

The Steam Podcast - Episode Three - Transcript

Theme Song

Gather around, the kettle's steaming. Come on in, it's warm inside. Informing, hearts and minds.
Insighting, positivity. Including, us all.

Intro

A CAFE community of people on the journey of recovery, cultivating compassion and encouraging growth, inviting listeners to embark on a voyage of discovery as together we explore the many paths to recovery. All aboard, full steam ahead.

Land Acknowledgement

The steam team acknowledges that we are living, working and recording on the unceded ancestral traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations, now commonly known as Vancouver. The Steam Team is committed to reframing our responsibilities to land and community and walking the road of reconciliation together.

Interview

Hello there, hi my name's Nigel, welcome to the Steam Team podcast. And today we have a very special guest with us, Damian Murphy, from the safety confines of the Recovery Café in Vancouver. And this is going to be part of our monthly series to interview topical and relevant people. And Damian is no doubt one of the ground force movement people who have brought this Recovery Café to where it's at today. And I'm honoured to have him with me.

Damian

Thanks Nigel.

Nigel

You're welcome buddy. I just wanted to say on a personal note, I've been here for about a year and I've seen you grow and manifest this really beautiful energy that has given this entire organization an identity. And if I was going to say one word, what that identity is, it's dignity. What you've given this group of us who are in Recovery some dignity. So, I thank you for that sir, before we even get going.

Damian

Well thank you for your kind words Nigel. I'm glad this isn't on video, you'd see me blushing. Yeah.

Nigel

So why don't we just start with how you got here. What inspired you, what in your past triggered you to follow this path of helping others?

Damian

Well that's a long story. If we're talking about the Recovery Café, I've been with The Kettle now for about 15 years, 10 years as a manager, and it was in 2019, so about five years ago now, when The Kettle was first exploring the idea of bringing the Recovery Café to Vancouver. At the time I was managing one of our supportive housing sites, *The Kettle on Burrard*, which is a 139 unit apartment building for folks who were previously experiencing homelessness. And I heard about this new program that the Kettle was considering taking on here in Vancouver. And I did a bit of research, discovered a document that Street to Home had put together. Street to Home is the primary funder for the Café at the moment. And they'd done quite a comprehensive business case on why the Recovery Café model might be needed in Vancouver as part of the continuum of Recovery services, and it looked really appealing to me.

Nigel

Right, and you jumped at it and you said, I can do this. I can man this ship.

Damian

I'm a pretty confident guy, yeah. I think it was the model appealed to me enough that it grabbed my interest right away.

Nigel

Right, and it's a multi-discipline, it's a very organic model that I feel, right? It's got very different elements that, like you say, and you've identified, it's serving a different need in this community, which is quite unique and original, right? So, take us back to a couple years ago when funding's in place, the arguments have been made, the selection committee has happened, now you're starting to go, what happened there?

Damian

I mean, the model itself, we are part of a network of Recovery cafes. The model itself started in Seattle. So, when I was hired on as manager, the first almost six months before we even had a physical location was to go through extensive training with the network. It's kind of a deep dive into the philosophy of the Café, the different parts of the Café, the guiding principles, the core commitments, how they all fit together, as well as, you know, operational parts of the model. Because every Café is run the same way, for the same reason. And if you travel to any Café in the network, you'll find something very similar to what you find here in Vancouver's Recovery Café. Although I like to think we're one of the most beautiful Cafés.

Nigel

No question. No argument there. So, when you say network, Damian, you're talking about American?

Damian

That's right. It started in Seattle, the first one. And when we joined a few years ago in 2019, there were 29 Cafés in the network. The Seattle is, for lack of a better word, the headquarters. They had started expanding and replicating the model in other communities in the States in about 2015, roughly, even though they've been around for 20 years. But in 2015, they started expanding the model. So, yeah, we were number 29 and we were the first and still are the only Recovery Café in the network in Canada. It's since grown to 66 cafes today in 2024, but we're still the first and only one in Canada. We're hopeful that will change in the near future. So that was interesting. During the training, we met, it was all online through Zoom, we met a bunch of other great folks from all over the U.S. And yeah, we all took the training together. Yeah. Some of the accents were a little challenging to get ahold of. Texas, Illinois, some of those Chicago accents are a little challenging. Yeah, all over the place.

Nigel

But OK, and just to be clear, though, but there's no fiduciary responsibility. We're funded in a different funding stream.

Damian

We did receive some seed funding from the network originally for the first two years.

Nigel

I mean, not that it's, I'm just wondering how those like and the general philosophy is similar, but it must be there must be some differences in.

