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**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FORUM MEETING MINUTES**

**25th April 2018**

**TOWN CENTRE LIBRARY, DELFT**

**9:30-12:00**

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**PRESENT:**  Christopher Louw (Harambee), Albert Matthews (FCRC), Miemie Kristoffel (BVDF), Alois Aloo (SOS Village), Abel Veldsman (FCRC), Laverne Jones (Adonis Musati Project), Hilton Davids (VCO), Lydia Manie (BVDF), Donovan Serfontein (LNOC), Watson M (Adonis Musati Projects), Colleen Brookes-Gain (WCSCF)

**APOLOGIES**: Janice King (WCSCF), Cheryl Harper (We Can Change Our World), Bobby Chetty (PAL)

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1. **WELCOME &** I**NTRODUCTION**: Colleen welcomed everyone and introductions went around the room. Each delegate gave a brief description of their organisation.
2. **MEETING TOPIC: UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

**Guest speaker:** **Albert Matthews:**

Albert is married with 2 kids.

10 YEARS ago he was a drug addict who had spent short-term time in jail on 3 occasions.

On the 31 May, 10 years ago….he made the conscious decision to change his life…..resulting in 10 years of sobriety.

One year ago, UWC offered a 1 years substance abuse course which was valued at R90 000.

In order to qualify for the course, he had to send in a motivational letter. In his motivational letter*,* he stated that *he was best suited to do the course considering he had been a substance abuser for many years. He already knew what the* ***effects*** *of substance abuse was (…what you would do for a fix etc, he now wished to know what chemical changes had taken place while he was abusing substances.) In short, since he had done the practical side of substance abuse, he now wished to familiarise himself with the theoretical part of it.*

**Two weeks ago he graduated from UWC’s 1 year substance abuse course!**

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**What is the opposite of addiction**?

Many would *say clean/ sober minded or sobriety*.

But he says the opposite of **addiction** …..is…. **CONNECTION.**

Many addicts **have no real connection** with their families and visa versa and those who want to change their lives around, often walk that road alone without the support of their families. Families don’t really **know HOW** to support the family member who is addicted and the expectations for the addict’s recovery are oftentimes unreal. When an addict leaves a 6 week rehab program and is considered ‘drug- free’, the expectation from the family is that life would be so much better now. Within a heartbeat, to the dismay of the family, the person who exited the program with flying colours is back on drugs again. It is often a case of treating the symptoms and not the cause, and that’s where the problem lies.

**Albert used the analogy of a tree bearing fruit**….

“People know you by your fruits (habits). If there’s a problem with the roots of the tree

it will show up in its fruit.”

You can pick all the fruit off the tree which oftentimes is exactly what happens in some rehabs - which gives the illusion that everything is super-fine. The long awaited words are uttered “he/she is now clean.” BUT come next season, the same fruit will grow again and families are plummeted into despair. Families spend thousands trying to get their family member clean and it’s become a vicious cycle repeated over and over with the same disastrous results. The problem isn’t the fruit…it’s the roots of that tree.

As Albert said: the root of his problem was that as a young child, coming into awareness of things around him, the one picture that stood out for him was that of his dad smoking a dagga pipe. Although he said that he didn’t want to tread that road, he was the one that gave his family much grief, as, he not only abused substances, he was recruited into a gang as well. His recovery hinged on uprooting the root of the tree and the road to his recovery was the faith-based route.



**Methods of combating substance abuse**:

There are often two methods used to combat substance abuse:

… the medicinal way, or

… the faith-based way.

To each his own, but bottom-line, **there’s no quick fix.** One way or another, it is often a long and gruelling road to recovery, especially when the issue of the root cause of the addiction is dealt with.

**So what happens to your brain when you take drugs?**

Drugs are made of chemicals, many similar to the chemicals already in our system. Drugs alter the way nerve cells normally send, receive, and process information.

For example, some drugs, such as marijuana and heroin, have a similar structure to chemical messengers which are naturally produced by the brain.

Because of this similarity, these drugs are able to **“fool”** the brain’s receptors and activate nerve cells to send abnormal messages. Nearly all drugs, directly or indirectly, target the brain’s reward system.  The overstimulation of this system, which normally responds to natural behaviours such as eating, spending time with loved ones, etc., produces **pleasure** effects in response to the drugs.

This reaction sets in motion a pattern that compels some people to repeat the behaviour or to abuse more drugs. **This results in the “high” you feel when you take these drugs.**

Some drugs, can release 2 to 10 times the amount of **dopamine** and in some cases, this can occur almost immediately when drugs are smoked or injected, and the effects can last much longer.

