conversation starters

FALL 2026

The newsletter of PreventEd

Cultivating Stronger Communities Together Through Prevention and Recovery

By Jenny Armbruster



Jenny Armbruster
Executive Director

Substance use affects individuals, families, workplaces, schools, and entire communities. While the consequences can be serious, substance use prevention and recovery are both grounded in a hopeful truth: risk can be reduced, support can be strengthened, and people can build and/or rebuild meaningful lives. Effective prevention begins before concerns start, and effective recovery recognizes that healing is a long-term process supported by stability and connection. PreventEd's mission and work is focused on prevention and recovery. We are able to operate uniquely in this space where we do not provide direct ongoing clinical and treatment services, but can offer community-based services that work across sectors.



Prevention is most effective when it is early, consistent, and community-wide. It includes education, supportive relationships, safe environments, access to healthcare, and policies that reduce exposure to harmful substances. For young people, prevention often focuses on strengthening protective factors such as trusted adults, positive peer groups, school engagement, coping skills, and opportunities for belonging. This shows up in our school-based prevention services, coalition support and community information.

PreventEd's prevention efforts focus on being able to provide age-appropriate education about substance use, brain health, stress, and decision-making.

Recovery is not one-size-fits-all. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines recovery as a process of change through which people improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and work toward their full potential. This definition emphasizes that recovery includes more than stopping substance use; it also involves rebuilding stability, relationships, purpose, and hope.



Our Peer Recovery staff understand this more than most with their own lived experiences and knowledge to provide this support to others. PreventEd strives to provide prevention and recovery services that are often misunderstood and not always as readily funded as other efforts. Communities play a critical role in both prevention and recovery. Public health agencies, schools, faith communities, healthcare providers, employers, law enforcement, recovery organizations, and families can work together to identify local needs and remove barriers to care. Data-informed strategies can help communities prioritize areas with higher overdose risk, expand access to treatment, and ensure that services reach people who are most affected.

Substance use prevention and recovery are strongest when communities combine compassion with research-informed action. Prevention helps reduce risk before harm occurs, while recovery support helps people build healthier, more stable lives. Together, these efforts create communities where stigma is reduced, asking for help is encouraged, and every person has the opportunity to move toward wellness and purpose. These ongoing efforts are not possible without PreventEd having the support of donors and funders to be flexible in addressing community needs and ensuring programs are sustainable. Help us build strong communities for everyone.

Recovery Capital: Building a Life Beyond Abstinence

By John Singer

When people hear the word recovery, they often think it simply means not using drugs or alcohol. But recovery is so much more than abstinence. It's about rebuilding a life, finding purpose, and creating something you no longer feel the need to escape from. There is no single pathway to recovery. For some, it may include treatment or medication. For others, it might be 12-step programs, faith, peer support, counseling, recovery housing, or a combination of different approaches. What works for one person may not work for another, and that's okay.

Recovery capital is everything that helps give someone a stronger foundation for long-term recovery, safe housing, employment, supportive relationships, transportation, community, purpose, and people who believe in them.

Building recovery capital also means breaking the stigma surrounding substance use and recovery. When we stop defining people by their past and start recognizing their strengths and potential, we create opportunities for people to move forward.



Through my own recovery and my work in peer support, I've learned that recovery isn't just about helping someone stop using. It's about helping create a life worth staying in recovery for.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT.
Scan to donate to PreventEd to ensure that our community with continue to have access to our services during this time of uncertainty.

Prevention Works. Period.

By Jenny Mullen



Jenny Mullen
Associate Director of Education

It's no lie that prevention works. Research shows that for each dollar invested in research-based prevention programs, up to $10 is saved in treatment for alcohol or other substance misuse-related costs. Here at PreventEd, we have worked really hard to make sure we have the most up to date, hands-on, engaging programs that make a difference. We don't tell youth what to do; we provide them with life skills and science-based, factual information so that they can make their own educated decisions surrounding alcohol and other drugs.

A perfect example of this is our SPIRIT program. This year, we are celebrating 20 years of SPIRIT in the Ritenour School District. SPIRIT stands for School-based, Prevention, Intervention, Resources, IniTiative. Compared to other students in St. Louis County, Ritenour's usage rates are significantly lower. In the 2024-2025 school year, the St. Louis County high school student 30-day usage rates for alcohol, vaping, and cannabis were 10%, 13%, and 12% respectively, while Ritenour's were 6%, 6%, and 4%. We attribute this difference to SPIRIT programming and the relationships we have built in the Ritenour School District.