Damian

Yeah, each Café is responsible for their own core funding. But the network does provide some seed funding to get people up and running. You know, we're very fortunate that we had the support of Street to Home Foundation and the 65 Powell Foundation who own this building who are invested in the model as well. We're very fortunate. But in the States, a lot of the smaller communities that are starting up cafes are very small operations with maybe just a few people. So, yeah, they're learning everything from the ground up. Fundraising, board of directors, all of the structural pieces that you need to start up a nonprofit. We're fortunate that here we're part of The Kettle Society, an

existing nonprofit with almost 50 years of experience providing services in Vancouver. So, it gave us a bit of an advantage.

Nigel

Yeah. Right. That's a really important piece here, too. It's really in a sense, it's an extension of The Kettle Society philosophy.

Damian

Yeah, we're part of the Community Services Department in The Kettle. We're like a program of the Community Services Department. But the model itself aligns completely with the values, the mission, the purpose of The Kettle, which is why leadership at The Kettle decided to go ahead with taking it on.

Nigel

Yeah. So, can you talk to some of the programs that you're most proud of here? Because I know I've been involved in a few choir, writing, the Circles, of course, you know, art, art therapy. But maybe you could just talk a little bit to what you're most proud of and what some of the challenges therein in those programming bits.

Damian

Yeah, you mentioned the Recovery Circles, and that's really the heart of the Café model. All members are expected to attend a Recovery Circle once a week for one hour and share with other individuals what's going on with their Recovery. In fact, that's one of the only mandatory parts of this program. So, it's not like a drop-in center where people can just show up whenever they need something, some service, and we're here to provide a service where, you know, we're asking for a commitment from folks, a commitment to themselves, to their Recovery, and to the Café. So, I'm quite proud. Looking back, it was only a year and a half ago, or two years ago, when we opened the pop-up location. We only had a handful of members and we had one Circle running. Today, you know, we've got almost 100 active members and we have 12 Circles running throughout the week. So, I'm quite proud of that. And having been with the program since the beginning, I've seen some of the progress that people have made and the development of people as they've attended Circle over that time. We have Circles running now. The original Circle, Tuesday afternoon Circle, still runs today. And I'm very proud of the fact that it's now run by one of our members and it's not facilitated by staff anymore. So, we got to a place where members in the Circle have reached a kind of level of stability and confidence where they can take on the facilitation of the Circle because at first, they were all facilitated by staff. And, you know, that's one of our core commitments at the Recovery Café is to raise up member leaders. So, when I see members running Circles, when I see members running programs like this podcast... This was an idea of a member... I believe it was your idea way back in August of 2023, it sounded like a good idea. And I'm all for promoting and helping to facilitate good ideas. And here we are just a few months later on episode three of a brand-new podcast that's...

Nigel

Three of three thousand.

Damian

Yeah. Member led and member driven. And that's a great source of pride for me too, for sure.

Nigel

I just want to step back a little bit about the member led and the accountability quotient in that, which I found very helpful and, how it bonded the community and how it does, where I've been a very different model. So there's podcasts, there's writing, there's choir, there's the Circles, which are now growing exponentially... We do shows, we go to theatre shows and plays and we do trips. I mean... Who else is doing this kind of stuff? Here's what I also wanted to ask you too. Like the requirement to become a member, because this is a membership, right? There's a protocol like you said.

Damian

Yeah. It's free. But there is expectations.

Nigel

But there is expectations and that's really the only one, really.

Damian

The other expectation is that members will contribute to life in the Café. Right. So, we have our... What we call our contribution board, white board. It's a chore board. We ask that all members, when they come, they sign up to do a task to help us. There's only a couple of us permanent staff here and that's built into the model. This is a space for the members, so there's an expectation that members will help run the place with operations as well. So, we have a list of different tasks that people can help us with every day and the members are expected to sign up and do something every day, whether it's taking out the garbage, doing the recycling, helping with the coffee, food service...

Nigel

Dishes.

Damian

Dishes.

Nigel

Because we have food.

Damian

We generate a lot of dishes.

Nigel

We have a kitchen right next door that is feeding us every day. That's the other thing that's just incredible about...

Damian

And you mentioned accountability. That's a big piece of it and it's a big piece of Recovery too, right? Right. When you become part of a community, especially a recovery-oriented community, there is an expectation of accountability. And taking care of this space, keeping it as beautiful today as it was when it first opened, is a testament to the dedication of the members to the space. This is your space.

