

New BC3 certificate program to prepare grads to help those battling addiction

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Lucky Giron, of Butler, is shown Wednesday, June 24, 2020, on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township. Giron, who in her early 20s used up to 10 baggies of heroin a day, is now sober and a straight-A student in her first two semesters at BC3. The BC3 social work major is among the first students to enroll in BC3's new 33-credit addiction recovery certificate program, designed to prepare graduates for entry-level positions in residential and outpatient recovery facilities. Giron intends to become a drug and alcohol therapist.

(Butler, PA) A new addiction recovery certificate program this fall at Butler County Community College is designed to prepare graduates for entry-level positions in residential and outpatient recovery facilities and follows the implementation of a BC3 strategic plan initiative to improve the quality of life in the college's communities.

Graduates of the 33-credit program can work in a field helping those with an addiction, defined as a chronic brain disease that has the potential for relapse and recovery, according to a 2016 U.S. Surgeon General's report on alcohol, drugs and health.

Alcohol misuse contributes to 88,000 deaths each year, drug overdoses killed 47,000 in 2014, and substance use and misuse costs the United States more than \$400 billion annually in crime, health and lost productivity, according to the Surgeon General's "Facing Addiction in America."

BC3's certificate program will focus on substance addictions, such as those related to drug and alcohol use, and process addictions, such as gambling, gaming and eating disorders, said Dr. Karen Stubenbort, a BC3 associate professor of humanities and social science.

"I am excited that a lot of the students who are coming in are going to consider addictions from a different perspective," Stubenbort said. "They are not going to look at it as a character flaw. They are going to realize that there are medical, neurobiological and experiential things that come together in such a way that using substances or some sort of process numbs them to the pain."

Program brings to BC3 2 new courses, practicum

New three-credit courses in introduction to addiction counseling and in motivational interviewing, and an inaugural six-credit guided practicum, reflect a curriculum inspired by the insight of representatives from local governmental agencies, treatment centers and BC3 social work faculty, said Dr. Nichol Zaginaylo, BC3's associate dean of humanities and social science.

The practicum will provide students with opportunities to observe those working with clients in residential and outpatient recovery facilities.

"They are getting training building up to that (practicum) experience and then they get to put that training to practice," Zaginaylo said. "I think that the field work is going to be one of the best experiences for them. They will get that experience with people who are struggling in our community. That will help students to make a more informed decision about where they want to narrow their focus."

As an initiative to improve the quality of life in its communities, BC3 began a series of noncredit classes confronting opioid addiction in 2018 under Tracy Hack, coordinator of community leadership initiatives, and as part of its 2017-2022 strategic plan. More than 350 participants have since attended "Hope is Dope" courses in Butler, Lawrence and Mercer counties, and sequel "New Eyes" courses in Butler County.

Students in BC3's first introduction to addiction counseling course will learn about techniques considered most effective, treatment formats, case management, intervention approaches, assessment and placement.

BC3's new motivational interviewing course will teach students about the evidence-based treatment of choice for individuals in addiction recovery, according to the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration.

Both courses will teach students to practice the full range of communication skills needed as a treatment provider to effectively enter clients into the change process.

Aspiring therapist among first students in program

Courses in the addiction recovery certificate program also include college writing, general psychology, principles of sociology, addictions and family violence across the lifespan. The program prepares students for entry-level positions in a variety of treatment facilities – such as the one that helped to change Lucky Giron’s life.

Giron, a 29-year-old former Kittanning resident, is among the first students to enroll in BC3’s addiction recovery certificate program and is nearly halfway through her pursuit of an associate degree in social work. The straight-A student in her first two semesters said she hopes to be able to one day help others who are like she once was.

“Miserable, alone, lonely,” she said, recalling her early 20s when she injected the brown powdery heroin within one baggie into her arms, hands or neck, and then another, and another, and another. Each day. Her addiction led to lost jobs, lost residences, lost freedom during incarceration – and lost self-respect after sometimes stealing to support her up to \$120 a day habit.

Giron found sobriety in an outpatient treatment center in Armstrong County and the direction for what she now describes as a “full life” through her education at BC3.

The single mother from Butler plans to graduate in May 2021 with the new addiction recovery certificate accompanying her associate degree and to one day become a drug and alcohol therapist.

“I have a purpose now,” Giron said. “BC3 has given me something to work toward, and I have seen the fruits of my labor.”

BC3 offers 22 certificates or workplace certificates that take one year or less to complete. Social work is among BC3’s 56 associate degree programs.