

---

# FACE IT TOGETHER SIOUX FALLS



**INNOVATION****STORY**

NO. 9

**STORY**KRISTIN  
DONNAN  
& MORGAN  
MERCER**LOCATION**SIOUX FALLS,  
SD

Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls has a revolutionary, highly collaborative, community-based approach to helping people with drug and alcohol addiction get well. In contrast to traditional treatment methods, Face It TOGETHER uses a non-clinical, peer-to-peer addiction management support approach.





**LEADER**  
KEVIN KIRBY

**BUDGET**  
\$250,000–\$499,999

**GEOGRAPHY**  
SOUTH DAKOTA,  
NATIVE NATIONS

**YEARS ACTIVE**  
FOUNDED IN 2009

**FACE IT TOGETHER SIOUX FALLS GETS THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION WELL. THE ORGANIZATION IS GROUNDED IN A REVOLUTIONARY, HIGHLY COLLABORATIVE, COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO ADDICTION CARE.**

## BREAKTHROUGH

Of the 23 million people struggling with addiction, only 10 percent find help through established treatment options. Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls wanted to reach the other 90 percent, so it launched a revolutionary, peer-to-peer addiction management model that redefines recovery through a suite of expanded services that match the chronic, ongoing nature of the disease.

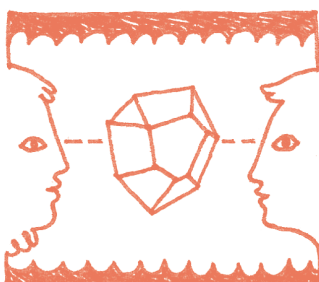
Through town hall meetings, Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls educated a cross-sector group of individuals about addiction and then set them loose to brainstorm bold and unprecedented ideas to challenge the status quo. The resulting concepts created a stronger recovery program and led to financial backing from new funders.

## THE BRAIN TRUST

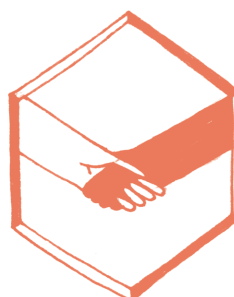
## IDEATION FREE FROM HIERARCHY

Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls flattens its organizational hierarchy to allow ideas from staff at all levels to surface and improve its model of care. It hires employees straight out of its recovery program, because it knows that firsthand experience makes its staff experts at finding solutions to fix traditional treatment systems that often fail.

### CREATES A SHARED VISION



### EMBODIES COLLABORATION



### WELCOMES IDEAS



**A NEW TAKE  
ON ADDICTION**

Looking at Kevin Kirby, it would be easy to assume he had it all together. He ran companies and nonprofit organizations; he married an accomplished woman; and he lived in a beautiful house with happy kids. But on the inside, Kevin experienced a completely different reality.

“I was dying. My life was a living hell,” he says. “I thought I was crazy. The only thing that gave me any relief from my daily charade was alcohol. I didn’t want to drink; I had to drink.”

Eventually even the alcohol quit working, leaving Kevin feeling hopeless, helpless and suicidal. He finally went to treatment for alcoholism. “I was shocked by what I learned. I wasn’t crazy. I wasn’t unique. I didn’t suffer from depression. I didn’t have an anxiety disorder. I had a treatable, chronic disease called addiction.”

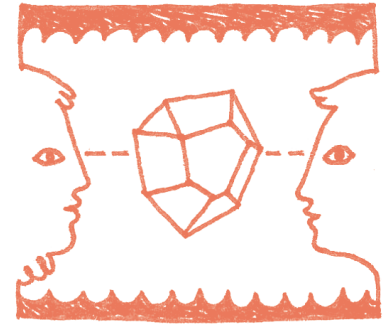
---

Kevin spent the next two years fighting through the beginning of his recovery with numerous trips to detox, the emergency room and several treatment facilities. He came close to death more than once, and even tried his hand working on a farm and a monastery.

“My experience with this disease has taught me how little it really has to do with drinking alcohol,” he says. “I had a drinking solution to my living problems.”

Across the country, nearly 23 million people struggle with addiction. Established treatment options only reach about 10 percent of those people; Kevin wanted to reach the other 90 percent. He started by opening a transitional home for those recovering from addiction, but that wasn’t enough. Along with his board of directors, Kevin started to shift his lens toward becoming the top advocate for recovery in the country.