Nigel

And you know, an extension of that, I've never felt that I couldn't invite a friend here as a guest to participate, to take care of the karaoke, the open mics and stuff like that, which has been a really huge transition from recently going through some tough times and getting through to the other side and having this community here. And in fact, just having a conversation earlier with one of the members here who were talking about doing a program and then having someone to come back to after her program was three months finished, and then she has somewhere to come back, stable, committed, accountable place, you know?

Damian

Yeah, and that's part of where we fit into the continuum of Recovery services here in Vancouver and why we fit in here. You know, we're not a clinical model, we're not doing counselling, we welcome many pathways to Recovery, but we're something a little bit different. So, when someone who's facing profound addiction, when they first decide to get into Recovery, they're going to probably have to go through medically supervised withdrawal, for example. So that's got to be done by doctors and nurses in like a Detox facility, so Coastal Health's Detox facility here in Vancouver. That's only the first step, right? And that can be seven days, 15 days, maybe longer in some circumstances, but it's pretty short term, that medically supervised part. But then what happens after that? You've got five days of being sober and you leave that facility. And where do you go? Often has been the case where people go back into community, whatever community they were a part of before, and unfortunately, yeah, it can be a trap and it can be, you know, relapse is prevalent. We know because of the circumstances where people are living and everything that's

going on in their lives at the time. So there are other programs like the Daytox program, which is kind of a natural kind of next step after Detox is Daytox. That's how we kind of have been running things in Vancouver. But again, with Daytox, it can be a time limited. It's still a bit of a clinical model. It does great work and it's fantastic, gives that extra support for people who need it as they're reintegrating into community. But it's also time limited as well. What we're offering is ongoing community-based support for people in Recovery. So, we have a drug and alcohol-free space. Everything we do is Recovery oriented here. And we have the Circles, which are more of a kind of peer support kind of situation, where people can still continue working on their Recovery doesn't go away overnight. It takes time to reach that level of stability before people can identify what their next steps and their goals are and then be achieving those goals. A lot of supports needed along the way. And you know what? A lot of love is needed along the way.

Nigel

And I think patience.

Damian

Yeah. When you look at the Recovery Café model, at the heart of it, if you Google Killian Noe, that's N.O.E., who was the founder of Recovery CAFE at the heart of why she started this is her belief, and I share it, that every single individual is a person who is worthy of giving and receiving love. So, we're starting from a place of love with this model and care and compassion. And, you know, so often in our society that we live in, sometimes that's missing. You know, these days society seems to be, you know, uncaring in many ways or turning a blind eye to the suffering of others and folks who are struggling with addiction often lose that sense of love.

Nigel

And they're usually the ones first left out. Exactly. And not asked to participate. What you just said about giving is critical to this. It's like as humans, I absolutely believe that that we are supposed to give and take.

Damian

That's right.

Nigel

It's a natural order of expansion and contraction, you know, a universal thing.

Damian

And that's our number one principle here. And that's what happens in ourselves and in others. And, you know, for folks struggling with addiction, sometimes self-love is the first thing that goes away. There's a lot of shame, a lot of guilt associated with addiction. So, people forget to love themselves.

Nigel

And the other thing, I just have to mention this because so many of us come from different backgrounds. There's no age discrimination. There's no, you know, we talk about the DOC, which is an acronym for drug of choice, just for the audience members who may not know that. But there's such a variance of challenges here. And we all come together in different levels of that, which I just think is, you know, again, a unique type of program. It's not prescriptive. It's not, you know, the outcomes are measured by, you know, well, the growth of the community and the ties that we're starting to build within the community, right, through the program.

Damian

And that's what happens in Circle. When you're sharing your struggles, your challenges, when you're sharing the good things that are happening, your successes, some gratitude. In the Circle, you get to know others on a very deep level and you get to be known by others on a very deep level. So, the Circle becomes almost like a little community within the bigger Café community. But the programs and activities are opportunities for people from various Circles to meet each other as well. Because you might not know as much about the person who's in a different Circle.

Nigel

Yeah, and share information about what's going on. I mean, how many times have people said, oh, yeah, bus passes here, transit here, you know, discounts on food over here. You know, there's this community of advice and help.

Damian

Yeah, yeah. In our parlance, we call it resource navigation. And sure, staff here, we're all trained. We're aware of a lot of resources around. But it's often folks that are accessing those resources that know them the best. And when you hit that example, it's perfect where members share with each other what's going on, the current resources or current things that are places where they can get the things that they need to help them along the way. It's great. I guess the other big part of the model is it's a little academic, but I would encourage listeners to do a bit of research about it is Recovery Capital. So, Recovery Capital is what we're all about building here and Recovery Capital, think of it as capital, capital like money, but Recovery Capital is sort of the it's the sum of the internal and external resources that are needed to achieve, in the first place, Recovery and then to maintain that Recovery in the long term going forward. And for folks who have lost everything...

