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Recovery coach Nicole Kordus, left, talks with Candice Francart of Green Bay during their weekly peer-to-peer support session at Casa Claire in Appleton. In late 2021, the two women met while Francart was seeking help to overcome her drug addiction. DAN POWERS/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

She struggled with drug use; now a peer coach is helping her stay sober

Bremen Keasey

Oshkosh Northwestern
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

APPLETON - Candice Francart knew last fall she was going down a bad path.

Struggling with an addiction to heroin and crystal meth, the Green Bay resident knew her drug use was ruining her life.

"I was changing into a person, a very angry person, very mean, just totally hating life," Francart, 38, said in a recent interview with The Oshkosh Northwestern.

Francart remembered calling her mom one day and "breaking down," saying she couldn't battle her addiction

alone, and she needed help. She had tried unsuccessfully to quit three times before. She knew something different was needed this time around.

On Oct. 26, Francart found something different when she met recovery

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No print paper delivery on Saturdays; e-Edition expanded with more news, sports

From Staff Reports

Oshkosh Northwestern
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OSHKOSH - A reminder for Northwestern subscribers: We will not be delivering a print edition on Saturday. This is the first week of the change in print delivery frequency we announced in January.

However, subscribers can find a full digital edition of the newspaper Saturday at thenorthwestern.com, filled with local news, advertising and features such as comics and puzzles. The new model means subscribers will get newspapers delivered to their home six days a week, with a digital newspaper available every day of the week.

In the meantime, we want to call to your attention some improvements and new features added to the digital e-Edi-

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Milwaukee Journal Sentinel editions to be delivered to commercial outlets such as gas stations and drug stores completes. MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

UWO students to rally for Ukraine Saturday at Opera House Square

Katy Macek

Oshkosh Northwestern
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

OSHKOSH - Raiden Montero watched his friends on the other side of the world "transform from civilians to soldiers and refugees ... in a matter of days."

He knew immediately he had to help.

Since shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh senior has been researching how to get supplies to Ukrainians. He worked with a group of UW-Oshkosh faculty to connect with Wisconsin Ukrainians, which last week held a rally in Appleton to collect supplies.

"Humans can't sit back and watch other humans be attacked," Montero said. "We have to take action."

The group is holding a donation drive and rally from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday in Opera House Square, 315 N. Main St., to raise awareness, donations and support for the Ukrainian people.

Oshkosh residents Dmitry Sokolov and Cassandra Bevacqua, who became involved with the Wisconsin Ukrainians after attending its Feb. 27 rally in Green Bay, said the most needed supplies for this drive are medical supplies and military items.

"We didn't get a lot of those during previous rallies, and they tend to be lighter (for shipping)," Sokolov said. "We're not going to turn away anything, but we want to focus on these."

Think, first-aid kits, adhesive bandages, antibacterial ointment and other items (though nothing with alcohol). Military donations could include things like hiking boots, thermal clothing, knee pads, hand warmers and balaclava masks. The Oshkosh Rally for Ukrainian Aid Google Document has a complete list.

Monetary donations are also needed and can be given through the group's DonorBox page. As of Wednesday, the page had raised \$25,820.46 of its \$100,000 goal. Volunteers will also collect cash and checks at Saturday's rally.

Wisconsin Ukrainians put together a complete list that is accessible on Google Drive or via its Facebook page. The list also includes other ways to help and places to drop off donations throughout the Fox Valley.

In addition, Montero said there are donation boxes throughout the UWO campus, including at Reeve Memorial Union, which the public may access. He plans to keep those out as long as needed, since the situation in Ukraine is fluid.

"We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, shoot, or even in an hour," he said.

Montero is working with a group of UWO faculty, including history professor Karl Loewenstein, anthropology professor Jordan Karsten, Execu-

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Keith Uhlig

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Francart

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coach Nikki Kordus. Kordus helped get Francart admitted to Casa Clare, the Appleton-based residential treatment program for women run by Apricity.

For someone struggling with addiction, getting into treatment can be a complicated process that requires them to jump through a lot of hoops to get care. A recovery coach helps guide people like Francart through that process — directing the recovery, walking them through treatment options and giving them resources and support as they undergo recovery.

Francart said she has been sober since Nov. 11, passing the three-month mark without using drugs.

"I feel I'm better today than I ever was before," Francart said.

For her, a recovery coach made a difference.

"I know if I was talking with someone who hasn't been through this struggle that I'd feel they don't really understand," Francart said. "And unless someone's been through it, they truly don't."