It's clear that in the long run, an upstream approach makes an impact. Prevention equips students with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to make informed decisions around substances. PreventEd is proud to be providing this proactive solution to youth in the 7-county region.

Sans Bar STL: 100% Fun. 0% Alcohol.

By Larisa Malley

Sans Bar STL brings people together through creative, alcohol-free experiences that celebrate connection, community, and fun. Led by the Associate Board of PreventEd, Sans Bar STL creates vibrant, alcohol-free experiences that prove you don't need alcohol to have a great time. From pop-up events and community gatherings to weddings, corporate happy hours, and private celebrations, we're shaking up creative, handcrafted zero-proof cocktails and helping build a culture where everyone feels welcome.









At the heart of Sans Bar STL is PreventEd's Associate Board, a group of passionate community members and emerging leaders who are committed to supporting PreventEd's mission in fun, innovative, and meaningful ways. Through volunteering, fundraising, event planning, and advocacy, Associate Board members help expand PreventEd's impact. We are always looking for enthusiastic new members who want to make a difference, meet like-minded people, and help grow a movement that is changing the way St. Louis comes together.

Every event supports PreventEd's work while raising awareness about the growing demand for non-alcoholic options and inclusive social spaces. Whether you're passionate about prevention, interested in the sober-curious movement, or simply looking for a creative way to connect with others and give back, there's a place for you behind the bar.

Join us as a volunteer, become a member of the Associate Board, book Sans Bar STL for your next event, or make a donation to help us create more opportunities for connection, belonging, and impact across our region. Together, we're proving that some of the best memories are made with great people, bold ideas, good vibes, and zero alcohol.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SANS BAR STL?

Have you always wanted to have a party without booze? A work happy hour with AF cocktails? NA wedding? We've got you covered. Scan the QR code for more information!

YOP Tax Credits Available

PreventEd has been awarded YOP tax credits by the Missouri Department of Economic Development to support our in-school prevention education programs. With a YOP Tax Credit, you can pay less in Missouri state income tax while supporting PreventEd's youth prevention education programs! Anyone with a Missouri Tax Liability and a donation of $1,000 or more to PreventEd is eligible.

HOW IT WORKS

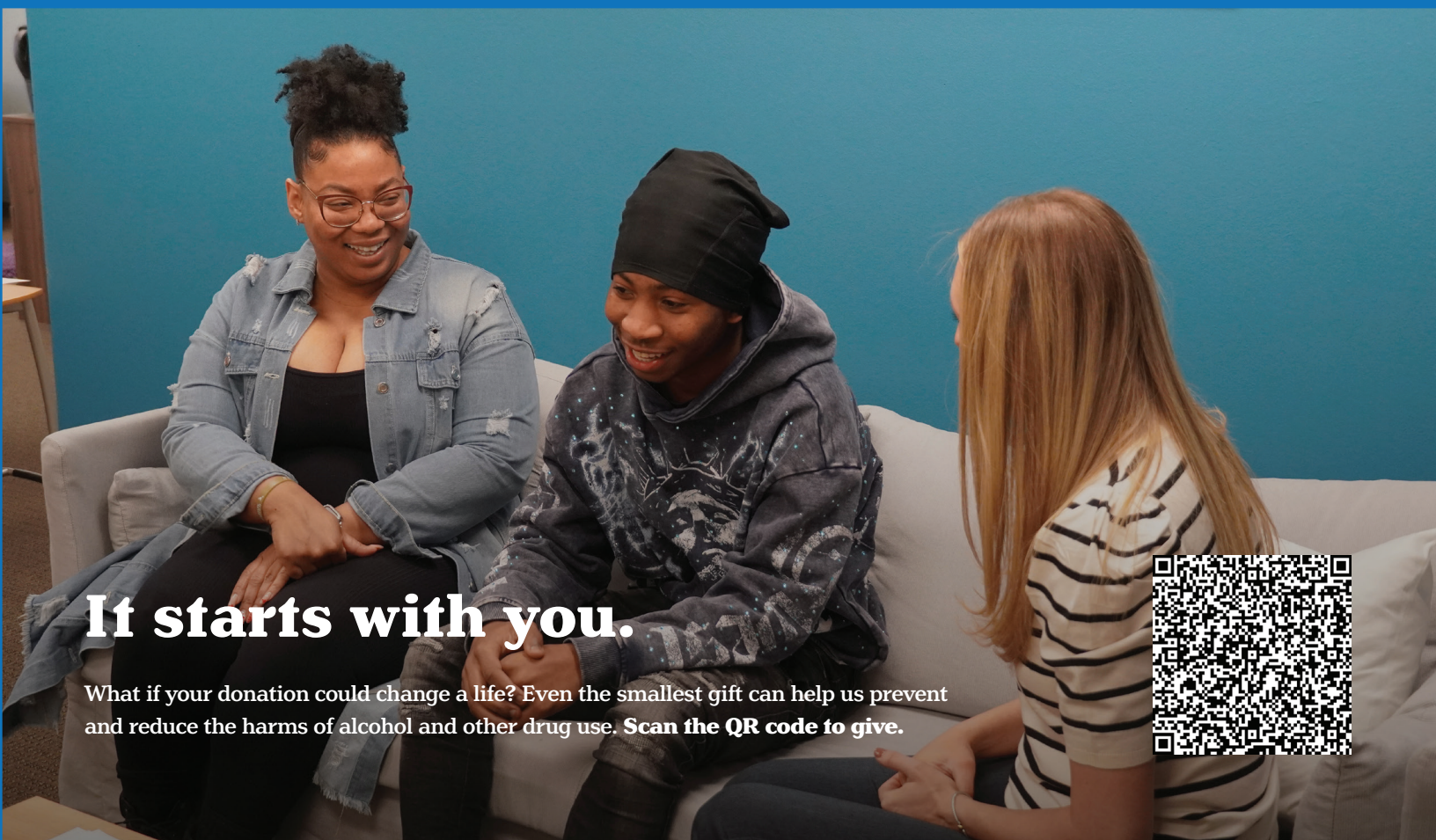
Federal Tax Bracket	32%			
	with YOP	*without YOP*	*with YOP*	*without YOP*
Investment Amount	**$5,000**	**$5,000**	**$2,500**	**$2,500**
Federal Tax Savings (32%)*	($800)	($1,600)	($400)	($800)
MO Tax Savings (6%)	($300)	($300)	($150)	($150)
MO Tax Savings YOP	($2,500)		($1,250)	
Out-of-Pocket Cost	**$1,400**	**$3,100**	**$700**	**$1,550**