Nigel

I'm going to ask you, I'm going to drill you down on this one, Damian. Can you give me a little example of that? The theoretical to the applicable?

Damian

Yeah, sure. So, folks who are struggling with addiction, they may have become disconnected from their communities or their families. That's the classic case of burning your bridges. Right. They may have to, you know, get their needs met with their addiction. They may have had to steal money or borrow money and not being able to pay it back. And yeah, this can lead to conflicts. It can lead to disconnection from communities and family and social or cultural capital is a part of Recovery Capital. And if you're a person who's going through this and when you go into Recovery, you want to reclaim those parts of your life that are gone or missing or that left. And for some, it's easier than others. Some may have a strong sense of cultural or social capital, like a family that's very supportive, and the family may take you back and help you get back on your feet. But for many people, that isn't the case. So, what we do here, a lot of what we do is rebuild that capital. Yeah, there's four parts to it. The Recovery Capital, the social and cultural capital, two of the biggest parts. We don't exist in isolation or we don't do well in isolation.

Nigel

Just curious then, how do you implant that renegotiation? I understand what you're saying because I went through the same thing. I just, you know, when you're going down that addiction hole, you're cutting loose, you're trying to get away from something. And it's probably... usually the people that love you the most. And to get back to that livability space where there's some communication and it's, I mean, I have seen that here. I've seen people who've made that transition back and working, getting back just jobs, you know, which is a huge thing. Obviously, obviously, going back to work, right.

Damian

It's a goal for a lot of our members. People want to be independent. They want to have an income. The Café provides that space for that to happen. It's a, I hope you'll find, I think you'll find it, an inviting place, a warm space. It's a safe space. It's drug and alcohol free. Because it's a membership model, everybody knows each other. We know everybody that comes through the door. And when new people come and join, they're welcomed immediately into the community, the Café community. So, it's a very comforting place in many ways. There's a lot of love here. Yeah, we do some practical workshops, you know, things like nonviolent communication and maybe some employment or housing workshops. But we also do a lot of social type workshops that help bring people together, like the choir, where once a week a group of people sing together or the writing group, or we have a chance to write together. And all of those activities are meant to foster that

sense of belonging, that sense of community, that sense of being part of something bigger than yourself.

Nigel

I look at it like cooperative healing. It's a collective cooperative. And the competition and the prescriptions, it's not here.

Damian

Yeah, and it's a very inclusive space. Everyone is welcome. Yes. Whatever stage in your Recovery, you're welcome to be in this space. Yeah. And I think you'll find that attitude reflected not only among the staff, but all the other members, volunteers that we have. It's that love. So, it is that love.

Nigel

It is that love. It's contagious. So, what are your hopes for the near future? Yeah. Next year or so?

Damian

I mean, the Café is ever-changing. There's people who come into the program, who've been in it for a while, like I said, who reach that kind of level of stability, achieve whatever goals they were working on, and they move on. I hope to continue seeing those kinds of successes among our membership. And so, you know, there's new people joining all the time. So, as sad as it is sometimes to say goodbye to someone, in many ways, it's also a success. Members, once you're a member here, you're always welcome to come back and, you know, members who've moved on do come back and visit, which is nice, and stay in touch. But we're still welcoming new members. This program's only officially 18 months old in this location, so we're still a growing program, and we're probably only at about half of our capacity right now. I think we could expand the number of Circles, especially now that we have more members leading Circles. I think we have three of our 12 Circles, so a quarter of them are now run by members. So, each time a staff person is freed up from running a Circle, we're able to start another Circle. I believe we have capacity for more Circles. Our goal was always in year three, which will be happening later this year in September. It's the start of year three. Our goal was to open on the weekends, and we're hearing that from members. We've heard that feedback. So, we're hoping to be open six days a week. Yeah. And that'll give us a chance to offer more Circles.

Nigel

I'm thinking these are going to pop up, too, don't you think? Like in Kelowna, Victoria. Is there a room for, you know, advocacy? Do you see that in the future?

Damian

Yeah. We get a lot of visitors, a lot of interest from other service providers, other nonprofits who've heard about this model, and they come to check it out. I kind of keep Friday open for my tours of folks that are curious. We've had people from Victoria, Edmonton, Toronto, in the interior, like you said, in Kelowna, who are getting close. There's definitely room to grow. I'd love to see other Cafés. They don't have to be run by The Kettle.

Nigel

Of course not. It could be run by any nonprofit, right?

