

# Holiday

HOMECOMING



RETREAT  

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REVIEW

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**PETER SCHORR**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dear Friends and Retreat Family,

The holidays are slowly creeping upon us, the stress of getting ready for the holidays is something that we have all experienced. What gifts do I buy? Will they like my gift? Can I afford the gifts I am buying? Will I have time to decorate? My family is coming and it is stressing me out, I have to spend time with my In-laws and that's always stressful. Just a few things that go through everyone's mind during the holidays.

Remember these holidays are for a time of reflection and a time for mending and reconciling with people who have stepped away from our lives for one reason or another. It's not just about what we can buy or what we will receive. We sometimes need to take a step back and understand the true meaning of the holiday season.

The best gift you can give someone is the gift of sobriety, for you and for them, it cost nothing, it's always well received and it is something that can last forever ...

Have a wonderful holiday season and please be safe. If you know someone who is struggling, guide them into a better situation.

Peace and Love,



Peter Schorr  
President/CEO





## MANAGING PTSD AND PAYING IT FORWARD THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

How Giving Can Transform Your Mental Health with Karmai Alexander

by Hadassa Delhomme

Growing up in a Muslim household, the holiday season was never a strong point of interest for young Karmai Alexander. While she was on active duty in the military, she admitted being the first to volunteer to work the winter holidays. Although

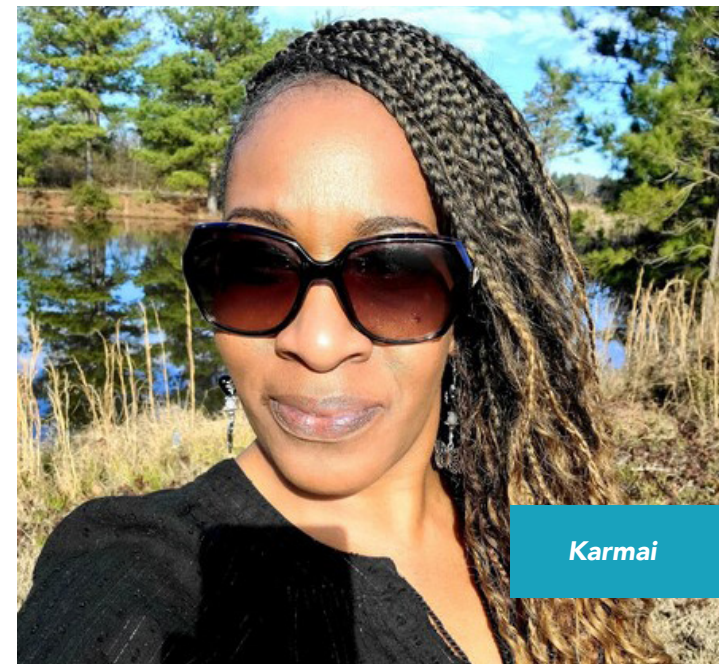
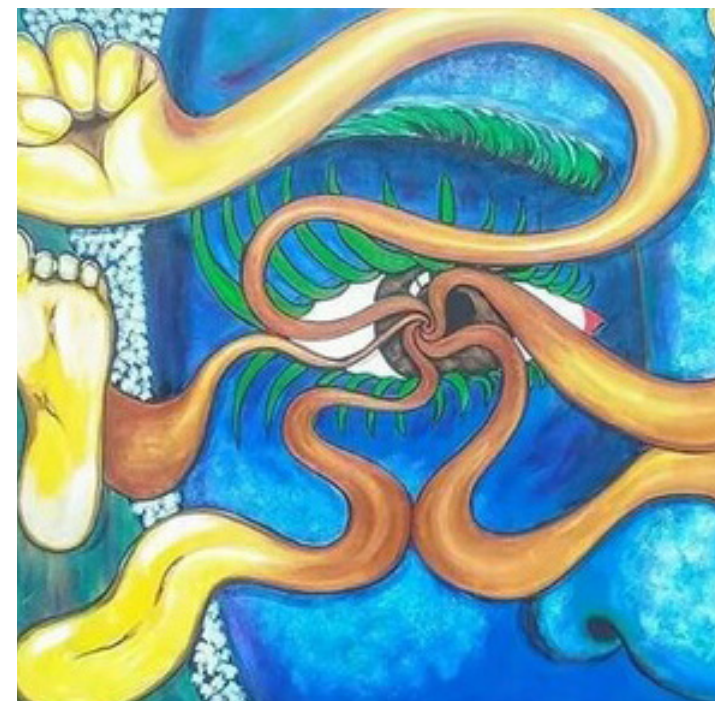
she did not celebrate the traditional holidays like Christmas and Hanukkah, she did enjoy the ambiance of the holidays season. Specifically, being with friends and family and watching the seasons change in her hometown.

