

# Creating Your Holistic Recovery Lifestyle

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When I began the journey of recovery with earnestness, I realized I needed to create a new way to live that would support ongoing healing and transformation. I realized the importance of living in a way where every activity and action I took would guide me in determining:

Is this experience enhancing or threatening my recovery?

Through this process, I was able to build a life of recovery in which the majority of my experiences were positive instead of negative, as they had been during my active addiction.

The process of building a network or support system that amplifies your feelings of connectedness to your personal recovery journey is known as building, "Recovery Capital" or, as it's known in the Native American Wellbriety movement, your "Healing Forest."

The important thing to remember is that this sacred journey is not only different for each person, but can also be different across each person's multiple stages of development.



The holistic self, *the whole of you*, is a composition of many different elements that come together in an integrated fashion:

**Mind + Body + Spirit + Emotion**

I moved out of my parents' house after achieving three and a half years of recovery, and went away to a graduate program to pursue my master's degree. This was a dream I thought had been taken away from me forever because of what I went through during my addiction: living on the streets of Detroit, getting arrested, spending time in jail, and being convicted of a felony.

**As soon as I showed up on campus I started to realize that I no longer had the support system I had built around me, and would have to start all over again.**

**The first thing I did was start talking about my recovery right away, in fact, I spoke about it on the first day of class when we did introductions. I did this so I could establish my identity and create a force field around me that would protect my recovery. In time, I started to meet other students who were either in recovery or allies of recovery, because of their experiences with family members affected by addiction. We started a community called “Students for Recovery” which became an independent study class and I received credit for organizing this group to create a more recovery-oriented campus. Soon, we created T-Shirts, and made friends with all the baristas at the corner coffee shop who loved our energy and our vision, and not only did they donate free coffee to our meetings, they would wear our T-Shirts every Friday! We started spreading recovery “like bees spread pollen” as New Hampshire Recovery Advocate Holly Cekala likes to say. We organized sober coffee struts anytime the school held a pub or bar crawl, as well as themed sober dances, and free smoothie nights at the local smoothie shop where we also built relationships with the supportive staff.**

**Our community went to meetings together, did yoga together, and held each other accountable for showing up for our recovery, for each other and for our academics. No matter what, our recovery came first. Because of the community of support we had built, we all graduated, protected our recovery, and left the campus better than we found it. We gave it the gift of an organized recovery community which became a formal collegiate recovery program.**

**That is Recovery Capital.**

### **Exercise 1**

**Start to create a landscape of people, places, and things in your community that inspire you to heal and empower you to create a life of wellness.**

- A. Take a moment and begin visualizing your dream “healing forest.” Close your eyes and think of the people, places, things, activities that make you feel happy, healthy, and safe.**
- B. List those people, places, things, and activities that came to mind. Now write them down alongside the corresponding side of the wellness wheel. The prompts below may help you think of a list:**
  - Where do you go to feel relaxed and peaceful? Where can you just be yourself and feel okay? Is this a friend’s house? A clubhouse? A place of worship? A coffeehouse?**

- **Who are the people that help you feel safe and supported? Who do you look up to? Who has provided you with guidance that helped you find your way? Where could you find more people who inspire you and treat you with gentleness and compassion?**
- **Do you play sports? Do you meditate? Does reading calm you down? Do you like to take walks in the woods or by water?**
- **How do you take care of your mind, body, and spirit in your community? Is there a donation yoga studio you can try? Is there a YMCA? Is there a climbing gym in your area? Are there meditation classes at your local library?**

### **The Healing Forest philosophy of the Native American Wellbriety Movement:**

**Creating a healing forest sums up the Four Laws of Change. It is the basis of the Healing Forest Model of positive community change and is expressed by the healing forest story (Simonelli, Spring, 1993) (White Bison, 2002).**

**Suppose you have a hundred-acre forest and in that forest there is disease or sickness. All the trees are sick. It is a sick forest. Suppose, then, you go to the forest one day and you take one of those sick trees and temporarily uproot it and put it under your arm.**

**You walk down a road and you put it in a nursery where there is good soil. Or, you take a young person. You take them out of the community and you put them in treatment.**

**So now you have this tree in good soil, and it gets healthy because it is getting sun and rain. It is getting well. It is turning green. You get this tree to be well and you take this well tree back to the sick forest. What happens if we take a well tree back to a sick forest? It gets sick again.**

**It means that we must actively heal the community and its institutions at the same time an individual works on his or her own healing from alcohol or drugs or other unwell behaviors. The individual affects the community and the community affects the individual. They are inseparable from the point of view of addiction recovery. Everything must be in the healing process simultaneously.**