Damian

Or a couple, a few people who want to start one. It's a little harder if you're starting from the ground up like that. And again, we're lucky to have The Kettle behind us as an umbrella organization to provide that kind of infrastructure and support. But a lot of the ones in the States, they start off really small, like a retail location or even in like a church basement or something like that, and they grow their communities there. There are other recovery-oriented community services happening right now at UBC. In the last few years, they've started a student Recovery service there. Coastal Health, Vancouver Coastal Health, has started The Junction. They started about a year after us, which is a similar service. In fact, there's a lot of crossover and membership between our groups. So, I would say Vancouver is pretty big geographically, and we have folks

coming from all over, different parts of Vancouver. There's room for another Café in the city for sure. And I would love to see them opening up in other communities.

Nigel

I'll help you with writing this thing up. We'll propose it.

Damian

Especially when there's, if you think about other communities in BC that are more remote and there may be a lack of services, right? We're lucky in Vancouver. There's so many different services offered. But in some other communities, there's not a lot going on.

Nigel

No, there's nothing. There's Tim Hortons.

Damian

Yeah. They may have a 12-step group running somewhere or something like that, which are fantastic as a pathway to Recovery as well. But the more options you give for people who are seeking Recovery, the more successful.

Nigel

This is important, Damian. I don't mean to cut you off. I really think that's part of our mission now. I don't mean to sound too evangelicalistic, but part of our mission now going forward is to say, this works. Well, it works for us. And as you will hear over these podcasts, I think that affirmation will be reaffirmed and to get it on our soap boxes if we can and say, you know, let's spread this love.

Damian

There's a reason it's growing so quickly in the States. And I think... Yeah.

Nigel

It's sustainable. Like this model of re-engaging your members to continue the... It's sustainable.

Damian

It is.

Nigel

And you're trusting them, and that's part of the give back. That's what, you know, we're really feeding back to our community, you know? So, listen, I want to thank you very much.

Damian

Thank you, Nigel.

Nigel

For coming out and sharing your voice and your wisdom. And look forward to doing some writing with you sometime and singing.

Damian

Absolutely. And that's kind of the beauty of this program, too, is that for us staff, we get to be involved in these things as well. So, you know, when you talk about taking joy from your work... It's uplifting for us, too.

Nigel

And it's palpable. Right? Cool. Thank you very much. Cheers.

Writer's Block

Welcome to this episode's segment of Writers Block, where we showcase Recovery CAFE members' original creative writing. We're fortunate to have with us today, Leonie. Leonie, take it away.

Thank you. So, I selected a piece from 1994. And just to give a bit of context, a lot of my writing has been catharsis. And in some ways, often when I have been given a light bulb moment and some sort of an awareness, and it comes with a visual. And that's all I'll say about this one. So, it's titled ...

The Shedding, Oh, Beauteous Snake Skin. by Leonie

I tried to keep you. Oh, the scaly stickiness of it all. I fumbled to massage my worn and dry skin in hopes of keeping it. I was molting. Inevitable. I know this, I mumbled quietly. I am slithering forward, pink, raw, new. I pour some tea and I wait. You coloured and patterned me for years. Inhaling the scents of bergamot, I pondered, why do you want to leave? Why now? Because it is time, it replied. Besides, it is not I that is leaving, it is you. Oh, I replied, a bit perplexed. I make some breakfast. I feel cold, my new skin, unfamiliar, tender, uncertain. I found myself almost longingly looking at my old skin as it lies curled and lifeless, yet once a sturdy coat of armor, encasing stories not yet told and slow to unfold. I grunted, it is nothing without my warmth and my heartbeat. It's just skin. I turn away, leaving it motionless, piled up in the corner of my living room. But at the door I stop, just enough to feel a strange pull. I want to save it. I want to stick it back on my skin. It's what I know, it's familiar. And then suddenly, panic, hissed. So take it with you. Leaning into my face closer, panic hissed again. Take it if you must. You will know when it's right to lay it down for good. A few minutes went by and I just stood there. And then a voice, calmer, more gentle, lulls. And when you do, when you do take it, it will be with love and memories and many, many tears. These tears will wet your skin, moisten your newness, baptize your largeness for life. So, I picked up my old skin, not yet ready, not yet trusting. And I fold it over my arms. I poured some more tea, comforted with this yellow blanket containing my old skin, laid upon my lap, almost as if for safekeeping. Okay, I soothed, just for a while longer, while the chair rocked me and pains ripped like trumpets and storms. My head heavy with stones, my arms laden with rocks, my walk became heavy. I know this. And soon, very soon, I will full right to lay us down in a garden, not heaped, but planted, buried deep, where rain will tuck us into bed and sun will warm us to sleep and sunflowers will grow where the old me died.