While on active duty in the Army, Karmai was a victim of military sexual assault. Like many cases, Karmai did not report her assault. Instead, she went home, got married, had children, and tried to fit into the typical box of what she thought life should look like... but eventually she found out that something wasn't quite right. After years of mental health concerns, she was diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder stemming from her assault.

Years later, Karmai manages her PTSD through various coping mechanisms and a love for art. "I cope with my PTSD by being more aware of my surroundings and the emotions that come with them," said Karmai "Once I figured out what my triggers were, I was more prepared to work around them." Other ways Karmai manages her PTSD are breathing exercises, painting, meditating, and taking time to practice gratitude.

While adjusting to her new normal, Karmai decided to join the Birdwell Foundation for PTSD during the winter months of 2019. Before then she never truly acknowledged that she had PTSD. It was through meeting other veterans who have suffered similar situations that she was able to begin to heal. Today, Karmai works as a Director of Media and Digital Content for Birdwell. Even in this capacity, Karmai continues to be hands-on with their patients.

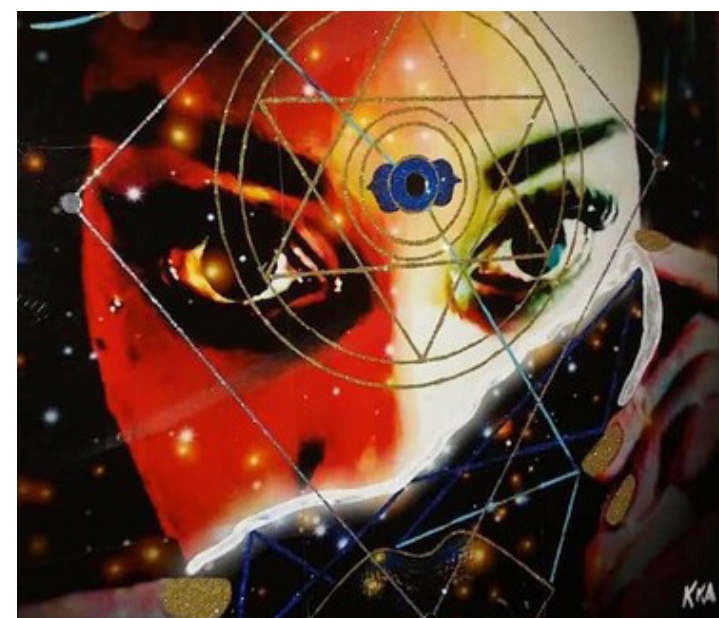
"The most effective tool I have found to manage my PTSD is helping others who also struggle with PTSD," said Karmai. "A majority of the time, when I am experiencing a trigger, helping someone else and talking through what's going on can benefit not only me but the person who is also in need."



Karmai

There is a popular holiday theme that states it is better to give than to receive. This theme rings true for Karmai and many others at the Birdwell Foundation. Veteran suicide and depression rates skyrocket throughout the holiday season. Foundations like Birdwell can place themselves as a firm resource for those who may be struggling. They even provide services for spouses and other family members.