Peer coaches help hundreds of Wisconsinites

In 2020, 37 people in Winnebago County died from drug overdoses. Public health experts believe the number of deaths in 2021 will be even higher. Those numbers will be released this summer.

The rise in overdoses is prompting public health officials to figure out how to help those struggling with addiction find treatment before they become another statistic.

"We're really looking collectively as a community at what we can be doing differently to support people that are in recovery and to support people getting into recovery," Stephanie Gyldenvand, a community health strategist with the Winnebago County Health Department, said.

The Emergency Department 2 Recovery program is one of those new strategies. The program, managed and funded by grants from Wisconsin Voices for Recovery, connects local hospitals with local peer support providers.

It uses a combination of recovery coaches — people who navigate the ins



Recovery coach Nicole Kordus, left, embraces Candice Francart of Green Bay during their weekly peer-to-peer support session at Casa Claire in Appleton. DAN POWERS/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

and outs of insurance and rehab placement — with peer specialists, someone who themselves has overcome addiction.

It is because of this program that Francart met Kordus, who is both a peer and recovery coach. That mix was the key to her recovery, Francart said.

Peer resources with the Emergency Department 2 Recovery program made contact with more than 1,000 Wisconsin residents who went to the hospital because of a drug overdose between September 2020 to September 2021, according to Cindy Burzinski, director of Wisconsin Voices for Recovery.

Those contacts stretched across 10 health care systems — including 30 hospitals in Wisconsin — with eight recovery organizations providing the peer support services.

A shared struggle allows coaches to connect

When Kordus started as a recovery coach, she thought some people would look at her and think, "This girl isn't going to know anything about me."

But Kordus struggled for six years with an addiction to prescription pain pills. At one point, she started selling cocaine to fund her drug use. For her, sobriety began when she was sentenced to prison on Oct. 26, 2011, for possession of cocaine with intent to distribute.

Kordus — who said she got high the morning she was sentenced — had to detox while in prison.

"It was awful," she said.

In hindsight, she said it was the "best day of her life." It was the day she began getting her life back on track.

Kordus finds sharing her past struggles with patients helps them open up to her about their personal struggles.

"I'm not ashamed of my past. It's not in vain if I can use it to help other people," Kordus said. "I think that's a really powerful connection when you've walked the walk. You get it."

Francart said she quickly trusted Kordus as they built a relationship. The two would talk everyday before Francart started treatment at Casa Clare, and the two remain close because their shared struggle gave them a good base for a connection.

Kordus said she usually is working with about four people struggling with addiction at a time, coaching them and helping them find resources as she helps guide their paths to recovery.

"Recovery coaching is really just giving them the power and supporting them," Kordus said. "It's whatever works for them to make their life better."

A lifelong way to recovery

While the Emergency Department 2

Recovery program helps people struggling with addiction get access to treatment and a peer coach for guidance, it is up to each individual to put in the work and have a mindset to stay sober.

Apricity's wide variety of programs — in-patient treatment, transitional housing, employment opportunities — means patients can have up to one to two years in a "safe and supportive environment" to help them in their recovery.

That made a difference for Francart, who said she previously completed an intensive outpatient program for two years but was only able to stay clean for awhile. She ended up relapsing in part because it didn't fulfill some of the baseline issues with addiction, she said.

Her time with Apricity helped her understand those baseline issues. Kordus thinks that's partly because it can take years to reach rock bottom and things aren't fixed in just one way, or in 28 days.

"It takes a long time to fix those things and you need that redundancy and day-to-day safe, supportive environment to unlearn behaviors," Kordus said.

Francart started with a 30-day, intensive in-person treatment program at Casa Clare before moving to a transitional housing program.

Francart said the program helped give her "a backpack full of homework" to help her learn different coping mechanisms and a solid base to take with her as she moved away from the "bubble," gaining more freedoms while facing the challenges of life.

"I'm taking everything with me," Francart said. "I can only grow from here."

Francart said she's "taken flight" since she's been in the program. After years of chaos and very little structure, she has built up something positive. She has structure and accountability, not to mention a car and a job — all through her treatment that started after the Oct. 26 meeting with Kordus when she felt at her lowest.

Now, Francart says she is in charge of her life. And with a lifetime of chaos and little structure, she now knows her path.

"I want to be a mommy, I want to be happy," Francart said. "I want to be the best me that I can be."

Contact Bremen Keasey at 920-570-5614 or bkeasey@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter at @Keasinh.

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