

Korina Barry ([00:00](#)):

Hello everyone. Thank you for tuning into the CASCW podcast. In today's episode, I chat with Dr. Amy Krentzman, who is a professor at the university of Minnesota and the school of social work during our conversation, Dr. Krentzman shares resources and recommendations for supporting addiction recovery. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Krentzman also highlights some new resources that she's created in partnership with our center, including a free online learning module series and a resource website, both of which we will link to in the description of this episode and on our podcast landing page on the cashew website, we hope you enjoyed this episode and check out the resources and continue to take care.

Korina Barry ([01:16](#)):

Hi, Amy, how are you doing?

Amy Krentzman ([01:18](#)):

Good Korina. How are you today?

Korina Barry ([01:20](#)):

You know, I am doing okay. Hanging in there, kind of working on getting sleep and taking care during kind of chaotic times. And could you Amy share with our listeners a little bit about, about yourself, um, kind of introduce yourself, share a little bit about your work.

Amy Krentzman ([01:36](#)):

Absolutely. I, um, joined the school of social work in 2013 and, um, I teach the addiction class and I do research on addiction recovery. And what that means is that I study, uh, the experience of addiction recovery sometimes for, um, groups that are not usually studied. Um, I also study systems that support recovery such as sober living houses, 12 step programs like alcoholics anonymous. Um, and I, I develop interventions that help people, uh, support their recovery.

Korina Barry ([02:19](#)):

And how are you, how are you doing and, and adjusting during the pandemic yourself? And are there ways you're taking care of yourself?

Amy Krentzman ([02:28](#)):

Definitely. Well, I am just so glad that one of the things that's healthy for us all to do is to go outside and thank goodness that we are permitted to do that. And that that's a low risk activity because I found that absolutely to be lifesaving, um, just to go outside, go for a walk, get a bit of exercise. Um, that's really been a lifesaver. That's been my number one thing you did. Oh, I couldn't agree more if, if we were in a place where we didn't have the privilege to access our parks or trails, just yeah. Fresh air with this would have been a lot more difficult to manage and navigate. And so you've recently released some new resources. Um, as I mentioned in my intro, focusing on how, um, child welfare professionals and other helping professionals can support addiction recovery during the pandemic.

Korina Barry ([03:30](#)):

And for our listeners who maybe aren't sure or still learning. Could you define recovery and explain a little bit more about what, what does it mean for someone to be in recovery?

Amy Krentzman ([03:41](#)):

In the broadest sense, recovery, a person in recovery is someone who formerly had a problem with drugs or alcohol, or maybe another addictive behavior like gambling and who currently does not have that problem anymore. Researchers lately have embraced this very wide, broad definition of recovery. And because the definition is so broad and because in recent years, researchers and advocates have embraced the philosophy that there are many pathways to recovery there isn't just one way. The best thing you can do is if you meet someone or one of your friends discloses to you that they are a person in recovery, just ask them, well, what does that mean to you to be a person in recovery? Because it will mean something different to different people.

Korina Barry ([04:39](#)):

Thank you. And let me say, so we, you have been a great partner with CASCW In our center for many years now and helping develop lots of resources around your, um, your research around addiction, around recovery. And so we have, we have great existing resources, um, that we hope folks will continue to access, but could you share with our listeners a little bit more about some of the new resources that you've created, and those are those resources that are specific to, um, the current times and, and navigating addiction recovery in the pandemic. Like I'm just kind of sharing a little bit more about the modules, the web resource page and, and other resources you'd like folks to know about.

Amy Krentzman ([05:23](#)):

Absolutely. Well, it was sort of interesting how this all came about. So very early in the pandemic, like week one, um, I was invited to be on our local NBC affiliate and interviewed on how people are staying sober during the pandemic, because there was this immediate realization across the media that the pandemic was going to cause relapse. And in fact, anecdotally, what we're hearing is that that's true that the stress, the bio-psychosocial stress of the pandemic did cause a lot of people to relapse. When I started to pull my thoughts together about being interviewed, I want, I wanted to consult the research and I felt that people listening would need a handout. Like I almost put my teacher hat on and I thought, okay, if I were giving this talk to a group of people in a room, I would want to give them a handout of resources.