Many people at Birdwell can relate to Karmai in the sense that talking to another veteran or first-responder who truly understands your struggle can be beneficial. Overall, Karmai wants you to know that if you are struggling this holiday season, please reach out for a helping hand. She chose to seek help, and now she can help a lot more people through the help she received. You may be the person that someone else may need. ■







## THE HOLIDAYS: THEY ARE JUST NOT THE SAME AS THEY USED TO BE

by Tanya Ruhl

**Growing up, I was raised by a single mom. Every year she managed to make the holidays special, especially Christmas. It was her favorite holiday and she always made sure to somehow make sure my sisters and I got the most amazing gifts. They may not have been the most expensive items on the market, but they were special, nonetheless.**

We had so many traditions, one of them being the ornaments for our tree. She loved her Christmas tree. We went out every year as a family the day after Thanksgiving just to pick out the perfect one, cut it down, and then go home and decorate it. On Christmas day, each one of us received an ornament in commemoration of something that happened to us that year.

One year I received a cheerleader ornament, another year it was a girl in a swimsuit to commemorate when I was on the swim team, and one I will never forget is a wooden horse. The year I received that one, I was part of the horseback riding camp for Girl Scouts which I had been begging for years to do. She even continued with ornaments into my adult years with my engagement, wedding, and even when my husband and I bought our first house together. She continued the tradition for the grandchildren as well.

Two years ago, in June my mom passed away and the effects were felt by many. I think for me personally I was in shock for a while, and it did not hit me for a while. When the holidays started to come around is when I really started to feel it. This is when things started to get difficult, not only for me but for my family including my children.

I was feeling extremely depressed, unfortunately for me, this always occurs around the holidays because while my mom always tried her best to make the holidays wonderful, I did not have a great time jumping back and forth between houses due to my parents being divorced. This still leaves a lasting effect on me even to this day and I struggle with it every year. I have always said if I could sleep from November 1st to January 1st I would. It really would not bother me to miss any of the excitement or anything else that everyone seems to enjoy because I do not. Now, I try for my children, but it is nothing like what my mom used to do.

Now add in the grief that I was finally feeling from the shock wearing off. I was one hot mess! I realized that my children were starting to feel the effects, even though this was supposed to be a time where we were happy as a family. It was the holiday season after all right? And what about all the traditions? The tree, the

ornaments, even the lights, who was supposed to do all of that? Just thinking about it all just made me want to crawl back into bed and never come out. It was just too overwhelming, but I knew my kids were counting on me.

That year, I decided to help with the Holiday Bazaar. Keeping busy helped with the depression and helped me process my grief as well. While I was at the Bazaar there happened to be a woman who was selling wooden ornaments that she handmade. To me, this was a sign. My grandfather who had passed many years before worked with wood, and there was a special ornament for each of my children. This made me tear up. I bought all 3 ornaments that night and explained to the woman what these ornaments would mean to the children who would be getting them.

On Christmas Day, none of us were feeling quite like ourselves. We shared some stories from when mom was here. Like the time Toby, her cat, got a bag stuck on his leg and freaked out and then proceeded to run around the house all over the gifts as she yelled "someone grab that cat!" Or another time when she forgot to hang the stockings up for the grandkids. This helped us grieve together as a family while we were able to remember her. My younger sister got us all an ornament with my mom's picture on one side and some special words in her handwriting on the other.

Last year was hard for many of us due to Covid and it rang true for my family as well. It really seemed to make the holidays especially depressing. My daughter had to graduate without her grandmother and during Covid, so she didn't really get a ceremony. My two boys had to be separated from all their friends for months on end. Depression and grief were running amuck through our household. My solution? Get funny ornaments to commemorate Covid during the year 2020 so we would never forget it. While they might not have been super impressed right away, I did see some smiles the longer they looked at them.