Interview

Okay, we're on. Thank you so much for coming by. I know that you have a busy day and you're just coming right out of a Circle right now. So how does it feel to, I don't know, land here right now?

Ruth

Land here, good. Yeah, it was a great Circle. And when I look around the sound booth, I see friendly faces. So I feel happy to be here. It's sweet to look and see those smiles. So yeah, this is a place I can do that. I can just land.

Jen

Wonderful. I kind of wrote out some questions. And really, you know, I was listening to Damian's interview and it was really about, you know, the business behind everything. But really, I'm kind of hoping that we'll get into the people behind the model. And to that, I just want to maybe introduce it by telling listeners how I was introduced to the Café. And, you know, first day that I met you was down at the pop-up, which was down on Hastings. It was maybe a year and a half ago, the summer of 2022. The model had been open for a while, but I was just being introduced by a friend and I walked into the space. And immediately, I felt myself at home. Like, the space was welcoming, it was warm, and it wasn't just the environment, it was the people there. And you were, I think, probably the first person that I met. You were probably the intake person on that day. And I just was so... I was just so touched by... I was so touched by how I felt in that space that I wanted to know how I could get involved. And ever since then, it's been a real joy for me to see the growth of the organization and to be a part of that growth. And I wonder if you could tell the listeners what

was it like for you when that pop-up... I mean, how was that... Tell me the process of getting that pop-up going.

Ruth

Well, I initially came to the pop-up in December of 2021. And when I arrived, I remember walking in the door, there were two computer monitors, there were two bookcases, and then the large, we called it the great table, and that was it. And just Damien and I. So, we actually would go out into the landscape, buying plants, room dividers. I went to the thrift store, got some plates. So, for a while, I felt like he was my work husband. We were going and buying all this stuff together, so it was pretty fun. And then we did all this community outreach, which was new for me to be out there pounding pavement and getting, visiting the different non-profits. Also really fun, and we were greeted very warmly, but of course, we didn't know how this was going to land. And I remember meeting you, Jen. I remember when you all came in, because I think Jas brought you. And yeah, it's very sweet, because it was quite a large group. You came with a whole group of you, but I noticed there was a lot of really thoughtful questions. And enthusiasm, which, yeah, I think the whole thing is definitely a labour of love for me. I formerly worked in housing, and it was at a harm reduction building. And one thing I noticed was, because it was harm reduction, most people weren't in Recovery. So, I had gotten this dinner program. We would cook together. We'd sit down at a proper tablecloth and eat together as a group on Friday nights, because I wanted to offer an alternative to people using. Well, lo and behold, the group was always full. And I worked, you know, I had wheelchairs in there. It was full every Friday, and I thought, these people need fun! But I also noticed one thing that was missing from that environment was, you know, wellness and Recovery. They weren't part of that world. So when this job posting came up, and it was a very long job description, the words wellness and Recovery really spoke to me, because what was missing for me in the work environment was that focus on wellness and Recovery. And I just loved that idea, because my whole world outside of here is the growth community. That's where I met my partner. I've been to workshops on just about everything, and I really believe in my own growth. And I was really excited to have that line up with my job now, too. So it was, yeah, and that's what brought me there. And I have met some amazing people. I mean, as you say, as you were, I was listening to you talk about the Circles, Jen, and it's that reminder that so much of a human is underneath the surface. You know, we just see the tip of the iceberg, but a lot of the person is underneath the surface. And in the Circle, you get to know a little bit more about the iceberg and the water. And I find that it's very sweet, because that's the place where the heart just opens wide.

Jen

And that's the Circle is one of the things that makes this program kind of unique, as far as I'm concerned, and in a sense really builds community. And I think, you know, from what you're talking about when you were working in housing, that's what you were trying to do when you were doing the Friday night dinner. You were facilitating, sounds like you were facilitating, this idea of building community and building alternatives to using. And the fact that you landed in this kind of environment seems like just a natural evolution of what you were. It's almost like a purpose-built job for you.

Ruth

I think so, because I've gone on enlightenment intensives, and that's a very similar process to the Recovery Circle, because the Recovery Circle orients you to the present moment. You're not talking about your whole life trauma, your whole history. You're focusing on the last week, and you're also, it's also focusing on struggles and wins. And that's what makes a complete human, you know, if we went to one side, we wouldn't be balanced. And so I love that it was a very elegant, intelligently designed model. The structure of the Recovery Circle is a structure of loving accountability. And when people share that way and open, you can't help but fall in love with them. You know, each person's got their own beauty. And it's quite, it's very sweet, it's very touching.