Amy Krentzman ([06:22](#)):

So realizing that would be impossible on TV. I developed a website of resources to serve as the handout. And when I built the website, I started to dig through the internet to find the resources available out there. And I was just astonished by all that I found, I mean, my jaw would just hang open in awe. When I found all that there was, and the recovery community pivoted very nimbly to provide lots and lots of stuff for people. So by the time I gave the interview, which was two minutes long, I knew I had an hour of useful material and all that material was on the website, but I knew I had something that people could put into use right away. So I gave a couple of podcasts and the content of those podcasts are in the modules that I developed for the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare.

Korina Barry ([07:20](#)):

Awesome. We will link to those resources in our description, of course. So folks can access and dig in a little more, um, and, you know, watch and listen. So the online modules are like a narrated PowerPoint. So folks can listen to those in the background. Whereas, um, you said like the, the web resource page is something folks can read through and click through and follow links. And, and so as you are, could you share with our listeners, what are some key takeaways you think, um, frontline child, welfare workers,

and other folks who are supporting individuals and families right now, um, some key takeaways that they should know about addiction recovery during these times.

Amy Krentzman ([08:08](#)):

Absolutely. The research clearly shows that one of the strongest sources of support comes from other people who are also in recovery, that social support supporting recovery is very important, but when that social support comes from other people also in recovery, then that really leads to sustained abstinence sustained recovery. So one of the biggest challenges facing people during the pandemic is that the face to face AA and are alcoholics anonymous and narcotics anonymous meetings were shuttered. And, um, therefore people were separated from this really essential source of social support. Um, and also always there are new people seeking recovery for the first time and they couldn't walk into a meeting any longer the meetings were closed. So to keep in mind that the most powerful thing for people in recovery is being as closely connected as possible to other people in recovery. Um, so that's, that's the number one takeaway the number two takeaway reach research has been done on this.

Amy Krentzman ([09:23](#)):

What's the best way to refer someone to an AA meeting or narcotics anonymous meeting, whether it's face to face or online, and just simply telling someone to go is not enough giving someone a pamphlet or a meeting list or a website link is not enough. What really helps is to connect that person to someone who's already going to make a personal introduction, have those two attend the meeting together, either in person or online, and then follow up with your client and ask, how did it go? You know, let them know, go ahead, go to the meeting. And then let's talk a day later and let me know how it went. So those two pieces, which recur in different research studies conducted by different scientists, the, the social support of introduction to someone who's already in the middle of that community. And then the assignment to go with that person and attended meeting, and then afterward the accountability to follow up and say, how was that? So those, I would say the main takeaways.

Korina Barry ([10:32](#)):

Yeah. And looking through and reading through and watching your modules and your resources and seeing, um, the addiction recovery community adapt to like many other, you know, areas to pandemic and connection and, and utilizing virtual meetings and such do you, and then, you know, uh, are not, not sure if you're hearing or if you, you have an idea on, do you think any of these new kind of modes of connecting for many will stick? You know, like I, you know, I, there are obviously I think challenges, um, and barriers, but I'm wondering if you are hearing or if you think any of, you know, as even States opened back up, um, and maybe you're going to shift towards more in-person gatherings, if they're able to, um, are you hearing or thinking that those virtual meetings may have been more accessible to folks and may continue in some capacity or not so much?

Amy Krentzman ([11:33](#)):

What one good thing to know is that thousands of electronic and virtual ways to connect with recovery resources existed before the pandemic, there were video meetings, there were message boards, um, daily readings, um, recorded recovery talks. So, but what happened with the pandemic is that very many, many more people, um, by hundreds of thousands jumped on and started getting their recovery support online. So there's a tremendous amount of meetings available online. There were conferences, recovery conferences, online, and all forms and pathways of recovery have different online presences, such as, um, every different 12 step program. You can imagine what they call 12 step alternatives, which

are recovery groups for people who don't care for the 12 step model, um, and support groups for the friends and family of people who are addicted. So all of these groups are available online. I believe that the experience of what's happened during COVID will permanently affect the recovery community moving forward in a positive way, because what it did for a lot of people is it forced them to use the technology.