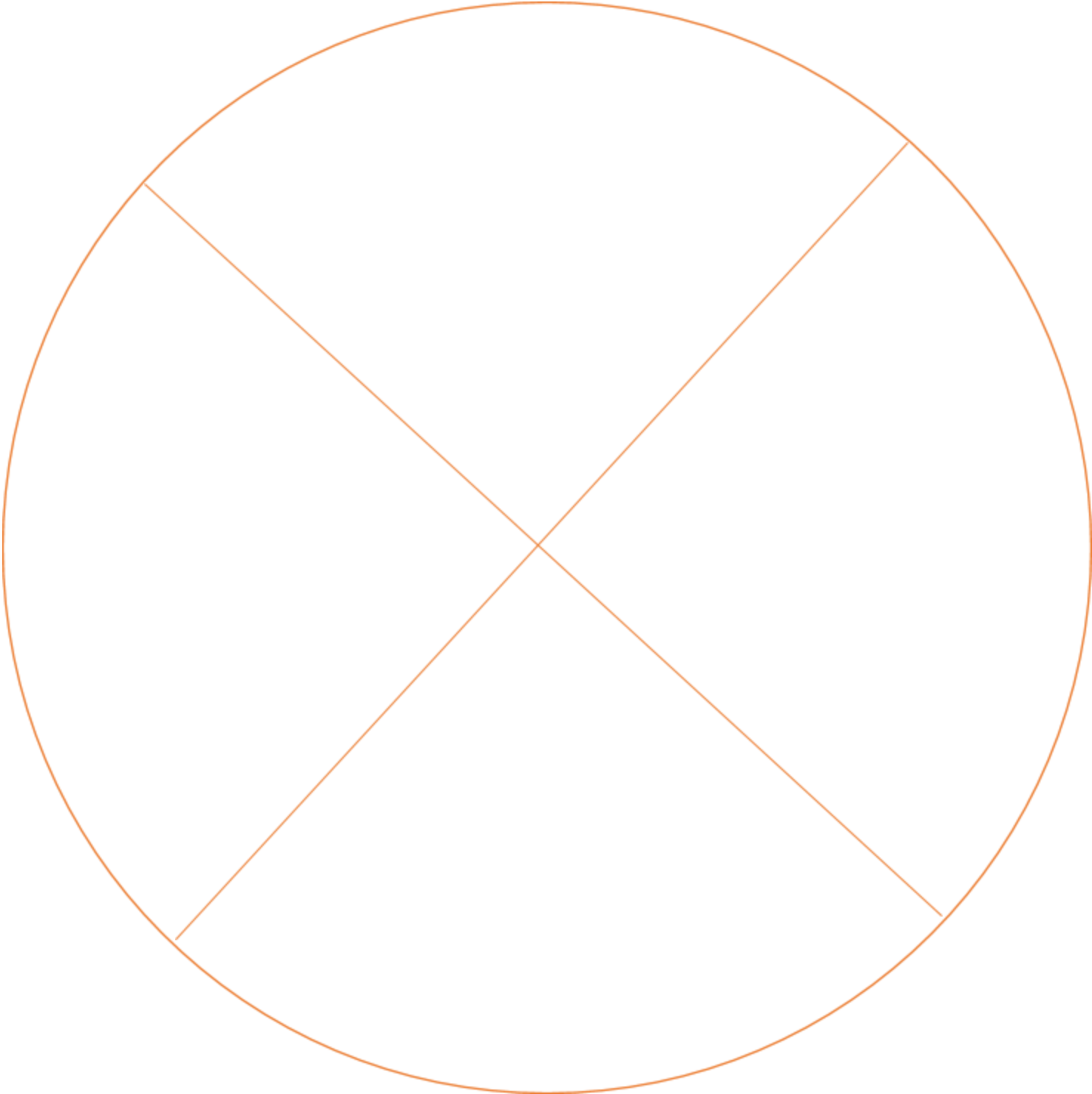
### **Exercise 2**

- A. An oak is a tall, sturdy, solid tree that provides safety and protection from the rain.**
- **List three examples of a person, place or thing that, like the oak, you go to in order to find a safe place where your recovery isn't threatened.**

- B. A field is an open space where a tree can stretch its branches and move about freely, unencumbered, in order to stay flexible.**
- **List somewhere you go where you can move and/or exercise to keep your body healthy.**

- C. Deer, birds and squirrels exist in harmony in the forest, they are kind and sweet; providing friendship.**
- **Who are the caring people in your family, school, or social network who support your recovery?**

Mind



Spirit