

# CASE STUDY

## Building a Culture of Addiction Wellness in the Workplace

When it comes to alcohol and drug addiction,  
**business as usual**  
**is over.**

\$215

billion in healthcare costs

\$273

billion in lost productivity

Nearly  
90%

of those suffering don't get help

### A Strategic Relationship

Groomer's Choice has always been an animals-and-people-before-profits company. It aims to solve problems in the company, pet industry and community.

It's no surprise that Groomer's Choice partnered with Face It TOGETHER to solve addiction in the workplace.

Face It TOGETHER is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to solving addiction by delivering value, marrying social mission with entrepreneurship. Headquartered in Sioux Falls, S.D., Face It TOGETHER's network of affiliates drives system change at the local level by building a chronic disease community model for drug and alcohol addiction.

While Face It TOGETHER understands that real change requires total community involvement — everything from criminal justice to faith to social services — a primary focus is on employers, as 70 percent of people suffering from addiction are employed either full or part time.

The costs of addiction to business are significant:

- An estimated 500 million workdays are lost annually due to addiction problems.
- Drug and alcohol addiction results in \$273 billion in lost productivity each year.
- Healthcare costs, turnover and work-related injuries are also all higher in employees who suffer from addiction.

To address this costly workforce challenge, Face It TOGETHER partners with employers to build cultures of addiction wellness and support in the workplace.

Learn more: [www.wefaceittogether.org](http://www.wefaceittogether.org) | [www.faceitsiouxfalls.org](http://www.faceitsiouxfalls.org)

*A partnership between  
Face It TOGETHER and  
Groomer's Choice*



#### About Groomer's Choice:

- Founded in 1997
- In its second generation of family ownership
- 50 team members
- Four distribution centers, delivering in one to two business days to 90 percent of grooming salons in U.S.
- Adding five team members annually

[www.groomerschoice.com](http://www.groomerschoice.com)

Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls, the organization's first affiliate, has partnered with more than 30 employers since it first launched the Workplace Initiative in 2009. One of the first companies to join was Groomer's Choice, a groomer service supplier. Groomer's Choice provides a wide variety of products to pet groomers all over the nation. From skunk odor shampoos to sapphire shimmer nail polish, Groomer's Choice strives to provide quality service to their loyal customer base in record delivery time.

Despite its rapid growth over the past few years, Groomer's Choice still has the feel of a family-oriented small business. Its 50 team members know each other's spouses and kids, and usually pets' names, too.

"Nobody's a number here," Tim Ryan, vice president of marketing and sales, said.

The partnership between Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls and Groomer's Choice came about when Groomer's Choice started looking for a solution to addiction in the workplace.

Shortly before the company learned of Face It TOGETHER, three Groomer's Choice employees resigned within a span of about six months. Because the company normally boasts a low attrition rate — something Ryan is very proud of — this was significant. It was only later that management learned that all three team members left due to addiction-related issues.

This prompted Groomer's Choice to look for a solution in earnest.

"We didn't feel very good about it because we didn't do anything to help them. They just sort of found their way out of the company and we couldn't do anything," Ryan said. "Addiction was an issue for us, and we had no idea what to do."

### The Workplace Initiative

Although addiction treatment was already a part of team members' health benefits, it was really only applicable to those who needed intensive 30 to 60 days of inpatient treatment — an approach Ryan called a "societal default." So for team members in need of different services, or with a loved one suffering from the disease, they were left with few options.

Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls is an "incredibly dynamic hub of resources," and is equipped to help people get what they really need, including navigation and peer support, Ryan said.

The Workplace Initiative is all about shifting the culture around addiction in the workplace. This includes reducing psychological barriers to seeking help, such as fear, providing access to confidential support and eliminating the shame and stigma surrounding addiction. Each Workplace Initiative is customized to the unique needs of a specific business.

Face It TOGETHER typically asks for an annual investment of \$40 per employee.

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– TIM RYAN, *Partner*

## Key elements

of the Workplace Initiative include:

- Workplace education and outreach programs
- Coordination with employee assistance, wellness and benefits programs
- Supervisor training and support
- Human resources support
- Peer recovery coaching and navigation to services (virtual or in person)
- Co-Workers in Recovery peer support program
- Outcomes measurement

### A Sound Business Decision

For Groomer's Choice management, investing in the Workplace Initiative came down to the numbers.