Amy Krentzman ([12:58](#)):

And I think across the board, people are hesitant to use the technology. They can be afraid of it. They just don't like it. They don't want to bother with it. They know what works for them, and they don't want to change. And there's two great examples of this one is I'm old enough that I remember when our family got our first microwave, I was in college. And even though we had the shiny new microwave on the counter kitchen counter, my dad still took the morning, the morning coffee, you know, that afternoon, like the leftover coffee. And he heated it up on a pot on the stove. It's like, dad, we have a microwave. Why are you heating coffee up on a pot on the stove? And he did it because he had his system. It worked perfectly well. The coffee got hot and he didn't see the need for learning something new to make it happen.

Amy Krentzman ([13:50](#)):

Now, another example I love teaching. Um, I love teaching. I have my way of doing it faced at always taught face to face. And I always felt inside myself. I don't want to teach online. I just don't want to do it. I hope I never have to face them moment when I have to do it. So I too had that resistance to technology, but what with the pandemic has done for a lot of people in recovery is it's made them have to take that leap of trying the zoom meeting. And from, for some, they really like it. They find it works and they find a lot of benefits to it. It's pretty efficient. You don't have to travel. There's no travel time, so you can fit it into your day, a little more efficiently.

Amy Krentzman ([14:38](#)):

And, Uh, it can make you try meetings that you normally wouldn't attend, make you a little more adventurous and make new friends. Uh, one thing with online is that people dial in from all over the world. So you can get a certain lift from meeting people in recovery all over the world. Uh, so I think that when the pandemic is over and people begin resuming face to face meeting, which is actually starting to happen in the twin cities, people are starting to open up their, um, 12 step meeting rooms with social distancing, with masks. But I think even when things open up, there'll be people who feel better about using online meetings. Maybe they're high risk individuals, um, or they're just simply found that it's more efficient. Um, and so I think that online meeting attendance is going to remain elevated when, when things, when the rooms open up again, it's going to go way down, but it's going to be elevated versus its pre pandemic levels.

Korina Barry ([15:48](#)):

Yeah. And for listeners too. And who just so they know in your web resource page that you have also pulled together a list, um, for maybe folks who don't have the equipment, the internet, or I think even people who are maybe zoomed in virtual meeting to out, or just not comfortable and wanting to be on camera or in that kind of setting, but that you have a great list of, um, phone numbers that have folks have a phone that they can at least call and have access to some, some of them even 24/7 support. Um, and so I think that is also a great, an important addition to that web resource page and just, you know, again, thinking of access and just kind of where people are at and helping meet people where they're at.

Amy Krentzman ([16:35](#)):

Absolutely. And there's two of those resources I'd like to showcase. One is the local alcoholics anonymous or narcotics anonymous intergroup. They're still answering their phones. So if a person has only a phone and that phone does not connect to the internet, they can call the local intergroup and they can look up a telephone meeting on the computer and give the person the access information. The other thing I'd love for people to know about are this relatively new, um, system that's on the recovery horizon, and those are recovery community organizations. Now I knew about Minnesota recovery connection, which is in Minneapolis. But when I did the research for the website, I found that Minnesota has six recovery community organizations across the state. So these are brick and mortar buildings. Most often, these are offices that exist in the three dimensional world. Of course they're shuttered now, but they're still answering their phones.

Amy Krentzman ([17:43](#)):

And these organizations, recovery community organizations came about to fill a gap they're treatment centers, and they're not mutual aid groups. They are in that missing space in between. And they do several things that are really powerful. First of all, they have the philosophy that there are multiple paths to recovery and they don't judge anyone. Anyone at all can call them up. They provide a wide range of services to people in recovery, such as maybe someone wants to go back into treatment or maybe someone needs housing, or maybe someone needs public assistance. They can help with all that. And the thing that's exciting about their work is what they do is they train people in recovery to become peer support specialists. And then those people go on the phone and help other people. So they have some formal official training.

Amy Krentzman ([18:40](#)):

They learn about the resources that are available and they follow a code of ethics. And then these folks are the ones answering the phones. They will also do a weekly recovery outreach call. So they'll, if anyone wants to, they can get their name on the list and they can receive a telephone call once a week from these individuals checking in with them. So the recovery community organizations are answering their phones now during COVID. And if the client has that phone number, um, and dials them up, that person will help them with whatever else they need. And I did hear that if they get the answering machine, they should leave a message.