Jen

And the Circles are one important aspect, and I would say one of the cornerstones of the program. And I was just talking with somebody outside about how it's sort of like a community within a community. We have the membership and the overall space, and I thought it was so sweet listening to you talking about putting together the space, because it's true. Like, there's something to building a space. And it was really wonderful to hear you talk about how you put your heart and love into creating that space, because it really makes a difference when you walk in and you can tell that it's a loving space that's cared for. So, when we're in Circle, that's a very intimate community. But then there's the outside of the Circle, which is this sort of mishmash of people, you know, trying to gather themselves up and find their passions or find their expressions, find a community that can expand them outside of this, you know, because my impression of the space is that it's in the continuum. It's sort of like a launch pad from like, okay, I'm ready now. You know, I've got some foundation now. I've got my commitment now, and I'm ready to kind of launch off and take on a new life potentially, or find the life that I had before. Can you tell me, as somebody who sees the ins and outs and the ups and downs of every day as a staff member here, what are some of the struggles that you see around you?

Ruth

Well, right off the bat, the number one is teaching people what accountability means. You know, because this model, because it's a member-driven model, people aren't used to that. I think folks in the community and in other nonprofits are used to a drop-in model, but this program is designed that when you're part of something, how do you build community? You make everyone part of it. Everyone's got a job. So here they do, we call it Café contributions. In other words, it's a chore, but, you know, it's done with love. People choose their own chore. Some people do choose it. Others, you may have to chase down a little, but the big thing is learning that accountability, like one of our guiding principles, show respect. Well, quickly you can show respect by showing up on time. But the members themselves will say to, you know, they'll have to have the feedback from other members if they're not on time or if they don't show up, if they promise they were going to do something, people don't show up. So, it's a new way of being, and so we've had to be very patient. And it's just how it is. I mean, I'm patient with this anyway because I've been around mental health for about 17 years, so I know this. But also, I am very patient. That's the place I can just be a holding presence or maybe send out gentle reminders, you know, via email. Like, I'm always emailing people. I'm like a satellite.

Jen

Well, you know, it makes me think that you take on a little bit of the role, even the way that you described sort of putting together the space, this role of being the holder of the space. And when I think about being a parent, I think about, you know, it can be frustrating when you're trying to hold space, when people aren't putting a little bit of effort into keeping it up, that our role, your role in holding this space as a staff member, my role as a parent isn't to do everything. So, when you talk about accountability, it's about being part of a community. And I think some people, you know, maybe it's the first time that they felt like a part of a community. And I want to wrap it up a little bit, but maybe getting a little bit more into the work that you do outside of the Café that feeds into the sense of your devotion to community and to helping others.

Ruth

Well, tonight I'm running my own Ceremony Circle. For me, it's very important to have a life of meaning. And I also really love ritual. And so, I teach people about the power of ceremony, how they can use ceremony in their lives. So, we celebrate the calendar, the Earth calendar, why our ancestors celebrated these seasons, the lights coming back, what does that really mean, how did we celebrate? You know, and these are the times when we gathered around fire, we danced, we celebrated. And that is kind of what I'm doing here also in a different way. But I hugely believe in the power of community. I myself, my family live in Alberta, so I'm here alone. I do have a partner, but we don't live together. And for me, community is very important. And I'm an eldest child, and I

have two younger brothers, so I feel I was raised to be in community, because as an eldest child, you're always, you're picking up stuff. You're driving your brother to his hockey game. My dad was a very good motivator. But he also taught me the power of independence, and also to see other people's gifts. And that's another thing I feel I'm able to do, is part of my introvert is seeing the beauty in others, or this person would be good at this, or maybe we should ask someone to do this, or I wonder how they'd feel about this. These things all sort of come together here in the Café setting.

Jen

Do you have any dreams for the future of the Café?

Ruth

I mean, I would love, obviously, more and more as we go down the pike. I'd love to see more members running Circles, also more members teaching classes. And I like to be the little fairy outside helping support that, because I'm a big believer in empowering people. I'd love to see more of that. Obviously, it would be great if we had some kind of job program at the Café, maybe down the line, housing. But hey, everything starts with a vision, right?

Jen

Maybe that's something you could delegate out!

Ruth

Exactly, I'll put the call out to the universe.

Jen

Well, I can't tell you what a joy it's been for me to know you over these months and to feel your dedication and your devotion to community. It really brings a sense of hope in my heart, and I want to thank you for that. Cheers, and let's keep the train rolling.

Ruth

Okay, thanks, Jen. I appreciate this time with you. And I say the same back to you. I've enjoyed seeing you spread your very big wings.

