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Advocacy with Anonymity

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Recovery
Advocacy Toolkit
MAKING OUR VOICES COUNT

How can we stand up for our rights while respecting the anonymity tradition of our 12-step groups?

Here are some questions that may help you think about how you can tell others what recovery means to you and your family.

Question: It sounds like we can be advocates as long as we don't mention our 12-step groups. Isn't that still harmful?

Answer: Absolutely not. There is a long and rich tradition of people in recovery speaking out as advocates. It is one way to 'put a face on recovery'. In fact, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob were on the founding board of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (NCADD) America's oldest advocacy group. Bill Wilson remembered this important event in a 1958 Grapevine article:

"Then came Marty Mann (NCADD founder). As a recovered alcoholic, she knew that public attitudes had to be changed, that alcoholism was a disease and that alcoholics could be helped. She developed a plan for an organisation to conduct a vigorous plan of public education and to organise citizens' committees all over the country. She brought the plan to me. I was enthusiastic."

Question: Why does the recovery community need to organise and advocate for policies that support long-term recovery?

Answer: To make recovery a reality for even more people across the UK we must become visible.

We are the living proof that there are solutions to alcohol and drug addiction. By adding our voices we can change the focus from the problem to the solution - treatment and long-term recovery.

An estimated 2 million people in the UK are struggling with addiction. This is an estimate as no one organisation can agree a true figure. Relying on statistics based on people who attend treatment does not reflect the number of people who are keeping their own addiction, or those of friends and family members, secret.

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.

“Part of the understandable hesitation many of us in the fellowships have with ‘coming out’ about our personal recovery, is the worry that we will somehow be in breach of the spiritual principles that both bind us to each other, and help us maintain the freedom we - and many thousands of others - have found in those principles.

I have recently begun to describe myself as a man in long term recovery. Those who know what I mean, know what I mean - and I am able to maintain my part of the foundations, whilst continuing to carry this message to those who need it.”

Simon Jenkins, Mutual Aid Practitioner and Consultant

Question: If I recovered through Alcoholics Anonymous or another 12-step group, how do I talk about my recovery without referring to AA or my mutual aid group?

Answer: The American Advocacy organisation, Faces & Voices of Recovery, has developed a language that people can use to talk about their own recovery that doesn't mention any particular recovery pathway.

*"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 the number of years that you have been in recovery)** years.*

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."

You can also simply say, *"I found recovery through a 12-step group, but our traditions do not permit me to name it in the media"* or if you are an Al-Anon member, you can simply say, *"I'm a family member in recovery from a relative or friend's addiction."*

"I'm an advocate because I know anonymity doesn't mean invisibility. And because I would like to see a day when people suffering with alcohol and other drug problems are treated as sick people who need to access solutions to getting - well rather than morally bad people who need to learn how to be good."

AnneMarie Ward. Founder, Faces and Voices of Recovery UK

Question: How can I get involved?

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

You can:

- ⇒ Contact FAVOR UK for recovery messaging training
- ⇒ Volunteer and provide recovery support to others
- ⇒ Become a member of FAVOR UK
- ⇒ Set up or join a Recovery Advocacy Organisation in your community
- ⇒ Educate yourself about the issues
- ⇒ Provide financial support for recovery advocacy
- ⇒ Use social media – get connected!
- ⇒ Look out for up and coming Recovery Advocacy Campaigns

Question: How do I tell my story?

Answer: Your personal story can be very powerful. The way that stories are shared in 12-step meetings may not resonate with the general public because frequently they focus on periods of active addiction. So try to talk more about your time in active recovery!

Practice and training can help you learn the most important points to make and the right language to 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:

- ⇒ Make it personal
- ⇒ Keep it simple and in the present tense, so that it's real and understandable
- ⇒ Help people understand that recovery means that you, or the person that you care about, are no longer using alcohol or drugs. You can do this by saying "long-term recovery", talking about stability and mentioning the length of time that you or that person have been in recovery
- ⇒ Talk about your recovery, not your addiction
- ⇒ Help people understand that there's more to recovery than not using alcohol or drugs, and that a major part of recovery is creating a better life

Question: Where should I speak out?

