

# Treatment center: ‘I promise it’s going to be better’

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“I was so overwhelmed I couldn’t really speak,” Mathews said. “Then, I identified as a newcomer, and everyone cheered for me and hugged me. I would hug someone and they would tell me, ‘I promise it’s going to be better.’ So I just stayed and kept coming back.”

At that point, Mathews knew he wanted to work in the recovery field. He began working as a support staff of a treatment center one year later. He started a consulting firm with his wife to assist treatment centers.

Years later, Mathews became the CEO of his own treatment center, Stillwater Behavioral Health in Southern California.

Stillwater Behavioral Health operates detoxification and mental health programs out of a facility in Santa Barbara, California, as well as other inpatient residential buildings.

On any given day, patients can see Mathews wandering the facility, sitting in on support group meetings. Interacting with patients on a personal level is exactly what he wanted while he went through his own recovery.

Throughout his work Mathews has noticed a lack of support services for patients experiencing addiction. He says substance abuse cases have significantly spiked during the pandemic.

“We’ve seen an increase in overdose deaths, suicide attempts, mental health and substance abuse. All of it,” Mathews said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention there were more than 81,000 drug overdose deaths in the United States in the 12 months ending May 2020, the largest number ever recorded for a 12-month period.

Mathews recommends top quality care when it comes to achieving long-term sobriety, but acknowledged the cost to check into



ABOVE: Stillwater Behavioral Health in Southern California. LEFT: The backyard of the Stillwater substance abuse treatment center.

**ACCORDING TO THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION THERE WERE MORE THAN 81,000 DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE 12 MONTHS ENDING MAY 2020, THE LARGEST NUMBER EVER RECORDED FOR A 12-MONTH PERIOD.**

a facility like his is not feasible for everyone.

On the North Coast, efforts are being made to offer more inclusive treatment options to historically oppressed and marginalized groups and communities.

The Lower Columbia Q

Center offers weekly meetings of Queer Edge Sobriety Support Group for the LGBTQ community.

Tessa Scheller co-founded the center and serves as the facilitator of Queer Edge Sobriety Support Group. Scheller said the meetings

give people a chance to speak freely.

“We have members tell us, and people from the community tell us, that they were not comfortable as queer or trans people, at some of the meetings that you weren’t able

to talk about their relationships comfortably,” said Scheller. “They weren’t able to talk about who they are.” Scheller said.

Awakenings by the Sea in Seaside provides treatment exclusively for women.

Virtue at the Pointe in Astoria provides services for both behavioral and substance addictions.

Mathews said being around others with similar

experiences can be critical for recovery.

“For me, that was so wildly important, you know, when I was talking to somebody, and they were trying to help me, if I could believe that they had been through what I had been through and had experienced something similar,” Mathews said.

Isa Kaufman-Geballe is a contributor for *The Astorian and Coast Weekend*.

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