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~~ADDICT~~
~~LIAR~~
~~JUNKIE~~
~~CRIMINAL~~
~~DRUGGIE~~
~~FAILURE~~
~~SMACK HEAD~~
~~OFFENDER~~

HOW ABOUT:

HUMAN

Special Edition

Recovery in Prison

What Recovery Means To Me

David Smith resides in Holme House and is a voluntary Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team worker, a servery worker and an active contributor to the DRP and associated regime activities

I've only ever known recovery to be when 'breaking down in my car'. That changed when I started my prison life, which I now class as overcoming a drink/drug addiction, and being in recovery, beating the addiction and trying new ways of going with day to day life instead of drowning it in drugs. All that does is block it out until the drugs wear off.

So, I'm in recovery and trying new ways, attending meetings with DART and working with peer mentors, and hoping to change my mind set and build on strengths to overcome the urge of relapsing and falling back in to old habits. Also possibly breaking the circle of

friends that I have, as that could be the main trigger in taking drugs.

When in recovery, I think the main importance to recovering is having the right people and positive supports around you, so if a time does come to you relapsing, then you have the positive people around you to make sure you maintain the recovery and keep you on the right positive track in recovering, and overcome the addiction.

Keep a positive mind.

Keep busy.

Overcoming the urge.

What Recovery Means to Me

Dion Lee, resides in Holme House and is a proud father, a Recovery Navigator and an active contributor to the DRP and associated regime activities

Recovery is a word/term that I am not very keen on! As well as disempowering, it suggests that a person was previously 'ok' and then became ill or sick, and then after a period of 'recovery', they will be 'ok' again. Alternatively, you will be in recovery forever (in limbo), and never fully 'ok' again? As if 'ok' exists.

If I think of this term 'recovery' within the context of a person's journey, or their personal growth, terms like drug abuse, self-medicating, dependency, desistance (terms associated with identifying substance misuse) are all subjective. The root causes (disease) are always particular to the individual. Observing symptoms is a completely different thing! It may not be possible, in reality, to render an accurate diagnosis/identification of the actual disease, without the benefit of hindsight. Trial and error is par for the course 'in that sense'.

I used to think that this baseline/foundation ultimately degraded the efficiency of systems designed to support people on their journey (in their growth) to less than adequate or even a lottery. However, after years of badgering and challenging some very patient academics and professionals, I came to the conclusion that the efficiency of such systems is more dependent on the prevailing perceptions of the environment within the environment, that the systems are being deployed in.

Self-reflection is key, and any medium (other than unnecessary incarceration/isolation) that promotes and encourages honest self-reflection, without judgement,

is vital not only as a harm reduction tool, but as the most effective form of treatment, for recovery and rehabilitation I think.

My life has been intertwined with all facets of drug use for over 30 years (maybe even before I was born). On reflection, I notice that most people get tired or fed up with their status quo over a period of time, and then a timely event (events) will act as a catalyst for their change/growth spurt—'the critical point'.

After such an event, in the short term, the individual may not have reached (on their journey/growth) a sustainable tempo, plateau, or level they can maintain. But, the experience that they gain will make them definitely more likely to succeed the next time they reach that 'critical point' in the future.

It is very important for service users and providers to recognise that on any individual's journey, some 'zones' (places/times) are more supportive of, or conducive to change than others, not only for individuals, but generally.

When identified, these could be definitive zones where systems and resources can be more effectively deployed.

If I try to apply an analogue, I read somewhere a while ago to try and express what I feel, then, incarceration, prison transfers or release should be viewed less as a boundary (divisive, final, restrictive), and more like a border (connective, central, enabling) a definitive zone where activity of all kinds, namely physical, mental and emotional, are more concentrated relative to before and after.

With naturally more relative 'potential' for 'events' to occur that is crossover/exchanges of ideas, ways out (critical points), the reason I prefer the term growth to recovery is because it is emotional growth and intellectual growth that cause an individual to mature over time (regardless of age!) to a stage where they can better manage life, interactions and their own natural disposition more efficiently. Every exposure to any new or alternative ideas, strategies, techniques etc. that occur in one of these 'border' zones are perfect opportunities for an individual to recognise agency in action, either from watching others go through the process of observing, adapting and modelling new activities that is crossing borders or reflecting on themselves and how they managed the border. These are events that can become critical points that precede major change/growth.

I suppose the main point is that systems of support must be structured, so as to be in place and initiate at the right time in a person's journey (at a border to potentially benefit the many). Otherwise, the window of opportunity is missed, exposure to these systems at the wrong time is more often than not consciously resisted and/or manipulated, which is a drain on resources, and more importantly, psychologically and emotionally damaging to users, providers and society.

Engineering the environment with the requisite triggers and support systems here would not take a feat of magic! However, nibbling around the edges or tinkering will not put a dent in the problem. Someone must be brave and push the boat out.

I do fully realise that institutional change is not easy. Change is a thing (ironically) resisted by all! It will be met with resistance and castigation from cynics on all sides, but I can assure you that challenges you will face implementing such change pales in comparison to the gauntlet ran by inmates (those not viewed as victims) who try to stand for what is right and promote positive change. In action, that is a 'real life tightrope walk' with no safety net.

The DRP is one of the most effective resources I have come across in the prison service, both practically and as a concept. It does not seem to be a part of the old rusty machinery. It bridges so many gaps, gets so much done, not passing the buck (fearfully or disingenuously) like most other rusty cogs in the HMPS, wherein lies the problem and the opportunity. Instead of the DRP trying desperately to cover all the deficits reactively, they could be working proactively implementing new approaches to regime, residency, as well as rehabilitation.

Service users need to see and feel more than (with respect) good intentions and sociological jargon that they don't understand. They need to see a clear, tangible path/plan to follow (orientation or induction blocks, progression blocks, mid-long term blocks, pre-release blocks etc.). We will then build our communities and moderate ourselves accordingly, reflecting the community outside. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. Help us to help ourselves to create an 'enabling environment' by structuring our entry, stay and departure from this traumatic event.

We can be pros not just cons!

What Recovery Means to Me

Lee Ferguson resides in Holme House and is the Chair of the Democratic Council, a voluntary Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team worker and an active contributor to the DRP and associated regime activities

My recovery is a complicated and complex issue, linked with every thought and action at the present moment in time, closely connected to what the future holds. Yet recovery is so simple, as this is the real me, a happy, productive person, who has reconnected with a love of life and people. However, a constant battle between past and present rages on inside of me, and an internal tug of war with no end in sight that could determine life or death. Within this ongoing struggle I relish each new day, and challenge, as the real human being inside of me is firmly finding a way to fill the void of addiction.

My battle of recovery is being won after embedding new core principles into my life, such as beliefs and values strong enough to speak about and

hopefully influence my children. Firstly, keeping fit through regular exercise and gym is a core principle for myself. Secondly is education, for my own personal development in the short term, and in the long term. What I learn will go towards supporting my new beliefs and values around working in addiction. Instead of running away from my problems as I did in the past, I face addiction head on to strengthen my understanding of recovery.

If I give way to my desires of addiction, there will be no inner struggle, no friction, and no fight, but if I struggle to achieve my goals with desires that hinder me, I can create a fight inside worthy of winning.

Recovery is now winning this war of attraction! Breaking down addiction, to overcome myself.