



Bio for Susan Stader

Walking The Healing Path

Although Susan Stader barely clears five feet, she casts a long shadow. Perhaps that's because she never stands still. Always in motion, she pushes herself—and those she serves—to take the next step, the one that leads to transformation and growth. Her career is a testament to a lifetime of brave steps along a healing path she first discovered as a teenager.

Like many teens, Susan once had no idea what her purpose was or how to find it. At 15, she entered a therapeutic boarding school where she spent three years learning how to reclaim her self-worth. It was her first step toward discovering the calling that would define her life.

Mentors and friends at the school helped Susan see her own potential. Through a mix of tough love and unwavering encouragement, they guided her to identify her values, establish boundaries, and remain true to them. “Many showed me what true love looks like,” Susan recalls. “Nurturing was the key to recovery for me.”

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That insight became the foundation for her life's work.

Susan's early career began as a Waldorf teacher in a therapeutic residential community for children with disabilities in Pennsylvania. Inspired by founder Rudolf Steiner's holistic approach, she next traveled to England to study anthroposophical counseling at Emerson College. Soon afterward, she was invited to work at a therapeutic boarding school in Arezzo, Italy, where she spent three years counseling teens struggling with mental health and substance use. It was there that her purpose crystallized: helping others find freedom from addiction.

Raising two children while pursuing her education, Susan steadily advanced toward that goal—earning a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's in community counseling, and certifications in counseling and clinical addictions. Each step prepared her for the most significant leap of all.

In 2006, Susan received a call that several residential recovery houses in Asheville were about to close. The need for transitional living was urgent. Drawing from her own experience in therapeutic communities, she knew the role that accountability, structure, and supportive housing played in recovery. Taking a leap of faith, she leased the houses and founded Next Step Recovery.

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What began with a handful of residents has now supported well over 1,000 men in reclaiming their lives. Today, Next Step offers both transitional living and an intensive outpatient program (PHP/IOP) for adult men in early recovery. Residents stay an average of 90 days—often longer—receiving counseling, relapse-prevention education, case management, and guided sober adventures, all while working, studying, or volunteering.

The program is structured and deeply compassionate. Staff and peers alike provide accountability and encouragement. “I’ve been through several treatment programs and houses,” shares one resident. “Next Step Recovery is different. Here, you really feel loved and cared for. I felt that from day one.”

Susan, known affectionately as “Mama Bear,” sees nurturing as central to healing trauma. “Men often don’t know what to do with their trauma,” she explains. “They have a hard time nurturing each other. That’s where I can help.”

Her philosophy is straightforward: addiction is not a moral failing but a disease—and one that can have a hopeful outcome with the proper support.

As a nonprofit, Next Step Recovery depends on donations, grants, and resident fees. But Susan remains committed to keeping the doors open to those who need it most. “Our residents often come to us spiritually bankrupt. Addiction has taken nearly everything—jobs, relationships, self-worth. We help them build those back, step by step.”

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For Susan Stader, every step has mattered. From her teenage years in therapeutic boarding school to her decades of counseling and leadership, she has walked her own healing path to light the way for others. And at Next Step Recovery, she continues to remind her community that recovery is possible, one step at a time.

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