As a co-founder of Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls, Kevin set out to overhaul the traditional approach to recovery that falls back on short-term solutions and puts a Band-Aid on the problems stemming from addiction. He replaced that system with a revolutionary, community-based model that builds an architecture of ongoing support around those seeking recovery. The key to his method is incorporating what the medical community has known for years, but what society has had trouble embracing: that drug and alcohol addiction is not a failing or weakness of character, but a chronic and manageable disease.



### CREATES A SHARED VISION

When Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls first began, it set out to accomplish an audacious goal: to reform the addiction care system. To shake up traditional thinking, it pulled experts from the community into its organization, including business leaders and those directly affected by addiction. These connections and this type of firsthand knowledge provided invaluable insight. Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls set its sights on transforming the city of Sioux Falls into a community that understood and treated addiction like a chronic illness, much like you would think about cancer or diabetes. The organization also changed the language it used, referring to those who got well as survivors. Its data-driven, peer-to-peer model helped Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls fill in service gaps in the community at no charge. Today, its peer addiction management coaches provide free services to clients and their loved ones. Team members also regularly visit all local addiction providers to extend the post-treatment continuum of care to patients.

**THE BRAIN TRUST****Stigma. Fear. Money.****Inaccurate information about**

**how addiction works. All of these barriers prevent people from linking up with the help they need to manage their disease.**

In 2009, Kevin and his team led a series of innovative town hall meetings to brainstorm new ways to fix the broken field of addiction recovery and treatment. What they came up with was Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls, a cutting-edge model that provides a continuum of services to guide people through the phases of recovery at no cost.

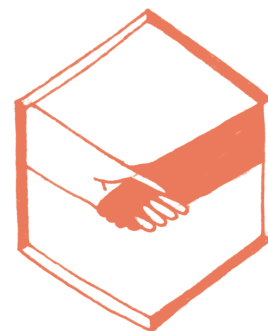
While state and federal funding support most addiction and recovery programs, the founders of Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls considered that paradigm unsustainable and decided to cast a wider net. First, the team identified employers in the area that would support its work. Then Kevin and his board looked to public officials, nonprofits, community foundations, the social service arena and other national experts in addiction recovery. “We wanted representatives of all sectors to come,” Kevin says.

Over the seven-month town hall process, Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls facilitated discussions between these groups. Anywhere from 30 to 50 people showed up to each meeting. “Our ideas were bold and unprecedented,” says Kevin. “We believed that if we got enough brain space from leaders, we could reject the status quo and find creative ways to solve our biggest health and societal challenge. We described the problem as we saw it, and then watched the process unfold.” It worked. Armed with statistics, attendees started asking their own questions—and demanding solutions.

The employer community immediately recognized that despite providing wellness programs, nearly 10 percent of its employees still struggled with untreated addiction. For that, companies paid the price. Nationally, businesses pay out nearly \$250 billion a year for addiction, or \$1,700 for every employee who doesn't seek help. The employ-

ers participating in the meetings saw a solution, though. Unlike other recovery organizations across the nation, Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls sustains itself in large part through private-based revenue. While it receives a handful of grants and donations, the bulk of its funding comes from member employers that pay \$40 per employee to join. In return, companies receive workplace education, tools that measure outcomes and training support. In exchange, Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls saves businesses money by decreasing healthcare costs, improving safety, increasing productivity and reducing the amount of time employees miss work due to addiction.

By 2014, Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls had reached 31 employer partners. The collaborative approach from which Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls first launched continues to serve as the backbone of the organization and sustains its visionary work. With its partners, Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls battles against established treatment systems that are resistant to change even though only seven percent of those first-time patients enter into recovery. Since 2009, Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls has served over 8,000 people with a distinct range of addiction management services not offered elsewhere. In 2014, 62 to 82 percent of Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls clients reported being in recovery a year after starting with the organization. Those kinds of rates convinced the local chapter of United Way to invest financially in Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls for the benefit it adds to the community. Those percentages also helped Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls convince two competing healthcare providers to support its unique approach to addiction.



