



### **Robin Lavorato, Executive Director Essex Health and Wellness Recovery Center**



Robin Lavorato is the Executive Director of the Essex Health and Wellness Recovery Center located at St. Michael's Medical Center in Newark, New Jersey. Robin also has a full-time career with New Pathway Counseling Center where she is the Director of Adolescent Services.

Robin was nominated and chosen to receive the Outstanding Nonprofit Advocate Award for her volunteer work with Essex Health and Wellness Recovery Center.

In June 2018 Robin launched the Opioid Task Force in Essex County to bring awareness to the opioid crisis in Essex County. Essex County had and still does have the highest number of suspected opioid overdose deaths in New Jersey.

Robin organized the first meeting in June 2018 at The Restoration Center in Newark, a homeless shelter. Eighty people joined the in-person meeting. Robin continued to hold monthly meetings in different towns throughout Essex County for the next year. In September of 2018 she held the first Opioid Awareness Walk in Essex County. Over 220 people walked from Newark to West Caldwell on Bloomfield Avenue in an effort to spread awareness and save lives.

In 2019 Robin registered the non-profit Essex Health and Wellness Recovery Center. St. Michael's Medical Center in Newark donated space for the Recovery Center. The Recovery Center has been dedicated to Mrs. Joanne Diglio, the mother of a son who lost his life to an opioid overdose. Joanne was in attendance at the first Opioid Task Force meeting and became a passionate volunteer. Sadly, Joanne lost her battle with cancer in January 2020. In October 2019, the second Opioid Awareness Walk was held, with over 400 people walking.

The First Anniversary Celebration was held June 2019 honoring Special Agent in Charge Susan A. Gibson, head of the New Jersey office of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

The Second Anniversary Celebration was not held due to COVID-19. The Third Anniversary Celebration was held June 2021 honoring Sergeant Charles Cunningham and the Vice Crime Unit of the Montclair Police Department.



The Third Opioid Awareness Walk was cut-back due to COVID-19 but was held October 2020, with over 200 walkers. The Fourth Opioid Awareness Walk will be held October 23, 2021.

The Essex Health and Wellness Recovery Center serves individuals and their families who are suffering with Substance Use Disorder. Robin receives referrals from law enforcement agencies, healthcare providers, social service agencies, friends and family members. The Recovery Center has Robin and other Recovery Guides (some New Jersey Certified Peer Recovery Specialists) respond to the needs of the individual – it could be placement in a detox or treatment center, introducing someone to 12 step meetings, assisting in securing housing, transportation, healthcare, clothing or food.

The Essex Health and Wellness Recovery Center has trained law enforcement, school staff and others in administering Nalaxone, the life-saving drug that reverses an opioid overdose.

The Essex Health and Wellness Recovery Center assisted a group of Montclair High School students create a documentary called “Not My Choice.” They also presented at Rotary and Kiwanis meetings. They have held events for Essex County Drug Court participants and their children. Essex Health and Wellness Recovery Center has participated in street outreach to the homeless, volunteered at food distribution events, and donated food to first responders during the COVID-19 lockdown. They have attended various community awareness fairs and other events sharing their services.

Due to a lack of a financial history it has been difficult for the Essex Health and Wellness Recovery Center to secure grant funding. Their small funding includes fundraisers, a comedy night, recovery flag sale, the Opioid Awareness Walk and Anniversary Celebration ad journals.