While it might not be the same and I could never fill the huge shoes of my mother, I can change traditions slightly to make them my own. The grief will be there from time to time, but it doesn't sting as much, and talking about it helps. Especially about funny stories, or moments that others never knew about. Depression can get better, but you need to reach out to someone. There is no shame in asking for help. ■



Tanya Ruhl





## FOSTERING SUPPORT AND COMPASSION TO YOUR LOVED ONES THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

by Hadassa Delhomme

Oftentimes, the holiday season can become an added stress or trigger for depression, grief, and anxiety. Glorified as “the most wonderful time of the year,” many have to face the reality of loneliness, loss, poor mental health, and sometimes the fear of relapsing in their recovery.

To learn how to navigate and support loved ones while they deal with the toll of the holiday season, I sat down with Patti Weisbrod, Family Care Manager at Retreat Behavioral Health. We discuss how to survive the holiday season when you or your loved one struggles with depression and grief.

### 1. HOW CAN I EXPRESS TO MY FAMILY MEMBERS THAT I AM EXPERIENCING DEPRESSION AND GRIEF?

When experiencing anxiety, grief, depression, or any other mental health conditions, your first instinct may be to isolate but now more than ever is the time where you need to find your support system. “The best thing you can do is rip off the band-aid and sit down and explain to your family what’s been going on with you, even if you’re unsure of what exactly you may be experiencing,” said Patti. Whether you are 16 or in your mid-forties, support from your family can always be beneficial to your mental health. Being honest and taking the first step to communicate can radically change your path.

### 2. WHAT CAN THE FAMILY DO TO SUPPORT THEIR LOVED ONE WHO IS STRUGGLING WITH DEPRESSION AND GRIEF?

**“As a family member, you want to present a united front of support for your loved one,” said Patti. “One of the best things you can do other than be there for your loved one is to research how you can get your loved one help and better support them.”**

Being on the same page can help your loved one progress to a healthier state. “Being in denial and offering up quick fixes such as telling your loved one to go for a walk or go hang out with some friends can help prolong the healing process and create room for distrust and lack of communication from your loved one that is struggling.” While offering support, it is also vital to know when your loved one may benefit from professional help. If you feel as if they may be a danger to themselves or someone else, seek help.

### 3. HOW CAN AN INDIVIDUAL PREVENT THEMSELVES FROM FEELING GUILTY ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN ALL HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES?

The holiday season always seems to come with a slew of activities from dinners to photos and family gatherings. When managing a mental health condition, one activity may sometimes feel like a marathon. Patti shares what you should do to avoid guilt when these situations arrive. “Know your limits, oftentimes there may be triggers that can send you down a dark path. Knowing what you

can and what you might not be able to attend can greatly prevent a lapse in mental health.” Patti also mentions that a great way to attend these events is with someone supportive of you that can help you throughout the event.

Altogether, support can go a long way in mental health and recovery. Giving and receiving support can help turn an individual’s day around. Within the family dynamic, whether you are a parent with an adult child struggling with depression or a child watching your parent struggle with grief - creating room for healthy communication, honesty, and support can help save your loved ones’ life. So, remember this holiday season, offer support, compassion, and understanding. ■



Patti Weisbrod



## COMMUNITY CONNECTION

CELEBRATING WELLNESS AND EMPOWERING ALUMNI TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

### NAVIGATING THE HOLIDAYS IN RECOVERY

by Joi Honer BA CAC CCDP

**Holidays can be challenging for people in recovery, especially in early recovery. Benjamin Franklin said it best: "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail." It is important to think about holiday connections and making healthy choices proactively. While no one can control everything, mindful planning will help mitigate the risk of a return to use. In addition, careful planning can lessen stress and make most holiday activities even more enjoyable.**

Here are some tips to help your recovery and support overall wellness during the holiday season:

