Every September, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) sponsors National Recovery Month to increase awareness and understanding of mental illness and substance use disorders. This is a time to celebrate each personal journey toward recovery and inspire social inclusion of those around us who live with mental illness and/or substance use disorder. This year’s theme for National Recovery Month is “Join the Voices for Recovery: Strengthen Families and Communities.” Addiction and mental illness are more visible and prevalent in our country than ever before. According to SAMSHA, in 2015, over 20.8 million Americans age 12 and above were classified as living with a substance use disorder and over 43.4 million adults were living with a mental health disorder. This year’s theme highlights the value of family support and community involvement. Behavioral health is essential to overall health, treatment is effective and people can and do recover. SAMSHA urges those who live with mental illness and substance use disorders to seek support within their community from both natural supports (peers, friends and family, church, grassroots organizations) and from professional supports (counselors, therapists, psychiatric and addiction specialists, rehabilitation centers and detox centers). A great movement designed to increase awareness and hope for addiction recovery started in 2001 with the founding of Faces & Voices of Recovery. According to Faces & Voices, more than 23 million Americans are currently living in recovery from addiction. Members of Faces & Voices promote the reality that…

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promote the reality that recovery is possible with time and support, and that it is a community responsibility.
Both SAMSHA and Faces & Voices urge us to become recovery allies. An ally is a supporter and/or advocate who may not identify as a member of a group but who believes strongly in meeting the needs of a particular segment of the population. At this point, all of us are affected by addiction or mental illness; it is only a question of whether we experience it directly or indirectly. Tens of millions of Americans are “affected others” or the close friends and family members who, to varying degrees, are impacted by a loved one’s addiction. Millions more of us are Adult Children of Alcoholics or Addicts (ACOAs). It’s time for each of us to acknowledge that if addiction is a social problem, then responding adaptively as communities is the solution.
As neighbors, coworkers, colleagues and civic leaders, each of us can foster inclusion and create greater opportunities for socializing, working, living, and the fulfillment of basic life needs. All of us can support those seeking recovery by actively choosing to engage with people who identify as living with mental illness. We can attend and lend our talents to local drop in centers or consider opportunities to become certified as an Intentional Peer Support Specialist or as a Recovery Coach.
Maine Behavioral Healthcare recognizes and celebrates the importance of peer support. Please join us in celebrating National Recovery Month by supporting your neighbors and friends who may be in recovery and build a better community where you live and work.