

Good news about drugs and alcohol?

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Kate Fratti

Hey, finally some good news about drug and alcohol addiction, and you're invited to hear it Wednesday night.

Doors of the auditorium at Bucks County Community College's main campus in Newtown Township open at 5:30.

The message will be delivered at 6:30 p.m. by way of a film.

The event is free, free, free, as all good news should be. Still, a goodwill offering will be accepted so the good news continues to spread.

The news? There's living, breathing, smiling proof that, for all the increased abuse of drugs and alcohol across the nation, people who struggle with addiction can get better, do get better and stay better. Millions of addicts learn to thrive.

Yes, devastating news like the relapse of actor Phillip Seymour Hoffman, found dead of a heroin overdose after years of sobriety, is unsettling. A reminder how serious addiction is, how important it is never to underestimate its pull.

But it is possible for people to move beyond the addict label and onto lives worth living, if only the rest of us will withhold the ugly judgment and be more willing to provide the resources it takes to provide people with the education, tools and support to manage this complicated and chronic disease.

Remove the stigma, and people are less reluctant to seek help for their disease.

That's what addiction is, after all. Disease. It may be simpler to see it as bad behavior — cheaper to pass judgment than approve the use of expensive resources to treat it. But addiction is no more bad behavior than diabetes.

No one asks, "Why is she doing this to us?" when a family member's blood sugar drops to dangerously low levels. Or when she has a migraine. Or an asthma attack.

Why does the addict relapse? Because she's still sick. Because his brain chemistry is changed. Because you can't send a person with an active addiction off to rehab for 90 days and then receive him back home without any other change.

Relapse is part of active addiction. It is not part of recovery.

On Wednesday, you're asked to sit in with your neighbors, your legislators, educators and other community leaders to see a documentary film about 23.5 million Americans living in long-term recovery. People thriving. To see the movie trailer, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqoEtUn0Agw>

The message is hope. A look away from the problem and onto solutions.

The film is called "The Anonymous People" and features the voices of some very successful people who put it all out there — honest talk about their struggle, their recovery, and their daily vigilance. It's about passing on what they know for sure, so others can be saved.

The goal is to shift our collective thinking away from the penalizing and stigmatizing those with alcohol and other drug problems. Why? Because punishment and shame don't help, said Bev Haberle, executive director of the Council of Southeast Pennsylvania.

She's been in long-term recovery 42 years, and is a force to be reckoned with. Not even diagnoses of diabetes or breast cancer derailed her recovery, because she had the tools to "manage" her addiction like she manages the diabetes and like she managed the cancer.

Disease doesn't define her. Instead, Haberle is best known for leading the local recovery movement. For consulting about recovery across the country.

The scary news she shares is that Philadelphia has the distinction of having the highest grade and cheapest heroin in the nation. The fastest growing populations at risk for addiction are people under 23 — and those 60 and older. Seniors, in this culture of "better living through chemicals," are apt to be ingesting multiple prescriptions. Sometimes, those diagnosed with dementia actually are over-prescribed.

She says for all the good work in Bucks County, there's much more to be done to create an environment for getting and staying well. More education, more support, more open conversation.

Join the conversation Wednesday night. For info, email Michal at mharper@councilsepa.org or call 215-345-6644, ext. 3109.

It's time for a little good news, no? Recovery is possible.

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