1. You don't have to attend everything you are invited to. Putting your wellness first can be hard, but it is necessary while working towards a successful recovery program. Especially in early recovery, some types of gathering may be too risky. Don't ever bow to peer pressure on these decisions. No means no and you can explain if you choose to, but an excuse is never owed.
2. If you do choose to go to a family event or gathering, bring your own beverage. This way nothing can be left to chance or misunderstanding. You know what is safe to drink.
3. When attending gatherings always have an exit strategy. For any holiday event, work party, or family gathering one must give themselves permission and a way to leave an event at any time. No one can predict when a craving will happen, so having an exit plan is key.
4. Choose to make your holiday more meaningful by participating in community service or perhaps helping someone newer than you navigate their recovery holiday. Disengage yourself from the materialistic "do more to get more" pace of the holidays. Slow down, practice being charitable, and enjoy the simple things.
5. Create a positive daily ritual that is non-negotiable. This is great to practice all the time but it's especially helpful during the holidays. Devote 15 minutes a day to read a daily devotion, make

a gratitude list, meditate, or do whatever it takes to help ground you in your recovery.

6. Use your support people and self-help meetings even more over the holidays. Make daily connections, use online meetings, volunteer at the local recovery clubhouse and avoid isolation.

7. Put some extra fun into your holidays! Sit at the kid's table, go sledding, see a holiday concert, make cookies, or handmade gifts. Invite the wonder, playfulness, and joy of the holiday spirit into your life or honor it, if it never left. 'Tis the season to be jolly, right?

Early recovery can be scary, but the stress of the holidays can make it even more so. But you got this! Stay flexible and use your support system. What used to be okay may no longer work for you. If you keep actively supporting your recovery your number one priority, you will find what you need to navigate this holiday season with joy, peace, and hope in recovery. Wishing you this and more, always. ■



Joi Honer

### MANAGING GRIEF THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS WHILE STAYING SOBER

by Maggie Hunt

**Fall brings beautiful scenery, pumpkin spice everything, and emotions associated with the holidays. Individuals both in recovery, and neurotypical feel a variety of feelings associated with the holidays beginning right after Halloween.**

I lost my father two days after Christmas in 2017, so my perspective on Holidays have changed drastically. The first year, I was flooded with sadness and promised myself that I would learn to work with my grief instead of against it and help others do the same.

First and foremost, I had to learn to give myself grace, so I also implore you to do the same. This means giving yourself permission to forgive your mistakes, lapses in judgment, and hurtful behavior because no one is perfect! Patience and tolerance of both myself and others had to be remembered in order to embrace change.

**FIND THE POWER IN CHOICE WITH THE EVENTS YOU DECIDE TO ATTEND OR NOT ATTEND.**

Looking back at holidays past when loved ones were with us, brings up emotions. They used to fill certain roles in the holiday merriment and festivities. You have a choice when it comes to attending different family events.

**ALWAYS HAVE AN EXIT PLAN.**

In some cases, we may feel obligated to attend an event. Before you go, call a friend and talk through the exit plan on what to do if.... Bring a friend if you have to or a sponsor, they can take the brunt of being a reason you have to leave early. You may start to feel uncomfortable, or they play a song that takes you back.

**BUILD A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY OF YOUR OWN.**

The hardest part of getting sober is asking for help. To assist with that, if you build a support group that recognizes behavior or can tell when you are struggling or acting different, they can call you on it. That way you don't have to ask, they already know. Allow them to share their experiences with you to help to know you are not alone. If you are attending a holiday festivity, it's okay to step away and call someone for some verbal support.

