

Wyoming Telehealth Network

October 2021 Provider Spotlight

Lana Mahoney, Recover Wyoming



Recover Wyoming is a non-profit and federally designated Recovery Community Organization (RCO) and is currently the only RCO in Wyoming. Their focus is to help people find, get, and stay in long-term recovery from substance use disorder. Recover Wyoming provide the Recovery Community Center, which is a safe, sober place for people to come and get information and resources, talk to someone about recovery, or just to have a cup of coffee. They also provide peer-to-peer recovery support services through our Recovery Coach and Telephone Recovery Support (TRS) programs.

Lana Mahoney has been a Wyoming resident the majority of her life and a Cheyenne resident for over 30 years. Her background is in Behavioral Health and Recovery Support services. She began her journey with Recover Wyoming in 2011 as a volunteer and has since worked for the organization in various roles including; Administrative Assistant, Laramie County Veterans Treatment Court Coordinator, Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) Case Manager, and Peer Specialist Training Coordinator. She has been instrumental in furthering the Peer Specialist profession in the state.

1. When did you first hear about telehealth? How did you feel about it then? How do you feel about it now?

Our organization heard about telehealth many years ago. At that point time, we thought it was a neat and innovative idea. We did wonder how a person's privacy/confidentiality might be impacted by receiving services through that method of care and support. We also had some concerns about the use of technology, in that not everyone has access to electronic devices and internet services.

With recent changes brought on by COVID-19, there definitely was a distinct shift in the need for telehealth services. We are now able to see that support can be offered via telehealth in a safe and secure manner. We also found out that many people liked the opportunity to receive services remotely and has now become a tool that people have learned about and become accustomed to.

2. When did you begin offering telehealth services? What prompted the need to offer these services?

We first began offering telehealth services in April of 2021, when we launched our Telephone Recovery Support (TRS) program. The program is designed so that individuals either new to recovery, or who wish to have extra support in their recovery, are called by TRS volunteers on a weekly basis to provide recovery "check-ins." These calls let TRS participants know that someone cares, and to offer information, resources, and support to help attain and maintain long-term recovery.

The need for telehealth services was highlighted by changes in service modalities impacted by COVID. Many organizations had restrictions and only offered services remotely. Also, many people were hesitant to access services in person due to precautions related to the pandemic. It was also something that fulfills a need in Wyoming due to the many rural areas where access to recovery support services is limited. TRS allows people in remote locations the opportunities to receive recovery support state-wide. It also provides an opportunity for those individuals with limited access to transportation, or for those who might have to travel a significant distance to receive support service, a telehealth modality as an alternative option.

3. What motivates you to continue offering telehealth services?

We have seen our Telephone Recovery Support (TRS) program be received as an effective option to provide recovery support services. We continue to receive referrals for TRS and have seen a lot of interest in this option for recovery support.

4. What is your proudest accomplishment with telehealth?

Our proudest accomplishment related to telehealth is the successful program development and implementation of the Telephone Recovery Support program. Since April 2021, we have received nearly 50 referrals to the TRS program. After reviewing TRS data, it is apparent that TRS provides an increase in positive outcomes for people engaging in the program.

5. What advice would you give patients wanting to try telehealth?

We would encourage others who have not yet engaged in telehealth services to give it a try. For those who are apprehensive due to the technology component, there are many opportunities to watch tutorials and receive information to effectively launch and utilizing telehealth services.

6. What advice would you give providers wanting to start offering telehealth?

If providers are apprehensive about starting telehealth services, consider that providing a telehealth option could remove barriers to access to services for some individuals.

7. What was the biggest barrier in providing telehealth services? Have you overcome it?

Our biggest barrier in providing telehealth services is identifying grants and programs that provide access to technology, such as cell phones, for TRS participants to receive recovery support calls.

8. How do you think implementing telehealth now will affect how things will be done at your organization after the pandemic is over?

Not only do we provide telehealth services via our Telephone Recovery Support program, but we also provide our Bridges to Recovery, all-recovery meetings through a hybrid format, where participants can join the meeting in person and online via the Zoom platform. We have seen that people enjoy using the Zoom option for recovery meetings and we plan to continue this hybrid meeting format in the future. We plan to continue to implement telehealth services in the future, regardless of COVID restrictions, etc.

9. Is there anything you learned the hard way in telehealth implementation?

So far, we've had a great experience with telehealth implementation. We have not encountered many challenges and don't have any significant "growing pains" to report.

10. Do you have any telehealth hacks or tricks?

Ensuring that program participants/clients are familiar with telehealth services prior to service engagement, will help to eliminate technology challenges. Some issues with technology are inevitable, such as poor internet connection, etc. and cannot always be prevented.

Bonus Question: Do you have a favorite podcast, book, or author?

Yes, a favorite book of Recover Wyoming is called Watch My Rising: A Recovery Anthology edited by Lynn Carlson. It is a collection of short stories and poems about recovery from substance use disorder and which include categories such as "families matter" and "many pathways." We provide this anthologies to people seeking or in recovery, their families, and allies, to provide hope and illustrate that recovery from substance use disorder is a reality.