**As a person continues to abuse drugs, the brain adapts to the overwhelming surges in dopamine by producing less of its own dopamine or by reducing the dopamine receptors**.

As a result, dopamine’s impact is lessened, reducing the abuser’s ability to enjoy the drugs and the things that previously brought pleasure. This decrease compels those addicted to drugs to keep abusing drugs to attempt to bring their dopamine function back to normal. **And, they may now require larger amounts of the drug** than they first did in order to achieve that initial high which can never be experienced again. That **“initial high”** is called **“chasing the dragon”.**

**For every** “high”…there’s a “low” and the “lows” become lower each time you use drugs. **The “lows” experienced gradually become so low that suicide can take place.**

**Changes:**

Drug-addiction can causes changes in areas of the brain that are critical to judgment, decision making, learning, memory, and behaviour control. Together, these changes can drive an abuser to seek out and take drugs compulsively despite adverse consequences—in other words, to become addicted to drugs.

**Toxic psychosis**  can occur from taking too much of a certain drug, or by having an adverse reaction after mixing substances, or during withdrawal from a drug, or if the individual has underlying mental health issues.

*Albert said, after mixing drugs, he hallucinated so badly everyone looked like Pokémon’s which lead him to hide out in his room for a few days.*

**It takes about 2 years to get rid of the fake dopamine** - it doesn’t happen overnight, or even within 6 weeks! Part of any rehab programme should require **lots of physical activities** so that the fake dopamine can be flushed sooner via sweating.

**Further Points from Albert’s view:**

* **How does one help someone who is addicted?** The general conception is that a person whose abusing substances should be removed from his/her environment for a while or not go back into his/her environment especially after rehab. But it is the opinion of Albert that, IF the root cause of the addiction is being addressed then where the person is, shouldn’t have that much of an effect.
* **The label: “Recovering Addict**”: Why must someone who **has recovered** from addiction say “ I am a recovering addict”. It doesn’t make sense especially if the root issue had been dealt with. Labels shouldn’t be used. It serves to keep people trapped.
* **Rehabs centres: Do they really work?** If one looks at how often the same people are going into rehabs repeatedly, then it seems that Rehabs are not really approaching the problem of addiction from the ‘root’ angle. Either they don’t understand this angle, or perhaps they are more concerned with ticking boxes or making money. And it’s not surprising that rehabs are being viewed as a means to make quick money; as rehabs are sprouting up all over and charging high rates. Albert expresses his concern that no one is monitoring the rehabs.
* From **a Biological and psychological** aspect, there is rarely only one issue at the root but rather a myriad of issues. What often happens is that when it comes to dealing with the root causes, parents do not want to own the part they play or they refuse to acknowledge that their behaviour could be part of the reason why one of their children are on drugs. When this scenario is taking place in the life of someone in recovery then the home environment can prove to be a setback for the person. In such a case, then it will not be a good idea for the person in recovery to be sent back to that environment. One should also be aware that there are also people who are highly susceptible to the suggestion of using drugs. Proper monitoring of this sector is also very worrying as it seems that no one is being held accountable.
* Our system is broken and needs fixing so that people abusing substances can receive the correct treatment no matter if you are a private patient or a someone making use of the government institution. A collective of voices need to be heard wrt how addictions are being addressed. And our health sector should be scrutinised, as there are distinct gaps wrt the way people with addictions are helped and the way rehabs are run.

**Conclusion:**

This is a road that no person who is addicted to substances, and who wants to change his/her life around, should walk alone. They need the strong support system of their family to walk that road with them. It’s not an easy road and many times family issues will be unearthed. But that’s all part of the healing not only of a person abusing substances, but of the family as whole. Family’s also need the correct information wrt what is really happening to the person abusing substances so that they can be educated on **how** to be supportive for greater impact and not drive the person further into addiction. Knowledge is power and we need to share our knowledge.

1. **NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

* **FCRC Hanover Park offers a 6 week Behaviour Modification Program.**

**The module consists of:**

1. Focus on the effects of substances on the brain
2. Anthropology
3. Identity
4. Paradigm shift
5. Altering behaviour
6. Anger management
7. Metamorphosis of man
8. Matthewmatics of life

All are welcome. Contact person - Albert 074 889 9056

* **Events:**

Celebration Concert

**DATE**: 1 June 2018

**TIME**: 7pm

**VENUE**: ppc: 10 Lansur Road

Hanover Park

1. **Next meeting:**  30th May 2018: Rylands Library, Gatesville

**Enquiries**: Janice King (WCSCF Coordinator) Cell: 072 4500 456

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