

# BAO (Be An Opportunity Communications) kicks off campaign with Lancaster, Littleton and Colebrook

by Tara Giles

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REGION- A new organization out of Manchester, developed to teach members of the public how to directly impact someone's opportunity to be alive in recovery today had it's 'ribbon cutting' in the North Country. The tour began in Colebrook and headed to Lancaster and Littleton over a three day period in mid July.

Be An Opportunity Communications was formed by a group of four women who share the same ideas when it comes to addiction and recovery. These ideas veer a bit from tradition, and it's why this group has already made a huge impact in such a short time. The masterminds behind the organization are Bernadette Gleeson , Irina Quiles Owens, Caitlyn St. Pierre and Lauren O'Neil.

Gleeson , the talking head of the group has that je ne sais quoi about her. Her ability to connect with a variety of different people is what sparked the endeavor all together. "It was something I knew I had to do, I knew I had to share my research with others and teach the public how to show up for each other."

The experience Gleeson has in this field is extensive. She was the Director of Recovery Development for HOPE for NH Recovery and prior to that was the founder and CEO of Trek Limitless Recovery in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Born and raised in Chicago, Gleeson spent years as a professional recovery coach. Her thesis while earning her MA in Professional Communication was in regards to the research and language of addiction recovery.

The 'Ah-Ha' moment came to the college basketball standout one night while she was alone sitting on the beach, "I was in a job I wasn't satisfied with and I kept thinking to myself, 'this isn't it' I'm supposed to be doing something else. I knew I needed to stop denying what people have said over the years, which was that I was a leader and that I am meant to share what's inside of me with the rest of the world."

The next day Gleeson went to work, and within hours had formed a new band of people ready to branch out into something bigger.

With the opioid epidemic at an all time high, community members in the North Country have been desperately seeking ways in which to pull people from the ashes. Addiction comes in all forms and Gleeson is hitting the nail on the head when it comes to how best to help those in need. The trend has taken off and lives are being changed for the better as we speak.

Gleeson begins her talk with, "I am a person living in long term recovery, which means that drugs and alcohol no longer limits my life in any way."

One point Gleeson makes is the similarity between the disease of addiction to any other medical disease that is being treated by professionals, "My thoughts are that the scientific and medical community overwhelmingly agree that this is a medical issue. Comparing and contrasting with which one can be debated, however addiction is a medical issue and needs to be treated as such."

"Often times we hear people say, 'she has to hit rock bottom before we can help her', 'when they are ready they will get help', 'give them an ultimatum, stop enabling, give them tough love' and these statements couldn't be further from the truth." Gleeson explains. "When someone is living with addiction, they are in a dark place. If you don't reach your hand out to help, they continue to isolate and remain in that darkness. The best thing you can do is to be a pin prick of light." Gleeson uses a dome as a metaphor for addiction. The addict lives under a dark dome, each time someone reaches out in a positive manner, a pin prick of light shines through the dome and onto the person.

Gleeson says, the more light that is shone on someone, the higher the chance is that they will recover.

Gleeson tells a story of a nurse in an emergency room who is there when a patient wakes up from an overdose. That nurse has two choices. They can either scowl, roll their eyes, be flat and unsupportive, or they can be there with a caring smile and a helping hand. They, according to Gleeson can be a pinprick of light. “When someone wakes up from an overdose they are not proud of where they're at and are nine times out of ten quite embarrassed to be there. The last thing they need is a nurse or doctor adding to the isolation.” “There are nurses and doctors out there who offer support, they don't shame the patient and we need more of that.” Gleeson said.

According to research Gleeson says, “We must be walking side by side with someone in recovery for at least five years.” Studies indicate that those in recovery for under one year have a 30% chance of staying in long term recovery. Those who make it past the one year mark have a 50% chance of living in recovery and those who make it to five years have a 75-90% chance of living in recovery.

Some advice Gleeson gave to community members who know someone with an addiction is as follows, remind them of their qualities and values, highlight anything healthy you notice them doing in their lives, stay connected to them no matter what and be direct with requests, invite them to do things no matter how many times they say no, to name a few.

As for the North Country Gleeson said, “This is where this project kicked off and it gives me a sense of pride as BAO continues to grow. My experience is that the people of the North Country truly want to do something about this public health crisis and they showed up to learn. They want to be a part of the solution.”

One quote that Gleeson shared, that seemed to resonate with the crowd at all three events was one by Peter Meinke, “But seven years is long enough and all of us deserve a visit now and then to the house where we were born before everything got written so far wrong.”

Gleeson explained, “This quote means that family and friends have leverage in that they will always be “home”. People living with an addiction will always want to reconnect, whether or not they say it or show it, I want families to know that it still matters. Family still has an opportunity of always being “home” that others don't.”

Hitting social media nationwide is a trend Gleeson began with the hashtag #handled. People from communities far and wide are posting photos with a number chosen from the list below to indicate what they are “handling” for others suffering addiction.

There are ten simple ways for community members to be an opportunity for those in need. The list is as follows.

1. Get a Cup of Coffee

Bring that person a cup of coffee or meet at a local cafe for a coffee date.

2. Pick Up the Phone and Call or Text

Send that person a text or call them to share that you are thinking about them.

3. Go For a Dinner Date

Take that person for breakfast, lunch and/or dinner.

4. Take an Adventure

Go for a walk, bike or hike. Invite that person into the world of things you love. Invite them to things they love or used to enjoy, once you learn what those are.

5. Share Your Gratitude

Share your feelings or thank that person for calling or texting you back. Share your feelings about what

it means to you when you see them.

#### 6. Point Out the Positive

Acknowledge and praise their activities or behaviors that they are currently doing that are healthy for them or that they have said are important to them.

#### 7. Listen

Listen to that person. Remind them that they are not crazy and not alone – that it makes sense that they feel the way they feel.

#### 8. Ask Questions

Ask a question, get curious. This will allow you to get to know them today for a deeper understanding and connection.

#### 9. Brainstorm

Offer to walk with that person on their journey. While doing so, offer to brainstorm ideas on what they think could help them.

#### 10. Give a High Five

Offer a hug, a high-five, a fist pound and let them know that you are not going anywhere. You are here, and you see who they truly are – right now and always.