**UNDERSTAND THAT FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHO DO NOT STRUGGLE WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER OR MENTAL HEALTH DISORDER ARE IGNORANT TO THEIR ACTIONS IN RELATION TO YOUR SOBRIETY.**

Even though recovery strategies are at the forefront of your mind, it is not the same for neurotypical individuals. My extended family loved me very much, but they often would ask me at parties what I wanted to drink, or if I wanted a cocktail (because my main struggle to them was drugs). They thought that I could continue to drink when I stopped the drugs, but for me, both went hand in hand. I would get resentful that they would ask me, "how could they ask me this, don't they know?" The answer to that is, no they did not, and it is selfish of me to think that they are so consumed with my issues. So, if good old uncle so-in-so asks you if you want a beer, just politely decline. Use your support system to practice saying no.

**CREATE NEW TRADITIONS THAT CELEBRATE YOU, YOUR SOBRIETY, AND YOUR GRIEF.**

I knew that going into my first holiday season without my dad was going to be difficult. I told myself and my family I wanted to create new traditions for my own family to celebrate our holiday. This helped bring to light the joy my father brought to our lives, while also giving us a new freedom to create our own. We did more events leading up to the holiday, so the initial day was not hard.

Just know, you do not have to be alone, there is always someone who has gone through something similar to you and got to the other side. If you are struggling, please call someone! ■



Maggie Hunt





# THANKSGIVING, TO REHAB, TO CHRISTMAS: HOW I BEGAN MY LONG-TERM RECOVERY THROUGHOUT THE HOLIDAYS

By Bea

**Hello, I'm Bea and I'm an addict... Those are words I never thought I'd say. On November 27th, 2020, the day after Thanksgiving my husband and my two sons drove me to Retreat in New Haven, CT for treatment for my substance use disorder.**

My opioid dependency began after a surgery that I had where I was prescribed Tylenol with codeine but if I must be honest, it began way before that. I first experimented with drugs at the age of 11. When I was 21 my father had a stroke which left him paralyzed on his right side. I was a daddy's girl. Seeing him in that condition and having to care for him and being a young single mom took a huge toll on me and I secretly started using more drugs. My father was prescribed Percocet but he didn't like them so I

began to take them myself and I would then call his doctor to prescribe him more. At this point I had become a person with an opioid use disorder and began to doctor shop. I was able to get prescriptions regularly. I still believed I could stop at any point and actually tried to on several occasions. I would stop for five days then start again.

I finally admitted to myself that I was a person with an opioid use disorder because it became harder and harder to stop and I was now stealing from my dad and buying them from a street dealer. I became sick when I tried to stop on my own. I was now physically and mentally in the grips of my disorder. The week after my son's 31st birthday I sat my family down and told them that I had a problem. They were shocked because I hid it so well.

A friend of our family got me into Retreat and I stayed there for 27 days. While at Retreat I detoxed for a week then went through intensive group and individual therapy. I spent a lot of time crying and uncomfortable because of the withdrawals. I was miserable but looking forward to the day that I could go home was what kept me sane.

When I came home after treatment it was the day before Christmas Eve. A great time to be home but also a dangerous time. My family celebrates the holidays with lots of food and drinks. Having just finished treatment I didn't know how to feel around everyone celebrating. My family also didn't know how to be around me. Some of my family treated me with kid gloves and some of my family couldn't even look at me. I was very uncomfortable. I was also very dedicated to my recovery. A few things that got me through the holidays were:

### My Laptop and Phone

I logged into meetings before and after parties. There are 24 hour zoom meetings. I find those really helpful.

### Reading and Meditation

I used my Calm app for meditation. Reading was a great distraction.

### My Husband

He was my support at parties. He would serve me ginger ale and stay with me.

### My Worry Stone

I carried it around with me and still do and rubbed it between my fingers when I felt anxious.

