

Documentary: Addiction is a disease, not a moral failing

Posted: Thursday, February 20, 2014 7:33 pm | Updated: 6:32 am, Sat Feb 22, 2014.

By MICHAEL MACAGNONE STAFF WRITER



Judge Donald Nasshorn talks with fellow panelists Diane Rosati, Executive Director for the Bucks County Drug and Alcohol Commission, Aaron Kucharski, recovery community coordinator for the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence in New Jersey and Lena Marder, the Bucks County Coordinator of Recovery Support Services for the Council of Southeast PA. The Council of Southeast PA held the panel following a showing of "The Anonymous People" documentary Wednesday night.

Society should spend more time and effort treating addiction as a disease, rather than a moral failing, according to a documentary and panel put on by the Council of Southeast PA Inc.

About 150 people came to the showing of "The Anonymous People" documentary Wednesday evening at the Bucks County Community College's Newtown Township campus.

Panelist Aaron Kucharski said he is also in long-term recovery and over the past three years has learned a lot about the ways different individuals can express their stories and become advocates for people with addictions. Kucharski serves as the Recovery Community Organizer for the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence in New Jersey.

"It's the nation's number one public health crisis, and if 23 million people have found a solution, we should celebrate their stories," he said.

"People in recovery are honestly the most talented, amazing people that I have ever met, and if we can help more people get well and get there

people give back to their community tenfold."

The film chronicles the history of advocacy for people with addiction issues, from the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous in the 1930s, through the "Just Say No" era of President Ronald Reagan's administration through to the present day. It also features advocates for people with addiction speaking out rather than remaining anonymous.

The film, and the panel afterward, emphasized treating addiction as a disease rather than a moral failing. The film also encouraged the audience to advocate for people with addiction, and not to remain silent and entirely anonymous.

Beverly Haberle, the executive director of the council, said the viewers frequently make personal connections with the stories shared in the film.

"Every time we have shown the movie I have someone come up and say that for the first time I feel good about being in recovery," she said.

The film includes interviews with actress Kristen Johnson, former NBA player Chris Herren and former Miss USA Tara Conner, among others, talking about their addictions.

After showing the film, the panelists took questions from the crowd about how to deal with addiction, how society viewed addiction and how people might best support others.

Panelist Lena Marder, the Bucks County coordinator for Recovery and Support Services run by the council, emphasized the treatment of addiction as a chronic, rather than acute, disease. She said support services will work best by offering constant support and attention, rather than treating addiction sufferers only when they relapse.

“Our recovery centers are in our communities to help people learn how to deal with the disease of addiction,” she said.

The panelists also pointed out that media accounts, such as the coverage of actor Phillip Seymour Hoffman’s death of an apparent drug overdose earlier this year, emphasize the drama of relapse and death over the difficulty of keeping clean.

Tracey Colby, a volunteer through the Council of Southeast PA, said she thought the film raised good points about advocating for people with addiction and wanted to learn more.

“I still want to learn more about how to reach out to lawmakers and try to change things,” she said.

Michael Macagnone 215-345-3166; email: mmacagnone@calkins.com; Twitter [@awisefool](https://twitter.com/awisefool)