



For July, August, and September 2022, Vol. XIV

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### **Sometimes I need an oasis...** by Jeffrey Santo

When most people hear the word oasis, they think of a tropical island or a place in the desert with palm trees and a spring feel pool. But the word also has another meaning, something serving as a refuge, relief, or pleasant change from what is usual, annoying, difficult, etc. When I think of that definition, another word comes to mind, a respite.

First, I must apologize that this newsletter is late. We opted to push the release back one month for several reasons. We had finished, but the tone was not a positive one. We discussed the overturning of Roe and how it affected our country as a whole. We discussed the Fourth of July mass shooting and how mental health concerns are always brought up when gun control should be the conversation. The more I reread our work, the more disgusted and depressed I became. After stepping away for a couple of days and doing a lot of thinking, the newsletter in its entirety was scrapped, and we chose to talk about something else.

As an advocate, it sometimes feels like all we talk about is damage control. We fight against service and budget cuts, and we speak out with the hope that we can fix and improve an imperfect system. We try so hard to catch all the people we see falling through the cracks while fighting the stigma that prevented many of them from seeking the help they deserve... That being said, we are shifting gears and returning to a positive topic Peer Run Respite.

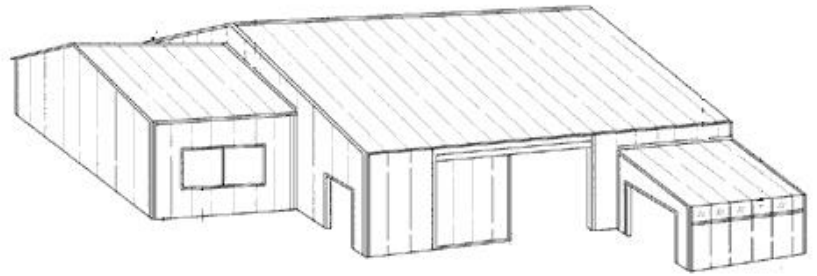


The folks at RIPPLE have been talking amongst ourselves and, as is our style, came up with something entirely outside the box. We want to introduce you to what we are calling the Oasis model respite.

So, what is this Oasis Model respite, and what makes it different? The most significant difference is the space needed for this model, a minimum of 5 acres. The amount of land required is to accommodate more than the house itself. Think

of the Oasis as a small, self-contained community environment. The house should be a single-story home with 4 – 6 bedrooms. A structure only one story high would allow easy modifications for accessibility. The house will function just like any other traditional respite. Warm and welcoming and a safe space to heal one's self.

The second building on the property would likely be a modular steel structure. These are cost-effective and easy to maintain, and its purpose would be to house the peer organization running the respite. One unanswered question is if a peer-run respite should appear in Connecticut, who exactly is running it? RIPPLE asked a different question, what would be needed as an organization to manage one ourselves? Having office space somewhere seemed logical. Steel buildings are easy to customize and are referred to as "multi-purpose buildings,"



This would serve as office space and become our organization's headquarters, saving money by not needing to rent space elsewhere. It would allow room for classes, in-person peer support groups, and community meetings. This would also act as an activity building for the respite.

During the community respite conversations, staff and staff compensation were addressed. One suggestion was that respite staff members' earnings should be similar to that of a peer bridger working with Advocacy Unlimited. After running some numbers, the respite would spend approximately 225,000 a year on four full-time staff members. This would include an annual income of 40,000 a year with a benefits package. Combined, we estimate the overall value of between 55,000 and 60,000 dollars a year.

We need to save money while at the same time ensuring peers are fairly compensated for their work. The Oasis model respite may have successfully addressed this issue. This idea comes from summer camp, where staffers traditionally came from all over the state and lived at the camp while it was open. Staff received free room and board while they were working. Could we use this model to our advantage? We believe so.



According to several online resources, the average cost for an apartment in Connecticut is now \$18,000 per year. When you add on utilities, you start heading north of 20,000 dollars. What if a person did not have to worry about the cost of housing? The Oasis model is a community-based environment; cabins for staff would be available as their living quarters. A "cabin" would be a small, efficient home based on a 900-square-foot design.

Since we are all people in recovery, staff members and anyone staying at the respite could share meals in a community setting if they chose. Buying food in bulk will allow the respite to save money in the long run and lower the cost of living of the staff at the same time.

The idea is to offer \$25,000 plus benefits, free housing, and utilities. This would put us at a base value of \$58,000 per year, which is in line with the standard of compensation we established. Taking part in the meal plan and eliminating a commute (less gas and vehicle maintenance) only add to that value. Plus, the idea of working and living in a supportive environment is appealing to just about everyone we have shared this concept.

