

# Letter to The Editor on Virtual Guided Support Groups

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**Cailyn Green<sup>1\*</sup> and Rodlyn R Hines<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Addiction Studies, USA

<sup>2</sup>Child and Family Studies, USA

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## Letter to The Editor

Thank you for taking the time to read our letter. We are writing to highlight one of the major obstacles to substance addiction recovery. My colleague and I made this discovery after starting an addiction support group to serve recovering addicts who work in the restaurant industry in Upstate, New York [1-7].

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was first created in 1935 by Bill Wilson after he identified having an addiction to alcohol [8]. These support groups were designed to be nonjudgement places where people could gather for support in their alcohol addiction [8]. Research conducted by Moos & Moos [5] demonstrates that there is a direct association between regular AA meeting attendance and better health outcomes. People who regularly attend AA meetings have better health outcomes in their formal clinical treatment [5].

Telehealth has changed dramatically since the COVID-19 global pandemic [3]. Even though healthcare providers have verbally expressed the need for telehealth for some time, the Covid-19 global pandemic necessitated our need for it. It took a worldwide emergency for healthcare and other sectors to understand and accept telehealth as a reputable technology [3]. E-Health and Telehealth are modes of providing clinical support in distance settings [4]. They have made it possible for clients to receive health care they otherwise would not have access to due to physical or geographical restraints [3]. Telehealth opened the door for support groups, such as AA, to develop online platforms with the purpose of reaching more people [6]. A support group is a group of individuals who share a common situation or experience and are seeking mutual aid [6]. AA now offers multiple platforms, and appointments for virtual support groups as Alcoholics Anonymous facilitators found the benefit in offering them in an online platform to reach more potential individuals seeking help [1].

We started and established a free virtual guided support group for individuals who work in the restaurant industry and are in addiction recovery or working towards recovery. The purpose of this support group was to provide a non-clinical support recovering addicts who are looking for informal addiction recovery support of any kind. Our virtual support group meets once every other week for one hour and is a non-judgmental platform that allows participants to be themselves and discuss any part of their addiction recovery challenges and successes. We connected with the New York State Restaurant Association officials who distributed our free virtual guided support group information with restaurants across New York state. We also went door to door and handed out flyers notifying local restaurants about this free support group. Despite all our publicizing efforts, there was a low attendance turnout. The lack of attendance suggests that the stigma surrounding addiction is still very real and current as relayed by Reynolds, Lehman, and Bennett [7]. According to Elliott & Shelley [2], recovering addicts do not want others around them to know they are recovering from substance addiction.

**\*Corresponding author:** Cailyn Green PhD, CASAC, Addiction Studies, Empire State College, Saratoga Springs, USA

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Thus, our target participants, the restaurant employees, may not want to disclose to their co-workers and others around them their addiction recovery efforts by attending this virtual guided support group. Despite the no-financial-cost and virtual location convenience our support group offers, potential attendees still weigh the high cost of addiction stigma as a consideration factor. Undoubtedly, stigmatization still plays a big role in the successes or failures of substance addiction recovery.

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