With the school year drawing to a close, CSR students and staff pushed to complete a major collaborative artwork that has been 14 months in the making. While this project isn't entirely finished it is remarkably close and will be completed over the summer for unveiling in the fall.

Back in March 2016, students were brainstorming ways to personalize our meeting space and decided that we needed a mural on the long wall at the back of the room. This notion generated a variety of themes around personal growth and struggle in recovery. Over the next few weeks we hashed out several working sketches of what this mural might look like. Employing my background as a visual artist and art teacher, I set about combining student concepts into a rendering that remained as faithful as possible to the original ideas.

In the days when CSR was located in the basement of the School of Social Work, students customized their space by painting directly on the walls. Unfortunately, that meant the image couldn’t be removed when CSR moved to Bellmont Hall. To avoid that outcome should CSR change locations in the future, we constructed the mural in three 4x4’ lightweight sections. The sections were then prepared with several coats of heavy white primer, and after the final images were unanimously approved the real work began.

Starting from a 1:1 ratio design, students gridded the panels and carefully outlined the images. As the drawing took shape over time, we began to add acrylic color in washes and glazes with an eye toward light and depth in the final work. In fact, the entire piece is an exercise in layering, with elements taking shape in stages, and the push and pull of shapes evolving organically as different hands worked them over time.

The themes represented are ones of new hope and cautions of the past. In ascending the 12 rungs of a ladder in the foreground, this person is leaving behind dark isolation in exchange for the promise of a new life. The sun and moon cycle are a nod to the power of time to heal as well as different phases of life. As a physical barrier, the wall can have multiple meanings. It is at once the boundary between addiction and recovery, between self-will and humility, and between life and death. Playing out this conflict of inner forces are the archetypal light and dark wolves of the Cherokee tradition, prompting the viewer to ponder “Which one will win?” The answer is: the one you feed.

When I came to UT I was already on a downward spiral. I had recently turned 21, and had begun to drink daily. With the added stress of law school and loneliness of moving to a new city, I started to black out regularly. It affected not just my school performance, but also my relationships with friends and family members, and my physical and mental health.

I realized I needed to stop, but I couldn’t figure out how. After trying unsuccessfully to quit on my own, the counseling center referred me to CSR. Reluctantly showed up, expecting not to fit in and not to find any solutions. Instead, I was greeted by a supportive community of people my age who were going through the same problems as I was. From then on, I attended at least two meetings a week. I built connections with the other students, and learned that I could be happy and stress-free without resorting to substance use.

I just graduated and am constantly amazed at how much better my life is since finding CSR. I wake up every day happy to be alive and excited for the future. I have rebuilt friendships and relationships that I thought were beyond repair. I ran my first 10k with another CSR student. And I am happy to say that last semester’s grades were the best I have ever received—not just in law school, but in my entire life.

I hate to say goodbye to CSR, but am incredibly grateful for the solid foundation for recovery that I have built in my time here. I leave behind a legacy, with CSR’s help, I have the tools and self-awareness I need to not lapse back into unhealthy habits and addictive tendencies.

Rachel G. - Juris Doctorate

SPRING 2017
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
THE CENTER FOR STUDENTS IN RECOVERY
Dear CSR Community,

Thank you so much for being a part of another great academic year at the Center for Students in Recovery! This year was marked by some exciting new developments, and we have more coming in 2018. The first-ever College Day for high school seniors in recovery was held in conjunction with our Sober Tailgate in September. In October we held the first meeting of the re-formed CSR Council. The Seminar on Addiction and Recovery (SOAR) began in the fall. We partnered with Housing and Food Services to offer the first ever housing community dedicated to sobriety and peer support in the UT Austin residence halls. The Healthy Lifestyles Living Learning Community will begin in Fall 2017 and we hope it will grow into the go-to choice for incoming freshmen in recovery.

We had a busy year, and we don’t plan to rest much during the summer! This year we will be sending a crew of four to the national conference for the Association of Recovery in Higher Education (ARHE) and the Association of Recovery Schools (ARS, the national organization for recovery high schools), held together in Washington, D.C. Thanks to the UT System, many of our counterparts at other UT schools will be joining us there, as well. Please mark your calendars for July 10 – 12, 2018 where we will be co-hosting the national conferences for ARHE and ARS in Houston with our friends at the University of Houston.

Another exciting development coming in 2018 is the Pop Up Institute on youth and emerging adult substance misuse and addiction. The Pop Up Institute initiative was started by the Office of the Vice President for Research to encourage interdisciplinary connections and community involvement. The Institute will be led by School of Social Work professor Dr. Lori Holleran Steiker, a member of the CSR Council and a long-time faculty advisor for CSR. CSR is a primary collaborator along with our partners at the Counseling and Mental Health Center.

Other principal participants in this Institute are various departments within the Dell Medical School, Operation Naloxone, the School of Pharmacy, the Center for Health Communications, the School of Social Work, the Waggoner Center for Alcohol and Addiction Research, University Health Services, and Undergraduate Studies. We are also welcoming non-UT collaborators from Harvard Medical School, Vanderbilt University, Communities for Recovery, Travis County Juvenile Justice, Texas Health and Human Services, and Facing Addiction, the national advocacy organization that collaborated on the landmark Surgeon General’s Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health.

We will be spending the summer preparing for next year and laying the groundwork for hosting these two exciting conferences in the summer of 2018. You can also catch CSR at the American College Health Association’s annual conference and the Texas Behavioral Health Institute this summer, both held in Austin.

Thank you for making these developments possible!

Sincerely in gratitude,

Sierra Castedo