**only 50% of YOP eligible deduction can be claimed on federal return*

Make your contribution of $1,000 or more to PreventEd. Be sure to indicate your desire to apply for tax credits on your donation (check or online from memo line). We will send you an acknowledgment and brief instructions on how to fill out the tax credit application.

**PreventEd advises you to consult your tax advisor to find out how much you can personally benefit from tax credit programs.*

For more information, contact Jenny Armbruster at jarmbruster@prevented.org



It starts with you.

What if your donation could change a life? Even the smallest gift can help us prevent and reduce the harms of alcohol and other drug use. **Scan the QR code to give.**

What Does Prevention or Recovery Mean to You?

By Austin Laves



Austin Laves
Communications Strategist

Sometimes, the most powerful impact is the one we never get to see. It can be the person who chooses to ask for help, the student who walks away with a better understanding of substance use, or the family that realizes they don't have to face recovery alone. To me, prevention and recovery are about creating those moments—moments that can change a life before a crisis happens or remind someone that a different future is still possible. At PreventEd, our work may look different from day to day, but at its heart, it is about connection, compassion, and giving people the knowledge and support they need to move forward. Recovery and prevention are not just outcomes; they are ongoing acts of hope, and every person we reach is part of that story.

But what does that look like in practice? Recovery and prevention can mean something different to every person we encounter, shaped by their experiences, challenges, and hopes for the future. The people doing this work every day have a unique perspective on what it means to create meaningful change—and their words offer a glimpse into the many ways prevention and recovery can touch a life.

> *"Getting into recovery helped me learn a lot about myself, which means I can help others learn to love on themselves."*
> *-Scott Hartman, Peer Support Specialist*

> *"[Funding]...keeps us in classrooms, keeps us in schools, and it keeps us in front of the youth. PreventEd can be a stable resource in schools and communities and stay in front of youth."*
> *-Joy Carter, Prevention Educator III*

> *"I didn't have much of a life before recovery...I can inspire my kids and be a great mom for my kids. I can be a good coworker in the community because of recovery."*
> *-Stacey Phipps, Peer Support Specialist*

These perspectives remind us that there is no single definition of recovery or prevention. Sometimes, it's about offering support when someone needs it most. Sometimes, it's about sharing information that changes the way someone sees themselves, their choices, or the people around them. And sometimes, it is simply about being there. "What Does Recovery or Prevention Mean to You?" is an opportunity to recognize those moments and the people behind them. Together, they reflect the heart of PreventEd's mission: to meet people where they are, create opportunities for change, and help build healthier futures—one connection at a time.