



Brian A. Pounds / Hearst Connecticut Media

**Lisa Pallenberg at Blue Recovery, the sober house for recovering addicts she owns in Madison on Thursday.**

# 'It's going to save lives'

## Blue Recovery owner welcomes newly opened short-term sober living facility

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By Lisa Reisman

For Lisa Pallenberg, the saddest part of being a sober house owner is when a resident relapses.

"It's so hard because it's the reality," said Pallenberg, the owner of Blue Recovery in Madison, at a recent open house of Redemption House, a non-profit short-term sober living facility in New Haven

for anyone struggling with addiction in need of a place to stay, whether before entering treatment or newly released from a detox or treatment facility, or required to leave a recovery house.

"The reality is there will be people in your house who are going to relapse because relapse is part of recovery," she said.

When Pallenberg heard

about Redemption House, she signed on as a board member.

She cited Blue Recovery's policy requiring a resident who relapses to leave the house for a minimum of 72 hours as the primary reason.

Redemption House, which opened earlier this month on Crescent Street, "is a huge resource for local

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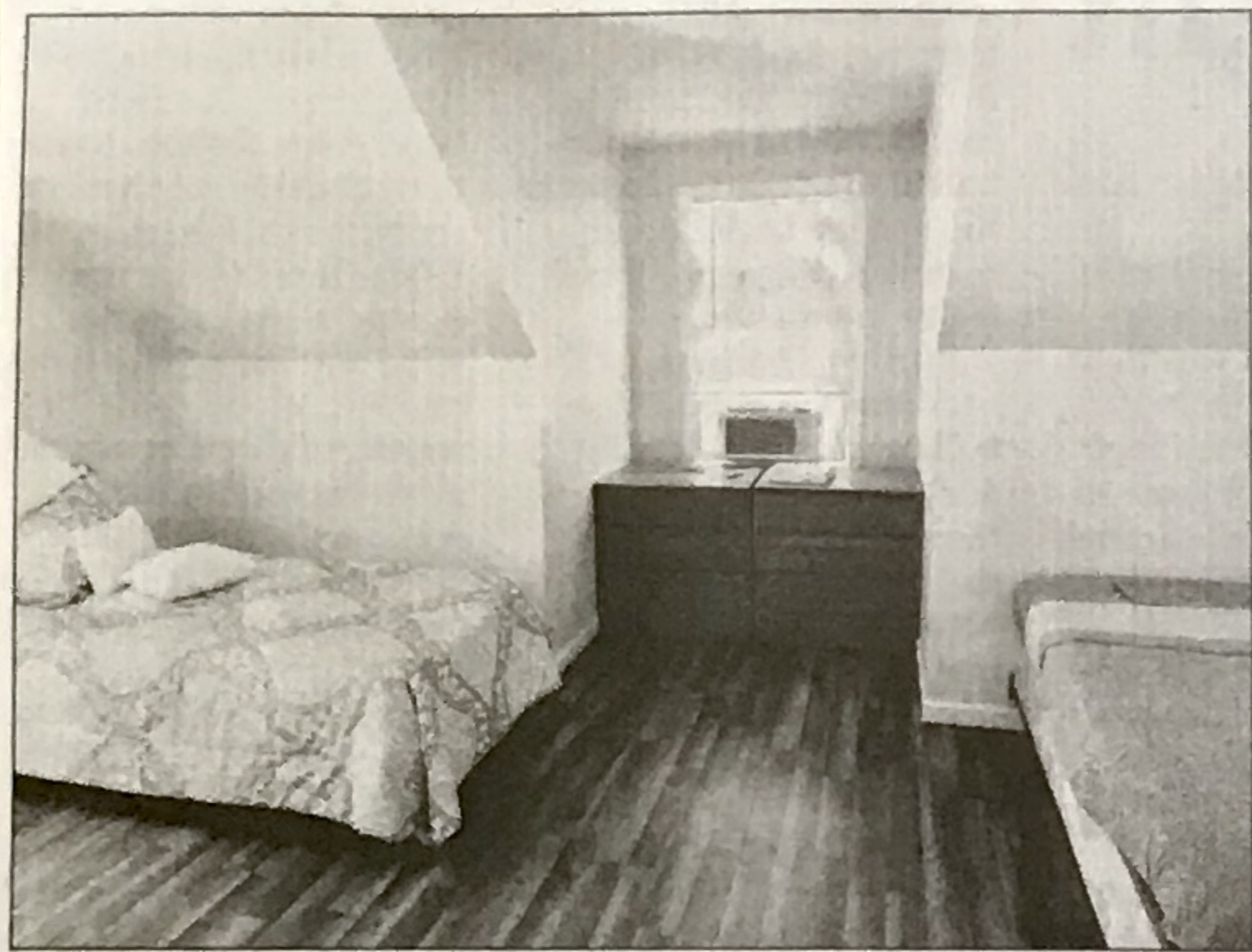


