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TOP STORY

Honoring humanity: Recovery Café offering a safe place for people to heal

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Recovery Café Lexington and Frankfort executive director Aaron Guldenschuh-Gatten leads a staff meeting at Recovery Café at Church of the Ascension on Wednesday. (Hannah Brown | State Journal)

Those currently struggling with a drug or alcohol addiction or who have been sober for numerous years can find support at Recovery Café located in the lower level of the Church of the Ascension.

“They don’t have to be in active addiction,” Recovery Café Lexington and Frankfort executive director Aaron Guldenschuh-Gatten said. “(Recovery Café) is for anyone struggling and who would like to unburden their cares and leave behind loneliness.”

The recovery center opened in January after Guldenschuh-Gatten said they had heard that an emergency shelter closed in Frankfort.

“We had received feedback from people in recovery talking about a lack of resources in Frankfort,” he said. “We knew there was no recovery community center in Frankfort.”

Guldenschuh-Gatten visited the Church of the Ascension, at 311 Washington St., on a Sunday and fell in love with the welcoming church leaders and parishioners.

“This church is so openhearted and loving,” he said.



A comfortable, coffeshop-like atmosphere has been created at Recovery Café at Church of the Ascension. (Hannah Brown | State Journal)

Guldenschuh-Gatten spoke with Church of the Ascension Rev. Peter Doddema about wanting to open a Recovery Café in Frankfort, and Doddema suggested opening it at the church.

Since opening, the café has assisted 72 “unique individuals,” Guldenschuh-Gatten said. The café offers recovery coaching, recovery circles of 12 people or fewer and life skills classes such as pottery, checking the oil in a car, assisting with obtaining a food handling license and more. All of the services are free.

People can attend Recovery Café for six days as a guest. After the six days, they are required to have a membership, which is free. Members agree to attend recovery circles and contribute to the community at the center by taking out the trash, preparing coffee or other chores.

“We all have something we can contribute,” Guldenschuh-Gatten said. “Every human being has gifts and deserves love. We don’t have to wait to be who we want to be.

“Recovery Café Frankfort is an open-hearted community for anyone on a journey of healing. We welcome all pathways of recovery. We want to be a safe place and a place that honors every person’s humanity.”

The center is open 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursday and Friday, and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday. In December, Guldenschuh-Gatten said the café will be open Tuesday-Saturday.

Recovery Café staff also participate in events that help to educate the community about addiction. The café recently partnered with the Frankfort Police Department (FPD), the local Wings of Hope Quick Response Team (QRT), the Franklin County Agency for Substance Abuse Policy (ASAP) and Expree Credit Union to host “Deflection Academy for Front Line Responders” led by Operation 2 Save Lives Cordata QRT National representatives.



Recovery Café Lexington and Frankfort executive director Aaron Guldenschuh-Gatten leads a staff meeting at Recovery Café at Church of the Ascension on Wednesday. (Hannah Brown | State Journal)

Several local agencies took part in the training on Tuesday and Wednesday at Church of the Ascension. Along with staff from Recovery Café and FPD were representatives from Wanda Joyce Robinson Foundation, Simon House, Franklin County Sheriff’s Office, Thorn Hill Education Center, New Vista, Fresh Start Frankfort, Frankfort Regional Medical Center, Franklin County Health Department, Passport, Yes Arts, Homeless and Housing Coalition, Franklin County Schools, William Justice Crisis Nursery, Cares Coalition, along with surrounding law enforcement agencies and other organizations.

“Part of QRT’s goal is to collaborate with other agencies and be able to provide an overdose response,” Shelley Hearn, community policing advocate with FPD, said. “Overdose deaths have decreased over time, but still, one is too many. If we can make contact and support one person, then it will be worth it.”

During the training event, Hearn said they discussed ways to support families and ways to engage with those who have a substance abuse disorder.



The “Deflection Academy for Front Line Responders” was led by Operation 2 Save Lives Cordata QRT National representatives on Wednesday at Church of the Ascension. (Hannah Brown | State Journal)

“We learned how to show empathy and provide resources and provide support,” Hearn said.

QRT began in August 2023 and has continued to grow.

“With an additional grant, we’ve been able to print more educational material and put together leave behind bags with Narcan and harm reduction materials,” Hearn said.

Tricia Hamilton, who is also a community policing advocate with FPD, hoped that the training event brought more awareness about addiction to the community.

“I’m hoping it will bring more folks to the QRT situation table and increase referrals to get more accurate information about the opioid crisis in the community.”

For more information about Recovery Café Frankfort, email Guldenschuh-Gatten at aaron@recoverycafelexington.org. You can also learn more at recoverycafelexington.org.

Coming up at the café is Rise as One Celebration from 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 4. There will be a pancake breakfast, games, prizes and more. The event is free and open to the public.

The Wings of Hope QRT “project is supported by the Kentucky Overdose Response Effort (KORE) through a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Grant 1H79TI087770-01.”

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