"One thing we've always understood is what it costs us to lose a team member, the total cost of attrition," Ryan said. "When you start to look at the metrics, and take a look at \$40 a head times 50 employees annually — a \$2,000 investment — we believe that it costs us around \$4,000 to turn over the lowest-paid position in our company. So if we lose that individual to addiction, we have two-to-one ROI by keeping them and by getting them well through this program."

From the beginning, Ryan said the company's management was on board with the Workplace Initiative, and had very few concerns about its implementation. The biggest "operational hurdle," as Ryan called it, was ensuring that each team member fully understood Face It TOGETHER and made a commitment to destigmatize addiction in the workplace.

"The number one priority is that the organization has full commitment from all team members," he said. "And that's the operational part that can be detrimental without everybody's buy in."

As a company that prides itself on the fact that there's no "inner circle," Ryan said, overcoming this challenge was simply a matter of starting with full commitment at the management level and devoting the right resources and time to launch the initiative. After the companywide announcement, there were several individual meetings to ensure that the Workplace Initiative was understood and utilized if necessary.

"We just made a commitment to it," he said. "And just like anything we've ever done, when we all are pointing in the same direction, things happen."

### Changing a Culture

Groomer's Choice has invested a total of \$5,400 in the Workplace Initiative since April of 2014. After a large kick-off event, there have been weekly lunch meetings every Wednesday for the Co-Worker in Recovery Program. Ryan has also participated in recovery coach training.

The program really comes to life as part of its routine human resource operations.

"For us it was a deliberate change in onboarding and a continual effort from a HR standpoint to let our team know that this exists," he said.

The Groomer's Choice kick-off event was attended by all team members, Ryan said. The event started with an introduction from the President and CEO Dan Dressen, who explained that Groomer's Choice felt strongly about the Workplace Initiative, that the stigma associated with addiction would be removed and that the company would continue to "work tirelessly in creating an environment where our team members, when needed, can come to us for help. In all cases," Ryan said.

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After that, David Whitesock, Chief Data Officer of the Face It TOGETHER national office, shared his personal addiction survivor story with the team.

"It was a sensory moment," Ryan said. "You could see, hear and feel a weight being lifted. Sensory moments inside of businesses are almost always organic and lasting culture builders."

In total, the kick-off lasted about two hours and concluded after several people from Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls stayed and visited with Groomer's Choice team members over lunch.

The Workplace Initiative is a shift in culture as much as it is a means of accessing resources. Education combating the stigma of addiction is an important step to ensure companywide support and acceptance; the goal is to treat addiction the same as any other chronic disease, such as diabetes or hypertension.

At Groomer's Choice, this involved several meetings to ensure that each team member understood the Face It TOGETHER message.

Before the Workplace Initiative, there were no proactive efforts in the Groomer's Choice workplace around addiction. Now there are people who attend the Co-Worker in Recovery Program lunches every week. This is a peer support program that trains team members as resources to serve as a "safe landing place" in the company. This means that those suffering from addiction, or with loved ones suffering from addiction, have someone to talk to if needed.

"The individual who participates in our Co-Worker in Recovery is viewed as a leader and a risk taker and is somebody who adds a lot of value to the organization," he said. "So it's totally 180 degrees from the status quo societal definition of somebody struggling with addiction. It's gone very well."

Overall, Ryan said the retention, mind and morale of team members has improved since the company's partnership with Face It TOGETHER.

The Workplace Initiative proves that management is committed to helping and caring for its team members, he said.

"When you say you care about the team, you actually do. And you have solutions that are in employees' best interests professionally and personally," Ryan said.

### **Saving Costs, Saving Lives**

Since the Workplace Initiative kickoff in 2014, the company is aware of three Groomer's Choice team members who have directly taken advantage of the resources at Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls. One employee in particular continues to actively participate in recovery coaching.

While the number may seem small, it's not far off national rates. It's estimated that about eight to nine percent of the population suffers from the disease of addiction. With three of its 50 team members seeking services from Face It TOGETHER, Groomer's Choice falls at six percent. It's also possible that others received services but didn't report to their employer.