Bryce Koloseus / Contributed photo

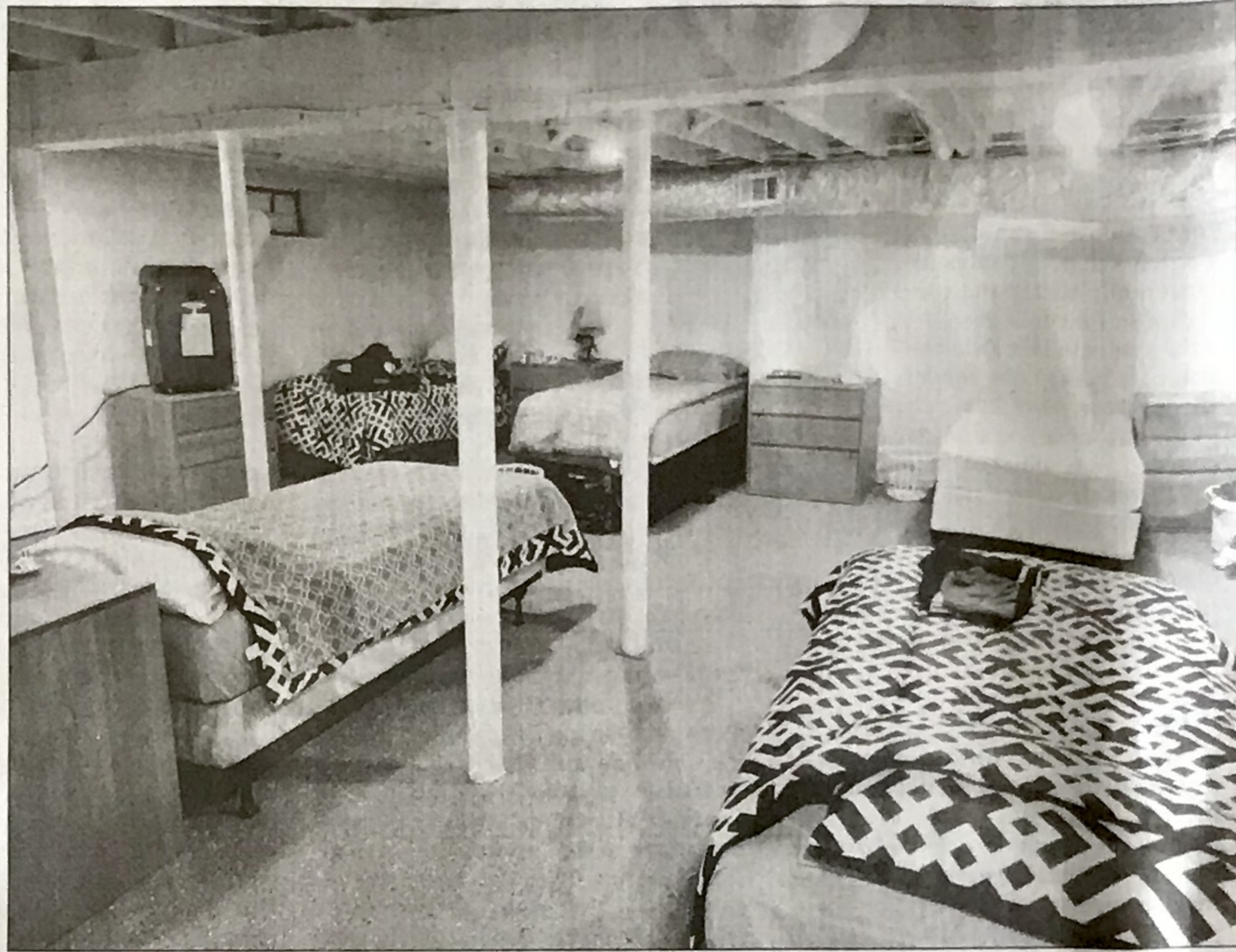


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Above, Rick DelValle, of Redemption House, and Lisa Pallenberg, of Blue Recovery, at Pallenberg's sober house for recovering addicts in Madison on Thursday, July 23. At left, The exterior of the Redemption House, a newly opened nonprofit short-term sober facility in New Haven.



One of the rooms where women sleep at Redemption House.



Bryce Koloseus / Contributed photo

The 10-bed men's quarters in the lower level of Redemption House.

## FACILITY

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sober houses anywhere in the area because often people struggling with addiction end up on the street or in motels where they continue to use," she said.

It's that second chance provided by the two-story, 18-bed residence for men and women that inspired Branford's Siobhan Macre to volunteer as project manager for Redemption House.

"The time frame 'between beds' is a very dangerous and potentially deadly time for someone who's already vulnerable," said Macre, who has friends and family impacted by addiction.

"Redemption House will make sure they have a safe place to stay, and connect them with the resources they need to get to the next step in their treatment plan."

That's particularly crucial, in light of an October 2019 report from the office of the state chief medical examiner showing a 221 percent increase in opioid-related drug overdoses in Connecticut from 2012 to 2018. Since the pandemic began, drug overdose deaths have spiked nationally, the Washington Post reported, with the White House drug policy office reporting a staggering 42 percent increase in May.