Korina Barry ([19:19](#)):

In thinking about the, you know, both virtual support right now, and even just distance support and phone support. Are there any privacy concerns that, um, or, or as people maybe think of privacy concerns, I wonder, could you share, are there any, can you share any ways that, um, folks in these support groups and organizations are helping create safe spaces, um, that looked different during the pandemic?

Amy Krentzman ([19:49](#)):

Absolutely. One of the, um, one of the reservations people might have about online video meetings is worries about their privacy. So something important that, um, a social worker can do, or a child welfare worker can do for a client is to actually teach them some basic zoom skills far and away away. Most of the virtual recovery meetings are on zoom. So you could teach your client how to turn off their camera. If they're more comfortable keeping the camera off and how to change their name, how to click on that box with the three dots, maybe the person only wants to put their first name. The other thing is that

people who are running the meetings are learning very rapidly, how to put special settings in zoom, to protect privacy of people attending, for example, to disable the function of being able to record the meeting. And hopefully the person running the meeting has taken all those precautions, going into zoom, going into the settings and disabling some of the things that make the meeting riskier.

Amy Krentzman ([21:06](#)):

Another thing, um, counselors can do to help People initiate Zoom meetings is to just warn them that there might be some small nuisance experiences they might have. For example, they might, um, miscalculate the time change. If they're attending a meeting that's out of California, it's going to require a time change calculation. They might make an error, or there might be an error listed in the meeting list about what time the meeting starts and your client gets on the meeting, right? As it's ending early in the pandemic, there was the problem of zoom bombing, where bad actors would come into the meeting and show offensive images and type offensive words by and large that's gone. It's no longer happening because of the security protections that zoom put in. And also the people in the recovery community figured out these settings in zoom to make things safer. And our website actually talks about all of that and has links to the updated recommendations for making a zoom meeting safe.

Amy Krentzman ([22:13](#)):

So I think that the counselor can reassure the client that there are things they can do to protect their privacy. And they can look for a meeting that does not have the record button enabled. There are certain, certain coaching that can go on, but also to let people know there might be some minor frustrations. The meeting might have a password and it hasn't been listed what the password is. So to just go down the list and try the very next meeting, I looked up meetings on a worldwide list of AA meetings. I looked up meetings on Friday at noon, and there were 23 meetings on Friday at noon. So just simply to go to the very next meeting on the list, you didn't ask about this specifically, but another thing people can do for people new to the 12 step or the mutual aid experience is they can encourage them to attend beginner's meetings and in a big electronic spreadsheet of virtual meetings.

Amy Krentzman ([23:13](#)):

And we have those links on our website, like on a PC, you can go control F and search for beginner and search the list for a beginner's meetings. Now beginner's meetings will be especially welcoming for the beginner and we'll have special themes related to what it's like, what life is like in early recovery. So that would be a great, a great recommendation. So I just want to say something else about, um, services online that cater to specific, um, ethnic and racial groups. There's a recovery community organization in the twin cities called twin cities recovery project that especially caters to the African American community. Now they have a website and a telephone number that clients can use. And then within the native American community, there is the Red Road Wellbriety, which has a website on that website. I didn't see online meetings. I didn't find online meetings, but there are email addresses for people to connect to that very important resource.

Korina Barry ([24:28](#)):

And Amy are you, um, you know, within your resources or, or in the work you're continuing. And I know you continue to update and add to these resources, are there culturally specific resources available to folks and other resources that are tailored to, you know, specific communities, um, that folks should know about and, and, uh, as they kind of consider and dig into what's out there?

Amy Krentzman (24:54):

Yes, there are. Um, first of all, there are 12 step alternatives. So if someone is uncomfortable with the spirituality, that is part of a 12 step program, there are now groups that do not have a spiritual component. So there were those options, women for sobriety life ring and smart recovery are the main three within 12 step programs. There are a bunch of meetings that address certain, um, identities within the population of human beings who are in recovery. So there are meetings for women. There are meetings for active military, uh, uh, folks and veterans. There are meetings for LGBTQ individuals. Um, there were even meetings for, for physicians and for lawyers, um, and for young people. And there are meetings in every language. So what can be really powerful is the recommendation to have your client attended meeting that speaks to one of their other identities. So there's that double identity of being a woman and being in recovery or being a veteran and being in recovery, um, that can be very pop, uh, powerful in terms of bringing about a powerful feeling of belonging.