## A Competitive Advantage

The Workplace Initiative has especially impacted the hiring of new team members at Groomer's Choice.

"We believe that our benefits package and our compensation are in line with other progressive companies in town. When we bring up the fact that we were one of the first small businesses to partner with Face It TOGETHER, and why we did it, I believe it changes a candidate's perception of our company," Ryan said. "And so it's been great from a hiring standpoint."

The Workplace Initiative, in addition to being an incredible way to attract talent, is an added personal and professional benefit to the Groomer's Choice team, he added.

"The new hire orientation and Co-Worker in Recovery are very effective means to expose both new and tenured team members to our partnership with Face It TOGETHER," Ryan said.

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More importantly, it's hard to quantify improvements to a life and the impact of broader culture change in a company.

Ryan likes to tell the story of one team member in particular. A top-four executive, this individual was an integral leader for the company.

Shortly after the Workplace Initiative launched, the executive came forward and shared that his son was suffering from addiction, and he had been contemplating resignation in order to take care of him.

Since then, he has utilized Face It TOGETHER's services, and his son is now in recovery.

"I'm very proud of that," Ryan said. "And Face It TOGETHER is the reason why that situation played out the way it did."

Ryan estimated that the resignation of this particular team member would have cost the company upwards of \$50,000. ***So their \$5,400 investment to date in Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls has delivered a 10-to-one ROI for just this one employee.***

"If we didn't partner with Face It TOGETHER, and come forward about addiction to our team and say, 'We're the kind of company that's going to help you or your family,' that individual would have resigned, and we would have never known why," he said. "That's terrifying to me. That would have been devastating to our company."

Because Groomer's Choice has only 50 team members, coming forward for help, even with the support of a company invested in the Workplace Initiative, may be difficult for some. Despite the initial deterrent, Ryan said the company's closeness is usually a positive thing.

"I would be crazy to believe that it's not a bit of a barrier, being such a tight-knit family," he said. "But it's also advantageous. We feel comfortable enough having those conversations with individuals."

If he were to try and convince another business leader to invest in the Workplace Initiative, Ryan said his argument would be equal parts emotional and logical.

"What I would say to them is, we've seen a positive ROI from a corner office standpoint. But more importantly, it continually adds things to the culture of the business in a very positive manner," he said.

A Workplace Initiative investment also demonstrates that the company's team members are truly cared for, Ryan added. The program is designed to augment traditional EAP services, which are usually short-term in nature.

"Having a solution for addiction in the workplace proves time and time again that the team is cared for and protected," he said. "And that's what I believe is all anybody wants from a personal and professional standpoint."

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## One Man's Story

### A Weight Off Jon's Shoulders

Jon Giblin has been a part of the Groomer's Choice manufacturing team for about a year and a half.

Now 40 years old, Giblin said he spent half his life drinking. After getting a DUI and starting court-ordered treatment, he realized he was ready to take his recovery seriously and commit to getting well.

"It just wasn't cutting it for me at my court-ordered treatment. I needed something else," he said. "I needed my own personal drive to really take over my recovery process."

Giblin said he first learned of Face It TOGETHER during his new employee orientation at Groomer's Choice. He'd been mulling it over for some time before he made the call after a bad day last December. He was on his way to a bar when he set up his first recovery coach appointment — a powerful moment for Giblin because he recognized that he needed to speak with someone else about his recovery.

Almost every Monday since, he and Dave Jansa, a Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls recovery coach, meet for one hour.

Now, Giblin said the two are "pretty chummy." Though not all of their coaching sessions are traditional ones — they've volunteered at golf tournaments and promotional booths together — Giblin said Dave's reinforcement has been a great resource. He thinks of Dave as more of a life coach.

At first, Giblin said he kept his recovery to himself at work; he wanted to conquer it on his own. When his first court date came around, he told his boss he had a doctor's appointment. After the judge moved it back until he finished aftercare treatment, Giblin told his boss the real reason he needed more time off.

"It felt so liberating to let him know," he said. "It was just all this weight off my shoulders."

At the end of that workday, Giblin's boss told him about his own past struggle with addiction. He recommended that Giblin check out Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls, where Giblin had already been going for almost two months.

