



## Recovery, Healing and Change: Why I Love My Work

by Michelle Olem



I am a clinician specializing in addictions and trauma.

I love my work.

I am incredibly grateful to all the clients who have trusted me enough to share their stories. I've had the opportunity to learn most of what I know about trauma, addiction and recovery from incredibly courageous survivors.

Yes, I did say they were the most important part of my schooling.

I did go to college and learned all the theory and approaches. And yes, all that information is in my software... but my inspiration comes from my clients.

I started working in the field twenty-plus years ago. I worked at Mount Auburn Prevention and Recovery Outpatient Clinic for fifteen years. I was fortunate to get my training from a supportive and caring environment with wonderful colleagues and clients from all walks of life.

After moving to Cape Cod, I commuted to Cambridge for two years. When the commute became a little too challenging (after a very snowy winter), I left Mount Auburn.

I spent the next three years working with a grant to help women who had domestic violence, trauma and substance abuse histories build safe, healthy lives. There I met courageous women who wanted to build better lives for their children.

Now I have a private practice, based on what I've learned in the last twenty years. This is what I know. Each client is an individual who will follow her or his own path to recovery at his or her own speed. Predetermined formulas do not work.

I often tell my clients that when you grow up in a dysfunctional environment, it's like going to the Fun House of Mirrors. All the reflections are distorted. The challenge is to develop a support system that accurately reflects who you are.

Recovery, healing, and change happen through connections. The therapist helps the client feel safe enough to develop trust to let go of some defenses.

Difficult life experiences push people to develop layers of defenses and belief systems that are no longer helpful or useful.

I see the purpose of the therapeutic alliance as taking down those defenses and belief systems, and to reconnect to the core person. It is a process of discovery and reconnection to our true self.

My biggest reward is watching my clients become empowered and develop a healthy sense of self.

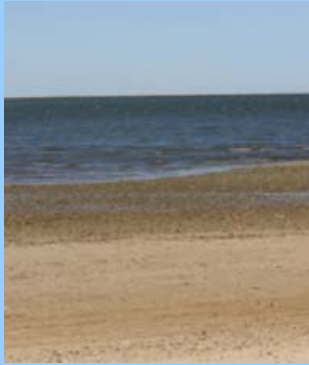
Once in a while, an old client will reconnect with me to let me know how they are doing. Recently, a young client from Cambridge sent me an email. He said he never forgot when I said to him, "The purpose of recovery from substance abuse is not just to stay abstinent but to get a Life."

With great pride, he shared that he had his own business, was clean, and enjoying life.

Now you know why I love my job!

Learn more about my practice at [www.olemrecovery.com](http://www.olemrecovery.com)

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Michele Olem, M.Ed., LADC1 is a clinician specializing in addictions and trauma. She has over 20 years of experience working with clients in Cambridge and on the Cape.

Michele moved to Wellfleet, her dream place, six years ago. She is the chair of the Wellfleet Cultural Council.

She has a private practice with offices in Orleans and Yarmouth. Her website is [www.olemrecovery.com](http://www.olemrecovery.com).