Even with my dedication to my recovery the holidays were difficult. Especially New Year's Eve! The champagne was flowing and everyone seemed to be having a great time and I was the only one, along with the kids, clean and sober. But I made it through. Today I am 10 months in recovery. Although, I complained about Retreat and hated being there, I am clean and sober today because of them. Going through detox and being away from my family for the first time made me hypersensitive. The care and after care that Retreat had given me is the reason why I am here to write about it. My name is Bea, and I am a recovering addict. ■



Bea





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# THE Behavioral Corner

with Steve Martorano

TUNE INTO OUR PODCAST EVERY TUESDAY AT: [BEHAVIORALCORNER.COM/PODCAST](http://BEHAVIORALCORNER.COM/PODCAST)

Join Steve Martorano, seasoned Philadelphia radio personality, as he discusses the complex world of behavioral health, the way we live and how our life choices affect our mental, physical and spiritual well-being.

PAST EPISODES



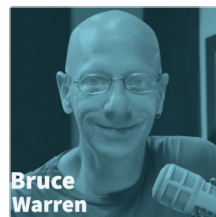
**EPISODE 26: Grace Shober & Maggie Hunt**

You know the song... "It's the most wonderful time of the year."? It's in all those car commercials. Sometimes it's even true. The holidays can be wonderful and also stressful for folks in recovery. Join us on the Behavioral Corner for our seasonal "Home of the Holidays" show with two of our favorite people, Maggie Hunt and Grace Shober from Retreat Behavioral Health



**EPISODE 18: Lauren Sisler**

What happens when a 3 AM phone call shatters all your illusions of a happy family life? Lauren Sisler, a sports journalist, received such a call and struggled with the truth surrounding her parents' secret life and death for the next ten years. Join us on the BehavioralCorner for this amazing story.

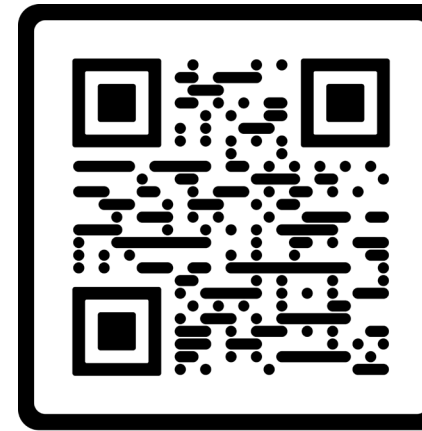


**EPISODE 03: Bruce Warren**

Bruce Warren has loved music ever since he can remember. He also believes in his soul that music can heal. As program director for Philadelphia's WXPB Bruce has the additional responsibility to share his passion with thousands of like-minded music lovers.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

TO VIEW OUR UPCOMING EVENTS, SCAN THIS CODE:



### RETREAT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH LIVE PANEL DISCUSSION SERIES -

**Our Upcoming Live Panel Discussions on Facebook Live: All will be held at 7pm et**

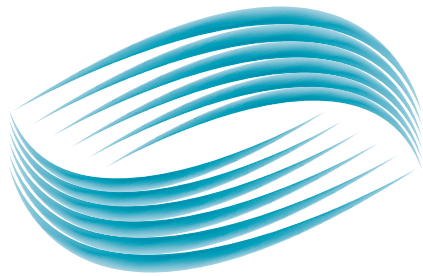
Retreat is continuing to hold live panel discussions on Facebook Live. These conversations with leading experts, academics, and voices on a variety of issues pertaining to substance abuse and mental health are meant to foster important discussions about themes and topics relevant to our community. Join us for these live discussions, and weigh in with your comments, questions, and feedback, on our official Facebook page.

[www.facebook.com/retreatbh](http://www.facebook.com/retreatbh)

To find out more about the live panels or other events please go to our events page on our website for up to date information.

<https://events.retreatbehavioralhealth.com/>





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Retreat Behavioral Health offers addiction services, from medically monitored detox to outpatient rehabilitation, providing a full continuum of care. We work with most commercial insurers, offer 24/7 admissions and complimentary transportation. We have locations in Lancaster County, PA, Palm Beach County, FL, and New Haven, CT. At Retreat, we pride ourselves on providing a compassionate and spiritual environment for those struggling with addiction in a secure and comfortable setting with dedicated and caring staff.

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