

# Advocacy....with anonymity

There are tens of thousands of men and women across the UK who want to speak out about their Recovery experiences while honouring the principles that have worked so well for so many. This answers questions that people who want to speak out are asking as they think about how to share their experiences and make it possible for others to get the help they need

*"I'm feeling better in my sobriety and I want to reach out and help others who are still in active addiction or struggling in their Recovery because of discriminatory policies and practices.*

*I hear the terms 'advocacy' and 'anonymity' all the time, but I'm not sure what they mean or how they apply to me. What can I do to help alcoholics and addicts who have not yet Recovered? How can I increase the public's understanding of addiction and Recovery?"*

**You can speak out** publicly without compromising the principles of the Recovery programme that you take part in. By doing so, you will be reaching out to alcoholics, addicts, their families - providing them with new hope – and educating policy makers.

If you too are in long-term Recovery, or are a family member and want to speak out about what it means to you and your family, this leaflet aims to help you feel more comfortable with how you can do this.

## **Anonymity...**

The principle of anonymity was established to ensure a safe place for people to Recover and keep focused on their primary purpose of helping alcoholics and addicts to Recover.

At the level of the media, anonymity is the cornerstone principle of many twelve-step groups and Recovery programmes. It is an essential element because it gives the Recovering person the protection he or she needs from scrutiny.

Anonymity also plays a crucial role in establishing personal humility, which is a cornerstone of the spiritual foundation of Recovery.

Here are the traditions that lay out the principle of anonymity as it applies to many twelve-step groups.

**Tradition 6:** "A [twelve-step group] ought never endorse, finance or lend the [twelve-step group] name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose."

**Tradition 10:** "The [twelve-step group] has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the [twelve-step group] ought never to be drawn into any public controversy."

**Tradition 11:** "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

This means **you can speak about your own Recovery and advocate for the rights of others**, as long as you don't involve the twelve-step group by name.

**Q: It sounds like we can be advocates as long as we don't mention our twelve-step groups or Recovery programmes. Isn't that still harmful?**

A: Absolutely not. There is a long and rich tradition of people in Recovery speaking out as advocates. It's one way to let our friends and neighbours put a face on recovery.

**Q: Why does the Recovery community need to organise and advocate for policies that support long-term Recovery?**

A: To make Recovery a Reality for even more people across the UK and beyond, we must become visible. You are the living proof that there are solutions to alcoholism and addiction. By adding your voice we can change the focus to the solution: treatment and long-term Recovery.

A significant proportion of people in the UK have friends or family members who have struggled with addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Together, we can break down the wall of shame and stigma that keeps people from finding their path to long-term Recovery.

We can work for greater access to treatment and Recovery support and make it possible for future generations of children and families to build communities that are healthier for all of us.

**Q. If I recovered through Alcoholics Anonymous or another twelve-step group, how do I talk about my Recovery in the media without referring to AA or my mutual support group?**

A: The suggestion is that you talk about your Recovery in a way that doesn't mention any particular pathway. For example:

*"I'm (your name) and I am in long-term Recovery, which means that I have not used (insert alcohol or drugs or the name of the drugs that you used) for more than (insert time).*

*I am committed to Recovery because it has given me and my family new purpose and hope for the future, while helping me gain stability in my life.*

*I am now speaking out because long-term Recovery has helped me change my life for the better, and I want to make it possible for others to do the same."*

Or you can simply say:

*"I found Recovery through a twelve-step group, but our traditions do not permit me to name it in the media."*

If you are an Al-Anon member, you can simply say:

*"I'm a family member in Recovery from a relative or friend's alcoholism."*

**Q: How can I get involved?**

A: There are many ways that you can speak out and get involved. Each person supports Recovery in his or her own way. You can:

- ❖ Get training and tell your recovery story
- ❖ Join a Recovery advocacy organisation in your community
- ❖ Educate yourself about the issues
- ❖ Volunteer and provide Recovery support to people returning to your community from treatment or prison
- ❖ Provide financial support for Recovery advocacy in your community
- ❖ Write letters, phone or visit your local councillors

**Q. How do I tell my story?**

A. Your personal story can be very powerful. The way that stories are shared among those in Recovery may not resonate with the general public because frequently they focus on periods of active addiction.

Practice and training can help you learn the most important points to make and the language that will get your story across. Focus on Recovery and on barriers that prevent people from getting treatment and sustaining their Recovery.

Here are a few pointers for you to use when you talk about your Recovery and what it means to you:

**Q: Where should I speak out?**

A: Start by talking with one other person, a friend or neighbour or a small group. As you become more comfortable, expand your audience.

As you gain more experience, you may want to speak publicly or privately with your local council or other public officials. You can coordinate your advocacy work with others.

**Q: How can I advocate if I am uncomfortable speaking publicly?**

A: There are many ways to support Recovery. You can write letters to your local newspaper responding to an article; or submit an opinion piece on a topic like making Recovery housing available to people newly in Recovery.

Write to or visit your elected officials, or invite them to activities that you are involved in. Your very presence may break some stereotypes they may hold. Policy makers often relate best to the real, human stories of their constituents and your story will help them understand how policies impact people who are rebuilding their lives.

**Q: How do I start?**

A: As with most activities in our lives, you will need to get comfortable by seeking support and guidance from people you trust.

If there's not a Recovery community network or organisation in your area yet, it may make the most sense to join together with a few others and map out a strategy for getting started.

If you have any Questions please contact the Faces and Voices of Recovery UK.

Email: [info@facesandvoicesofrecoveryuk.org](mailto:info@facesandvoicesofrecoveryuk.org)  
Website [www.facesandvoicesofrecoveryuk.org](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecoveryuk.org)  
Telephone 07727 255 808

Our Stories Have Power