. The two have been married for 13 years and now have 10-year-old twins. "I'm a soccer dad," he quips.

The Medical University of South Carolina has an established outpatient treatment program called the Center for Drug and Alcohol Programs, where Wood moved on to become a clinical instructor. He saw patients for more than six hours each day. "We helped them see the choices they were making and tried to help them make better decisions as it related to their substance use disorder."

One of the patients whom Wood met at MUSC was Isaac W. He became sober when he was 19 years old. "I remember what it felt like to think there was no way it was possible to get sober before being legally allowed to drink," Isaac says. "I've had to take my recovery on a different kind of path." That path was going to an inpatient treatment program in Atlanta, and then entering the program at MUSC. Isaac was not a patient of Wood's, but his friend was. Three years later, the two remain friends and roommates — and sober.

Because Isaac was kicked out of high school and subsequently had an extensive criminal history, for a while he didn't think college was an option. Once Isaac began recovery, he decided it could be. "I applied and I got denied six semesters in a row," he says. "I didn't disclose my recovery to the college."

Isaac's chance came soon after his last rejection letter. "A friend of mine had just moved to town. He had been sober seven or eight years at the time, and was coming from a collegiate recovery program in Georgia." Isaac had never heard of a CRP, which came

as little surprise given that they exist at fewer than 10 percent of four-year colleges in the U.S. His friend told him how students in recovery had the opportunity to have the same college experience, but in an environment surrounded by others in recovery at the same time. Inspired, Isaac applied to nearly a dozen schools. College of Charleston was the only one that didn't have a collegiate recovery program at the time. The same friend mentioned that he and some others were trying to get one started there. "I said to him, 'get me in that meeting.'"

Isaac, his friend, and two others held a meeting with the dean of students at College of Charleston. "They were confused why four people that weren't even students at the college were coming to them, trying to start something there," he says. It was in this meeting that Isaac was able to disclose his recovery to the dean. Two weeks later, he was accepted.

Now a sophomore at 23 years old, Isaac has been with the College of Charleston's CRP since its inception. Isaac and his cohorts were told that if they raised enough money, they would be able to hire a director. The number, Isaac said, seemed unattainable. He estimated it would take years to raise the full amount. To his surprise — and arguably everyone else's — they did it in six months.

"We found that in the community, people had been looking for something like this," Isaac says.

The program was built for students, by students. Isaac was one of the students on the panel interviewing potential directors.

Wood continues to keep in touch with several EHS classmates who live near him in the Charleston area. "I love keeping up with my classmates and alumni on Facebook," he says.

Another way many alumni keep in touch is by attending class reunions. Wood acknowledges that Reunion Weekend can be difficult for someone who is sober. He admittedly hasn't been to a reunion in several years. "That's a tough weekend for a sober guy."

In the past few years, however, Episcopal has begun to offer spaces and times for recovery meetings during Reunion Weekend. Wood says now that he knows the School provides that support for recovering individuals, he may soon return for his next reunion.

Meanwhile, Wood had kept in touch with Isaac and his friend, and heard they were developing the CRP. "I was watching this program being put together from afar, thinking that would be the neatest job I could ever have: going back to my alma mater and helping those who were struggling," he says.

After rounds of interviews, he was named the program's director in November, just months after its official launch. He intends to take the program in a direction of service and giving to the greater Charleston

community. "It's not the norm to be sober in college," he says. The main challenge for students is what to do on the weekends. While their peers may attend parties or social events involving alcohol, Wood holds recovery meetings on or near campus. Soon, he will start a community service initiative.

One of the principals of any recovery program is that in order to keep what you have you have to give it away. "By sharing his own story in a professional capacity, he shows that staying sober isn't difficult as long as you're keeping

up with the work. You can have a beautiful life," Isaac says of Wood. "He has this wonderful family... he's a role model to look up to."

Wood hopes that being open with his addiction and recovery will help others. "I've often wondered if and how many of my former classmates and friends at Episcopal have found recovery themselves, or needed to," he says. "Maybe sharing a little bit of my story will allow others to come forward."

SIGNS OF ALCOHOL DEPENDENCE AND ABUSE (FROM NIH):

CRAVING – A strong need, or urge, to drink. | **LOSS OF CONTROL** – Not being able to stop drinking once drinking has begun. | **PHYSICAL DEPENDENCE** – Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety after stopping drinking. | **TOLERANCE** – The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to feel the same effect.

20%



About 20 percent of college students show signs of alcohol dependence and abuse.

18
MILLION



Approximately 18 million people in the U.S. suffer from alcohol abuse or dependence.

4X

Individuals with alcohol use disorders (AUDs) who enter treatment are four times more likely to stop drinking. But less than one quarter of those with AUDs actually receives treatment or participates in mutual or self-help groups.

Excessive and/or chronic alcohol use may result in medical conditions such as liver and heart disease, pancreatitis, short and/or long-term harm to the brain, and esophageal and liver cancer.



Alcohol is the substance of choice among adolescents and is used by far more young people than tobacco or marijuana; early alcohol use is associated with future alcohol dependence.

