



Peter Bourque

Counseling Centers of New England

Location: Avon, CT **Impact on Local Community:** Providing counseling services to individuals coping with addiction and other issues

“The state of Connecticut and the country are facing an addiction epidemic of epic proportions. I need to be able to run a business to help fix this.”
~ Peter Bourque



As the Owner of the Counseling Centers of New England, Peter Bourque works tirelessly with psychiatric patients suffering from a range of conditions. For him, that passion draws upon the challenges he faced early in life.

Peter grew up in Long Island, the son of a working class family--his father was a chef, and his mother worked for a bus company. He struggled in school, committing truancy to feed progressively worse drinking, and partying and drug habits. At 17, he dropped out of school to work in the family cafeteria business; he worked decent hours, made decent money--and looking back on it, earned important business skills--but realized he had a problem with alcohol addiction.

At 16, Peter’s family discovered a counseling center that changed his and his family’s life. The center helped him and his family deal with a family member’s addiction and introduced him to Tina Calabrese, L.C.S.W., who planted the seeds for his own eventual recovery from addiction. Unfortunately, however, the counseling center feel victim to changes in reimbursement due to laws and HMO’s. Eventually, Peter’s family could no longer afford treatment.

Several years later, at age 24 and after years of battling his own addiction, Peter discovered that Calabrese had opened Heat and Soul Community Counseling in North Babylon, NY. It was then he was reconnected with the therapeutic process that saved his life and so many others.

He became sober, and this experience gave him the resolve to go back to school and get a GED. While pursuing that GED, Peter’s grades fluctuated from A’s to D’s. He kept being relegated to resource rooms for people who couldn’t read, when finally a nurse practitioner from his counseling center asked: “Have you considered that you might have ADHD?”

After taking medication for his condition, Peter read a book cover-to-cover for the first time. He made an incredible transformation, from struggling to complete his GED to finishing nursing school, working in pediatric intensive care units (ICUs), getting Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees while working, and gaining his nurse practitioner license in 2012.

That year, Peter opened his doors with just one office in Avon, Connecticut.

Four years later, he has over 1,300 patients, two offices, and fields hundreds of calls a week, all while never having run any advertising. “I searched for the best clinicians I knew and tried to convince them to join,” Peter said, putting his faith in skilled practitioners to deliver the best care, and thereby driving word-of-mouth customer referrals.

For all his success, the Counseling Centers of New England remained vulnerable to market conditions, the whims of big insurers, and the challenges of implementing new technology. In particular, the recent industry-wide switch to IC-10, a new billing system, resulted in over 80% of his claims being denied in December, versus just 2% in March; for a small business, losing a few months’ worth of cash flow can be devastating.

Despite bringing in nearly a million dollars of revenue this year, Peter has had to turn to credit cards for payroll after being declined by multiple local banks. In the end, “other than my uncle, my loan officer at Accion was the first person to help,” Peter said. After receiving a loan from Accion, Peter had the breathing room to invest in applying for state grants, and put his business cash flow in a reliable, consistent state. His loan was made possible by support from The Hartford through its Communities with HART program, which supports entrepreneurs like Peter who are having a positive impact in their community.

Peter’s personal history and the challenges he’s overcome have forged a passion for helping others the way that therapist and counseling center changed his life some 17 years ago. It’s with genuine anguish that he discusses the specter of addiction in New England, including over 3,000 overdoses in Massachusetts alone last year. “Without a business, I can’t fix this,” as Peter often reminds himself, “I need to be able to run a business, because if I don’t have that, I can’t do any of this.”

The state of Connecticut and the country are facing an epidemic of epic

proportions and Peter feels CCNE has the ability to make a huge dent.

“I’m grateful that organizations such as Accion exist to help support my dream so that I can continue to change lives.”