Answer: 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 service providers, drug and alcohol teams or other public officials. You could also help co-ordinate your advocacy work with others.

Question: How can I advocate if I am uncomfortable speaking publicly?

Answer: There are many ways to support recovery. You can use social media tools like Twitter, Facebook and in2recovery to raise awareness of recovery in your community. You could also think about writing letters to your local newspaper.

You could write to or visit your local councillors or MP 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 real, human stories of their constituents and your story will help them understand how their policies impact people who are rebuilding their lives.

“Sadly, at the moment, the mainstream media only seems interested in sensationalised stories about addiction. There is little or no interest in long-term recovery.

But the good news is the way people gain information is changing - in 2013, 36 million adults (73%) in Great Britain accessed the internet every day. This is our chance to create an alternative media, where we highlight the activities of recovery communities and show that we are real people who can and do recover.

For too long those most affected by alcohol and other drug problems have been absent from the public policy debate. We need to use whatever tools we can to become a constituency of consequence..”

Michaela Jones, Recovery Advocate

Question: How do I start?

Answer: As with most activities in our lives, you will need to get comfortable by seeking support and guidance from people you trust. See if there is a recovery community organisation in your area, and if there isn't one it may make the most sense to join together with a few others and map out a strategy for getting started. That way, if you are new to public speaking for example, you can practice with each other and then move out into the community.

The most important thing is getting started. Here are some common sense things to think about as you move forward:

- ⇒ No recovering person should advocate publicly if his or her sobriety, job or financial well-being will be put into jeopardy
- ⇒ A recovering person should think extremely carefully about advocating at the level of public media unless he or she has two years of recovery and training in recovery advocacy
- ⇒ You can disclose your identity and speak as a person in long-term recovery so long as your membership in a particular 12-step programme of recovery is not revealed

Here is another thought from Bill Wilson to keep in mind as we proceed together:

“So let us hasten to work alongside those projects of promise to hasten the recovery of millions who have not yet found their way out. These varied labors do not need our special endorsement; they need only a helping hand, when, as individuals, we can possibly give it.”

“I am a person in long term recovery who has also worked in the drug and alcohol field for many years. By being open about my own recovery, whilst maintaining my anonymity, I can contribute fully in discussions about treatment and recovery at a local and national level.

Commissioners, Service providers and the wider community can benefit so much by hearing from those who are in Recovery. Our shared experience can facilitate positive change. As an advocate for the Recovery Community I know my voice can provide a voice for others.”

Deb Drinkwater, Recovery Advocate

Anonymity

The principle of anonymity was established to assure 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, is the cornerstone principle of many 12-step groups. It is an essential element because it gives the recovering person the protection he/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 12-step groups.

Tradition Six

A [12-step group] ought never endorse, finance or lend the [12-step group] name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

Tradition Ten

The [12-step group] has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the [12-step group] ought never to be drawn into any public controversy.

Tradition Eleven

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.

Tradition Twelve

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

So, this means that ***you can speak about your own recovery and advocate for the rights of others***, as long as you do not involve the 12-step group by name.

There are tens of thousands of men and women across the UK just like you who want to speak out about their recovery experiences while honouring the principles and traditions that have worked so well for so many.

This booklet 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.

Here's what one person has to say:

"I'm feeling better and better in my sobriety as I work a twelve-step programme and am grateful for the blessings it has brought me.

I want to reach out and help others who are still in the throes of 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 12-step programme you are involved in. By doing so, you will be reaching out to alcoholics, addicts, their families - providing them with new hope – **and** educating policy makers.

Useful Contacts

Faces & Voices of Recovery UK

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e-mail: info@facesandvoicesofrecoveryuk.org

Faces & Voices of Recovery (America)

<http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/>

MANYFACES1VOICE.org

<http://manyfaces1voice.org/>



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