Korina Barry (26:25):

Awesome. Thank you, Amy. And is there anything else you would like listeners to, to know about addiction, recovery, and how to best take care of themselves? If they are someone who is in recovery or how to be supportive to others during this time,

Amy Krentzman (26:44):

I am writing a paper for a clinical social work journal, summarizing all of these recommendations and what the research literature says. So I think preparing your client for the fact, there'll be some nuisance variables, but those can be easily overcome helping your client to overcome any reluctance they have to technology. You can encourage them to think of it as an adventure or to try it. Um, and again, this idea of connecting them with someone who's already attending and inviting them to attend, and then having that accountability to meet with them again and ask, how did it go to emphasize the benefits of online meetings? And one very powerful aspect of the research literature on recovery emphasizes the role of helping others, helping others in recovery. And there are several ways that people can help others, even if they're beginners.

Amy Krentzman (27:48):

First of all, um, I encourage your client to hop onto the online meeting 10 minutes early and stay on the meeting a little bit afterward, like 10 minutes after, because these are the periods at the beginning of the meeting are the periods when people have the opportunity to agree, to read the opening statement of the meeting or be the timekeeper, if there is one. So there's an opportunity to do service at the first 10 minutes of the meeting, as well as to socialize and network with other people. And people also share a lot of resources at the beginning and the end, uh, just before the meeting starts.

Amy Krentzman (28:24):

And just after the meeting ends, I think spending time with your clients to teach them the basics of zoom, how to raise your hand, how to turn your camera on and off how to change your name, how to use the chat that that's time very well spent. Um, I also think it can be very helpful to have clients go through the online meeting list and choose a meeting for each day of the week. Meetings that look good to them either because of the topic or something they're curious about, or the origination location of the meeting and have them just make a paper calendar with every day of the week, listing the meetings for each day, that looked good to them so that when they wake up in the morning, they look at the

calendar and they say, all right, what's my meeting going to be today. I think having that can be very handy.

Amy Krentzman ([29:20](#)):

The regular recommendations for trying meetings are valid now to tell your client, to try at least six different meetings before deciding it's not for them. And again, arriving early and staying late. The other thing counselors can do is to attend a remote meeting themselves. There are open meetings across a number of these mutual aid groups and open meetings are ones where members of the community are very warmly welcome to attend their designated open meetings on purpose. I have students in the addiction class attendance open meeting, and they're very hesitant. They don't want to intrude on a private space. And a lot of people don't like the idea of attending an open meeting, but it's open on purpose.

Amy Krentzman ([30:09](#)):

The group has made that decision for themselves to be open. And if the counselor attends an open meeting, they're really in a very powerful position to tell their client what it's like and help them make. They have some authority then in explaining what to expect. And I think advising clients to do anything they can think of to solidify, extend, and maximize their connection with other people who are also in recovery, whether that's a text group or Facebook, friending people, social media, anything at all that they can do. Just calling someone up who they're worried about or who they'd like to connect with to maintain those connections is a very powerful recommendation.

Korina Barry ([31:00](#)):

Well, thank you so much, Amy. Those are all I think, I think those will all be really helpful tips. And, um, I know, and I believe frontline child, welfare workers and other folks supporting individuals and families right now will really find these resources helpful. And so we are very appreciative on CASCW for all your time and effort put into them and helping kind of tailor them to the child welfare workforce in some ways as well. Um, and so thank you and thank you for your time, chatting with me today and kind of giving a little intro and highlight of this important work.

Amy Krentzman ([31:37](#)):

Well, thank you for having me.

Korina Barry ([31:41](#)):

This podcast was brought to you by the center for advanced studies in child welfare. This podcast was produced by Korina Barry. Our series editors were Denise Cooper and Cliff Dahlberg music was composed by Big Cats. And this podcast is supported in part by a grant from the Minnesota department of Human Services, Children and Family Services Division. For more information, please visit the CASCW website at cascw.umn.edu. Thank you for listening and stay well, everyone.