Once Giblin became more open about his recovery, he said support has been ongoing from his supervisors and fellow team members at Groomer's Choice.

"Some of the upper management, Tim and his brother, have been out there and they've been like, 'Hey, you know we know what you're going through and we can tell in your work how well you're doing, so keep it up,'" he said. "So I'm getting positive responses from everybody."

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— JON GIBLIN, Coat Care Artisan

Giblin said a lack of support at work would be difficult, and would make it easy to stay stuck in harmful and unhealthy behaviors. In addition to being more productive and efficient at work, he feels an immense amount of gratitude and loyalty towards Groomer's Choice.

"I'm so much more devoted at work since they did help out in my recovery process," he said. "I mean I just feel whole and a sense of gratitude to them."

That gratitude is one of the main benefits of the Workplace Initiative in Giblin's mind. He also pointed to the "intricate" and varied work done in manufacturing, and said it takes one to two years for someone to be fully trained on the company's many products and procedures.

"I gotta think it's more economical for the company to be able to retain its investment," he said.

Giblin considers himself to be more direct, open and a better leader now. He said if an employer invests in the Workplace Initiative, they're going to reap the many benefits that come from a grateful and efficient team member.

"My productivity, my leadership, the additional responsibilities that I'm willing to take on, I'd say my production outflow has doubled if not more. I can't see a downside to the Workplace Initiative," he said. "You're helping someone get better, you're helping someone take control of his life."

### **Corporate Citizenship**

Since Giblin has started his recovery, his involvement in activities outside of the workplace are changing. He's closer to his family now, and even though he still frequents some bars to compete in dart tournaments, the environment is different.

"It's what you make of it," he said of the community.

For Ryan, who's lived in Sioux Falls his whole life excluding the few years he was in college, the community is a great place to run a business and raise a family.

"I would argue that Sioux Falls has as many bright minds per capita as any place in the United States," he said. "You're able to build a wonderful professional network in Sioux Falls while being able to offer your family a safe, affordable and diverse place to live."

Ryan is also in recovery and now serves on the Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls board of directors.

The positive implications for the community are just one more reason to invest in the Workplace Initiative, Ryan said.

"(Addiction is) one of our society's number one health crises that nobody seems to be finding solutions for. But it also directly impacts Sioux Falls, and directly impacts the lives of every employee we have. So we feel like it's our duty, both

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as business owners and employers, to solve addiction in our workplace," he said. "Collaboratively, we're doing a wild disservice to the community if we're not a part of the Workplace Initiative."

According to the Sioux Falls Annual Report 2015, more than 2,500 clients were served in the Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls center, more than 3,000 recovery support calls were made and about 6,000 people were touched via community outreach. Additionally, 69 percent of all coaching clients were employed full or part time.

**Face It TOGETHER's main focus is tracking outcomes. Among 2015 recovery coaching clients in Sioux Falls:**

**44%** improved their emotional health

**33%** increased hopefulness

**41%** improved physical health

**A strong majority of clients also agreed that Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls did a good or excellent job providing support:**

**86%** helping them get additional services

**96%** providing individual help and support

**95%** helping them understand that addiction is a treatable and manageable disease

**92%** respecting their cultural identity

In addition to welcoming the benefits of the Workplace Initiative, Ryan also appreciates the way in which Face It TOGETHER is willing to adapt and innovate.

"They don't have all the answers. They're willing to listen. They're willing to change and adapt to communities," he said. "They're willing to change and adapt to individual workplaces as long as it supports the mission."

*And, speaking of change, according to the annual Sioux Falls report, 94 percent of the 2015 recovery coach clients said their lives had changed for the better since the start of their coaching.*

Learn more about the Face It TOGETHER Workplace Initiative at [www.wefacetogether.org/join-us/employers](http://www.wefacetogether.org/join-us/employers).

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## Using data and technology to power peer support

Face It TOGETHER's peer recovery coaching is powered by a digital health platform that enables its coaches to engage clients remotely (by phone, text, email or video) and tracks outcomes. It allows the organization to extend reach and improve access to help clients better manage this chronic illness.

**axis**<sup>TM</sup>

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