### EMBODIES COLLABORATION

While addiction treatment centers typically focus on managing the physical symptoms of the disease, Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls diverges from the status quo by also serving as a resource for healthcare providers interested in more holistic and sustained strategies to manage addiction. It has forged partnerships with both Sanford Health and Avera Health to expand access to recovery support. Minnehaha Drug Court has also developed a partnership to use Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls for community members going through its processes.

Image: Avera Health





## IDEATION FREE FROM HIERARCHY

Becky was in her early thirties when she realized if she didn't do something soon, she would die from drug and alcohol use. After relapsing several times, she felt scared to make the call to Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls to start down the path to wellness again. Despite that, she picked up the phone. Two years later, she became a volunteer coach with the organization.

Peer recovery coaches are a cornerstone in Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls' work and let the organization do something other providers often can't: offer ongoing emotional and practical support for survivors of chronic addiction. Coaches dig in with clients to understand how addiction affects a patient's health, relationships and work, and to understand the barriers and opportunities that could help or hinder recovery. Coaches like Becky use role-playing, scenarios and simulation exercises to strengthen recovering clients' skills and then tailor individualized, long-term management support plans for them.

For many staff members, their first introduction to Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls was as someone suffering from addiction. Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls makes a habit of hiring these individuals and leaning on their expertise to brainstorm more effective ways of treating addiction and helping survivors manage recovery. Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls' collaborative, flat organization style gives all of its employees an equal voice at the table, and means the organization views their clients not just as survivors, but as an essential piece in managing the recovery of others suffering with addiction, too. The group's non-hierarchical structure is based on the belief that good ideas can come from any corner of the organization. That attitude creates spaces for new ideas to surface that push



### WELCOMES IDEAS

The spirit of social entrepreneurship is a way of life for Face It TOGETHER employees, and innovation often comes directly from team members. Staff are encouraged to ask difficult questions, take a systems approach to problem-solving, connect stakeholders to address challenges in new ways and apply tools proven in other sectors to the problems of addiction. Failure isn't a problem at Face It TOGETHER, but aiming too low is. Building this kind of culture starts with its hiring practices. The organization looks for individuals who love to learn, challenge the status

**“TRADITIONALLY A LOT OF PEOPLE THOUGHT RECOVERY WAS JUST ABOUT GETTING SOBER, BUT WHAT WE KNOW IS THAT’S JUST THE FIRST PHASE. YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO WORK ON ALL THE LIFE STUFF THAT HAPPENS UNDERNEATH BECAUSE ADDICTION IS A DISEASE OF BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT.”**

**-JULIE SCHOOLMEESTER, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
FACE IT TOGETHER SIOUX FALLS**

the organization’s work forward and help more people struggling with addiction move toward recovery.

When Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls first started, it didn’t have any tools or technology that could reliably capture data and share information among its partners. “We could tell you the last day someone had a drink, but that doesn’t fully explain the wellness experience,” says David Whitesock, the chief data officer at Face It TOGETHER, who is also in recovery. “We asked, ‘What data do we need to capture? What instruments can quantify and measure it?’”

To answer that question, David led the development of two innovative tools that measure addiction wellness: the Recovery Capital Index and the AXIS Addiction Management Platform. With them, the organization can track trends, improve patient wellness and reduce the costs related to treating addiction. The tools allow coaches and other providers to identify best practices, measure multiple dimensions of wellness and recovery, track clients’ progress and tailor support to fit each individual. Since few addiction or recovery organizations use data and technology to measure outcomes in this way, Face It TOGETHER is setting a new, national standard in the industry.

In a former life, David’s addiction to alcohol may have defined him. But now, like Kevin and the countless other team members at Face It TOGETHER Sioux Falls who are in recovery, he’s using that past life to redefine how we understand and treat the chronic disease of addiction that still affects 23 million people.

quo, think critically and embrace change. It also seeks out good communicators who are willing to be vulnerable. These characteristics develop trust between employees, which allows them to challenge one another and hold each other accountable without fear. Staff are passionate change makers and believe that a solution to addiction is inevitable. This mindset keeps them undeterred when they encounter intolerance to change in others. Team members don’t see institutional entrenchment as a barrier, but rather a riddle to solve.





Images: FITSF Stakeholders and Interior