Last Saturday, the New Haven Register reported a spike in overdoses potentially tied to heroin laced with fentanyl, <https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/New-Haven-Mayor-warns-of-overdose-spike-21-15433946.php>.

"Addiction doesn't care about COVID, and COVID doesn't care about addiction," said Rick DelValle, founder of Redemption House and owner of five recovery houses in the area.

That's the reason DelValle said he and the board decided, even as the last coat of paint in the men's quarters was drying, to open Redemption House, which is volunteer-run and currently relies entirely on donations.

"There are things that we need like a shredder and ink for the printer, and things still need to be fine-tuned, but this can't wait," he said. "Each day that goes by, someone else is left without a place to go."

Among the projects to be completed is a display of 8-by-10 photos showing young people lost to substance use disorder across one wall of the kitchen.

"These photos are from mothers like me who don't want their kids to be forgotten," said board member Joy Meyerholz, whose son Anthony Joseph "A.J." Mei-

zies died of an overdose at age 20 in May 2016.

"I would hope residents look at them and see the potential in their faces and think maybe this is my second chance."

Meyerholz said one of the reasons she believes Redemption House will "save lives," as she put it, is its policy of turning no one away. (People are asked to donate what they can.)

"You don't need a referral from a doctor or insurance," she said. "I didn't have good insurance so the only place A.J. could go was detox."

Another feature that sets apart Redemption House is its structured environment, according to demandZero founder Lisa Deane of Madison; her son Joe died due to an overdose in December 2018 when he was 23.

Unlike other short-term sober living facilities, "the residents have chores every day, they have meetings, they have activities, they're not just sitting around," she said.

Among the activities is an art program, conceived of by Carmella, the women's house manager, who asked that her last name not be used.

"It's about giving the residents hobbies, things to do with their time," said Carmella, who's referred to by Redemption House vice president Mark Manfredi as the residence's "secret weapon" for her cooking prowess. "One of our residents has been making jewelry, and I'd like to try meditation with them."

Board member Cara Coughlin said her daughter Kelly, who died of an overdose in July 2015, "never had a place to go. That's why she chose to move to Florida because she was afraid that if she got kicked out of a sober house, she was going to freeze."

The three-times-a-day peer-to-peer meetings, she said, "give residents a chance to talk with other people who've been there, who all have this clean time, because relating to a psychiatrist with a degree who never shot dope out of a mud puddle, they're not going to want to listen."

She and Meyerholz spoke at one of those meetings recently. "I told them this is a family disease, it really does affect the whole family," Coughlin said. "And it's also a family disease because it runs in families."

"The first time they use it's a choice, and after that it's no longer a choice."

For Bryce Koloseus, formerly of Guilford, volunteering as a house manager at Redemption House is a way to pay it forward.



Bryce Koloseus / Contributed photo

The living room at Redemption House, furnished solely by donations, where three daily meetings—a morning gratitude meeting, an afternoon 12-step meeting to set goals, and an evening meeting—take place.

"Rick's helped me rebuild my life and it's only fair for me to show these people that their life can be better and they don't have to keep living this way," he said. "That's why so many guys like me who Rick has helped were here everyday with their tools doing what needed to be done to get this place open."

While the house is awaiting 501(c)(3) status and still subsisting on donations, by all indications the unique model is gaining traction.

"Temporary safe places for people with substance use disorders (that is not a shelter or hospital) while they await treatment is definitely needed to help engage people with SUD in the treatment process and increases chances of sobriety," said Melissa Weimer, medical director of the Yale Addiction Medicine Consult Service, who said her clinic has already referred a few patients from Yale-New Haven. "We are grateful to have another resource in the community."

Laura Daniels, a community advocate who's referred three individuals to Redemption House since it opened, agreed.

"You don't need to go through all the red tape, you don't need a diagnosis as to why you need to be there, here is a place that you can go to that's safe and that's clean," she said.

"Word seems to be spreading," said DelValle, as he leaned against a counter in the brightly-lit kitchen.

"Already 10 men and women have been discharged successfully, some to treatment, some to sober living, and we've had to add two men beds." He added that an aide of U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who's involved with the state's opioid task force, will be making an advance visit in early August.

At which point Jennifer, a client who is formerly of Branford, came down the steps adorned in jewelry that she'd been making from a kit provided by Carmella.

Before landing at Redemption House, she'd been awake for 36 hours. "When I got here, I just slept," she said. "And then I got up, and I felt safe. For the first time in a long time, I feel hope."

Standing nearby, Pallenberg smiled. "It's just like Rick says," she said. "We need to wrap our arms around these people and tell them you can do this, we've been through this in one way or another, you can do it too."

"This is going to save lives."

► For more information about Redemption House, visit [redemptionhouses.org](http://redemptionhouses.org) or call 203-909-5707. To make a monetary donation, visit [redemptionhouse.org](http://redemptionhouse.org). For other needed donations, visit <https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/86ZF18777L0o>. Volunteers welcome.

► For information about Blue Recovery, visit Blue Recovery on Facebook.

► For information about demandZero, visit demandZero on Facebook.