This can all be placed on that 5 acres of land without feeling cluttered. There should still be plenty of room for things like a garden, outdoor meditation spots, a campfire area (where permitted), a small shed for maintenance items, and so on.

Is bigger better?

What would you say if I told you there is a Scout camp in North Haven, Connecticut? It is true, **Wah Wah Taysee** is located on Outer Ridge Road in North Haven. It sits on a small 16-acre parcel of land and has been operating since 1922.



What would be the advantage of having more land, and what could we do on that property? We would have the ability to host wellness events for up to 120 people at a time. Have weekend respite retreats where people could camp on the land, Up to 20 people (or four families). Allow space for forest bathing and meditations in an area away from the general public. Allow use of the room for clubhouses to have outdoor activities, picnics, and so on. It would also allow people staying at the respite to interact with other recovery community members if they wish.

Having a larger piece of land would also allow the opportunity for expansion. In the future, with infrastructure already in place, a Soteria model respite could be incorporated into the existing Oasis community. At the end of the day, there are just too many ideas to fit into a four-page newsletter. This is just a small sample of what the folks here at RIPPLE have been discussing. We believe that the Oasis model respite would not only be a success but will also serve as a test bed leading to an evaluation of what peer-run respites can become.

**Obstacles:** The current list is long and contains many unanswered questions. This is mainly because the Connecticut Legislature and the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services have not gotten their act together long enough to create a path forward.

- 1) Staff Qualifications:** The peer certification process is still up in the air. A Peer Support Task Force was established by Section 4-1a of the Connecticut General Statutes and Public Act 21-35. That sounds impressive until you discover government officials could not be bothered to even achieve the goal of making all the appointments needed for the said task force.

Yale and DMHAS have assembled groups, a subject matter expert panel, and an advisory council. Meaningful work on what peer certification should look like is just getting started, and the process will take six months or more.

- 2) Funding:** The money to get started and maintain the peer respite services in Connecticut was never established. Many peers, including the folks at RIPPLE, believe certified peer supporters should be able to bill insurance for their services. Here is a comparison between one of our support systems verses a traditionally credentialed treatment provider.



RIPPLE's late-night peer support meetings have met 270 times since September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Two certified Recovery Support Specialists co-host the meeting and have each spent 540 hours serving the community. That is 1080 hours, not including the time spent above and beyond our scheduled hours. We open the room when group members are having a rough time and request a safe space. We sometimes start early and end late going well beyond our established two-hour time.

Jeffrey went to a traditional talk therapist and ended his treatment because there was no forward movement in well over a year. His therapist's agency charged 242 dollars for a 45-minute session, which is just over \$322 per hour. If RIPPLE

could bill even half of that hourly amount, over 1080 hours, we would have generated over \$173,000 in revenue. It would help if you also kept in mind that we serve multiple people at once where a therapist is one-on-one. We know comparing these two services is not a perfect example.

The idea here is to help you understand that we can provide services that, if reimbursable by insurance, would give peers to be self-supported. We would not have to look for much outside funding beyond the respite startup. If a respite could bill \$500 a night, and if only three bedrooms were consistently occupied throughout the year, that would generate \$547,500. Adding events, classes, and other services would mean more incoming funds, even if the fee was an unspecified donation.

**The final obstacle:** The closed minds of those who resist change and the few who do not believe we can succeed. To them, it was once said, the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. This is our dream, and we have the determination to bring it to life.

# RockingRecovery.org

Recovery Innovations for Pursuing Peer Leadership and Empowerment (RIPPLE)



## Peer Hosted Late Night Support Group

Everyone needs to talk from time to time, and sometimes there is no one else around. Many people in recovery struggle at night when the warmlines are closed. If you are one of those people, we invite you to join us. If you live with depression, anxiety, PTSD, intrusive thoughts, or need help facing an addiction, you are not alone.

**Tuesdays, Thursdays, & Sundays  
10:00 PM to Midnight**

**These meetings will be offered on the  
Zoom platform and open to anyone  
who would like to attend.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89824032752>

**One tap mobile**

**+19292056099,,89824032752# US (New York)**

**Dial by your location**

**+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)  
Meeting ID: 898 2403 2752**

Powered by Peers....

And a  
lot of  
coffee!



**Please visit our website for more information:  
[www.rockingrecovery.org/zoom-meetings](http://www.rockingrecovery.org/zoom-meetings)**