Recovery Calendar

Hello, everyone out there in Recovery Land. Here's some upcoming events for March happening at Recovery CAFE and other sober spaces in Vancouver.

At the [Recovery Cafe](#), we're celebrating St. Patrick's Day in the afternoon on Thursday, March 14. Come enjoy some green pizzas and other healthy snacks and activities. In March, we're getting ready for another season of gardening. The Recovery Café has been invited to join a new community garden nearby, so we'll be planting a new garden bed from scratch. Gardening is great for your mental and physical health, plus you get to enjoy the fruits of your labour all summer long. No experience necessary, just a desire to learn how to grow food and get your hands in the earth. Also in March and open to the public, our monthly Open Mic afternoon is happening Friday, March 22, from 2 to 4. Come and show off your talent, whatever it may be. Guitar, piano, spoken word, stand-up comedy, or just be in the audience and enjoy the show. It's a fun and sober Friday afternoon held on the last Friday of every month. Recovery Café is located at 620 Clark Drive in East Van.

Nearby at the [Junction](#), March events include *Happier Hour* on Fridays all month from 5 to 7 p.m. There's also a 2S LGBTQ Plus meet-up every Thursday at 4.30. *Smudge and Feather Passing* every Wednesday morning at 11. Call 604-812-3139 for more information about the Junction and all the great things going on there every month. The Junction is located on the second floor at the Robert and Lily Lee Community Health Centre at Broadway & Commercial in East Van.

[The Recovery College YVR](#) is holding weekly workshops via Zoom on Saturdays throughout the month of March, starting on March 2. The theme of these workshops is *Coping with Uncertainty*. Recovery College YVR is located at 520 West 6th Avenue. See recoverycollegeyvr.ca for more info.

Do you have a good idea you'd like to turn into a business? [Employ to Empower](#) helps entrepreneurs turn into business people with their *Business Skills Training* course. Learn how to create a business plan, connect with other aspiring entrepreneurs, and join a community of people working for themselves. This latest 10-week course starts the week of March 4. Each class is two hours and taught in person at Employ to Empower, located at 319 West Pender Street. Find out more and sign up by calling 778-760-3563.

Also in March, [Ignite Vancouver](#) presents *Women's Day Sober Dance Party Celebration*, Friday, March 8, 630 to 10pm, at the Beaumont Studios, 2109 Alberta Street.

[The Alano Club North Shore](#) is hosting a Stand Up for *Recovery Comedy Showcase and Dinner*, Saturday, March 16, from 5-9pm. Head on out for a night of good food and comedy hosted by Mark Smith and featuring Patrick Maliha, with special guests Shane Clark, Juno Mack, and others. The Alano Club North Shore is located at 176 East 2nd Street in North Van. Call 604-987-4141 for more info and ticket reservations. Tickets are \$20 for the show and \$30 for the dinner and show.

And, if you're looking for a weekly fun and sober night out, a new alcohol-free comedy club has opened and is featuring local comics at [By the Hour Comedy](#), every Wednesday at 8pm. This event takes place at The Well Studios at 2111 Main Street. Tickets are \$18 at the door and \$15 in advance. Use promo code BTW2 for \$2 off your ticket.

That's all for now, but if you have a future event you'd like us to add, please get in touch at rcpodcast@thekettle.ca.

Credits

The STEAM Podcast is a member-led and member-driven program at The Kettle's Recovery Cafe. This episode of the STEAM Podcast was brought to you by the STEAM Team, with original creative content by Nigel, Mark, Duncan, Damian, Leonie, Jen, Ruth, and Kay. Original theme song created by James, audio and technical support Paul and Kay, and the rest of the support team, Sonya, Chad, and Matt, with a big shout out to the Kettle Society for providing the space and support to produce this show. The views and opinions expressed in this episode reflect those of the individual and not necessarily the collective group, the Recovery Café, or the Kettle Society.

About US

The Recovery Café is the newest program under the Community Services Department of The Kettle Society in Vancouver. We provide support, resources and a community of care along the entire continuum of a person's need for recovery assistance. The Café community allows our members to feel grounded and secure in a warm, welcoming environment that builds stability, strong relationships and a sense of belonging. The Recovery Café supports people in managing their mental health and substance use along the many pathways of recovery. We help each individual reclaim life as a person worthy of giving and receiving love. Everyone is in recovery from something at the Recovery Café. Whether you're recovering from addiction, a mental health transition or homelessness, the Café is a place of refuge and support, care and community. The Recovery Café is located at 620 Clark Drive and we are open Monday through Friday, 930 to 430. The Recovery Café is not religiously affiliated and is inclusive to all seeking recovery and a healing community.