



Creating Recovery Friendly Workplaces for a Healthier Workforce

Challenge

Substance use disorders impact millions of Americans, with an estimated 23 million in recovery. Stable employment is key to sustaining recovery, yet stigma and workplace policies often create barriers. Many employers lack the resources to support employees in recovery, leading to missed workforce retention opportunities, increased health care costs, and economic instability.

Approach

The **Recovery Friendly Workplaces (RFW)** initiative in Marinette County helps businesses support employees in recovery. A collaboration between UW-Madison Extension and Biehl Bridges to Recovery, RFW provides businesses with tools to assess policies, train staff, and implement recovery-supportive workplace practices. Funded by the Wisconsin Partnership Program, the program is led by the Health & Well-Being Institute.

Peer Recovery Coach and RFW trainer Beka Bussineau highlights the stigma that individuals with past criminal records often struggle to find jobs. RFW helps employers see the value in

second chances. The program supports both workplace safety and employee well-being, helping people stay employed while recovering. Research shows that businesses save an average of \$3,200 per employee in treatment-related costs and \$536 in health care expenses.



Results

RFW is making an impact in Marinette County. In August, the Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) Marinette Campus earned Recovery Friendly Workplace certification, reinforcing its commitment to an inclusive, stigma-free environment for employees and students.

Waupaca Foundry Plant 4, the largest employer in Marinette County to earn Recovery Friendly Workplace certification, is another major success. The foundry achieved bronze certification through RFW by updating policies and training to support employees in recovery. This included launching an Employee Assistance Program and wallet cards with local resource information.

By supporting recovery-friendly policies, RFW fosters healthier workplaces, strengthens economic stability, and reduces barriers for individuals in recovery. With employers like Waupaca Foundry leading the way, more employers may follow, opening new opportunities to make lasting, positive changes for employees and the community.

