

The Ice Breaker

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“So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable.”

–Christopher Reeve

THE “Dialog and Discovery” event held in Polk County

A number of issues were brought to light at last month’s “Evening of Dialog and Discovery” meeting hosted by The Butterfly House and Counseling Associates of St. Croix Falls. The meeting was an effort to study the mental health needs in Polk County, and discuss what resources are available to those who need help. Doreen Rivard and Denise Gunderson, co-founders of the Butterfly House, brought what information they could find, in the form of fliers and brochures, on what services are promoted in Polk County.

Facilitator Dr. Greg Alch, of Minneapolis, opened the meeting by asking attendees what mental health resources are needed in Polk County. Concerns were brought up immediately. A local pastor told the assembly that he believed depression, alcohol abuse and domestic abuse were three of the top issues. A child welfare worker pointed out a rise in “sexual deviation”, including acts against children.

Nearly everyone in attendance agreed that one of the largest problems faced by individuals in Polk County is the lack of funds for mental health programs.

Polk County is a largely rural area, with communities scattered miles from one another, which has led to fragmented awareness of services available.

The meeting was attended by a number of professionals in government and social services, including Judge Molly Galewryick, St. Croix Falls Police Officer Dan Peters.

Officer Peters addressed the frustration police experience when dealing with Chapter 51 (mental health issues) calls. In cases in which the person in question doesn’t meet all the criteria of a Chapter 51 call, but does appear to need some form of mental health services, police need to know what resources are available for the callers. Peters also said that some calls could have been avoided if the person or his family members had had access to mental health services before an emergency such as a suicide attempt or domestic abuse occurred.

After discussion of the problems facing Polk County, the meeting turned to brainstorming solutions.

It was decided that a system of networking between agencies in the county would be a logical, and relatively simple, place to start. Resources could be compiled into a list that would be published in brochures, newspapers, and on the Internet. In this way, resources such as the CRA shelter in Milltown, and The Butterfly House in St. Croix Falls, could also be promoted.

“There are so many of us out there working hard, but in isolation,” said Cindy Klein, of Counseling Associates. “The beginning of the solution is to come together and work together.”

doubt, and even relapse for some members.

A breach of confidence is costly to both she who shares it and she who broadcasts it to others. The first one loses her ability to trust another person, and the second loses *trustworthiness* to others.

An inviolable rule that all alcoholics and addicts *must* follow is to do nothing that compromises another person's sobriety. While this rule covers the obvious admonition never to offer drugs or alcohol to a fellow addict, it can also include gossip about meetings and others in the meetings, mean-spirited complaints, breach of confidence, and even flirting.

Any of the above can be dangerous behavior and not conducive to an AA/NA group's welfare. In a worst-case scenario this thoughtless behavior can lead to someone's relapse.

In a nutshell, fellowship *within* the club is essential to each members' welfare; anonymity to the world outside the club is essential to each individual as well as to the group as a whole.

Editor's Corner AMC's *Breaking Bad*: Is it entertainment or exploitation?

I recently read a review of AMC's drama about drug-dealing, *Breaking Bad*. The show is about a middle aged chemistry teacher who is told that he has terminal lung cancer. The diagnosis leads him to become a meth manufacturer and dealer in order to provide for his wife and son after his death. The reviewer gave the show a B+, calling it a "volatile and valuable product."

I don't know, maybe it's just me, but I'm not sure I'm ready to look at meth cooks and dealers for their entertainment value. I'm not ready to laugh at it And I wasn't ready when Saturday Night Live decided to poke fun at meth addicts last season. I guess you could say that I carry some baggage on that particular topic.

I have known meth dealers, and have seen their lives spiral out of control. I know mothers who lost custody of the children, or who will be separated from them by years in prison, all because of meth. I have known, and loved, meth users who saw their lives shredded right before their eyes, and we were both helpless to stop it.

I have hugged and cried with mothers who were frantic in their efforts to drag their children back over the precipice that is meth addiction.

I have heard "but I'm o.k." from meth users whose faces belied their words. They could not see how really NOT o.k. they were; their pale faces, empty eyes, ravaged skin, jerky movements, all lost on them because of meth's lies and promises.

I still have images of Candice Anderson's post-mortem photos in my mind. Candice Anderson was the 15-year-old daughter of a Texas meth addict who, along with Candice's step-father, beat the girl nearly to death, and injected her with a lethal dose of meth. They then stepped around her lifeless body while they cleaned up evidence that would incriminate them, and hours later called police to report the overdose.

Candice made the mistake of telling her meth-addicted "caregivers" that she no longer wanted to live the kind of life that she was subjected to in their home; a life that included the sexual abuse that is often attendant in the meth lifestyle. She threatened to turn her parents in, and was murdered for it. Her 13-year-old sister was witness to parts of the crime, and was forced to ride along as evidence was transported out of the house. It's a horror story I can't quite believe, but it's all true. (You can read Candice's story at <http://www.freewebs.com/candice15/inthelocalnews.htm>).

I just can't take a "lighthearted" look at meth. I rarely take issue with what the entertainment industry decides to pump out in the search for profits, but here, I guess I have to draw the line. I have to wonder if the writers, producers, and creator of *Breaking Bad* understand the ramifications of even *seeming* to glorify a lifestyle that includes meth. And I have to wonder why. . . Why would anyone want to watch it?

Meth in the real world creates more drama than Hollywood could crank out in a year, anyone who has been caught up in a loved one's addiction could attest to that. There's simply no entertainment value in that kind of pain.

The baggage that I carry won't let me see the humor, drama, or artistic value in a program that promotes meth. I hope the show tanks.

Word of the Month: Dream

We all use words to praise, to express love, to hurt, to vent our anger, and to try to make others understand us better. We've chosen twelve words that we think can have both very positive and very negative connotations, and we'll take a look at both sides each month.

Night Dreams

Once upon a time, we had a cantankerous little dachshund who used to delight us when he was fast asleep and dreaming. His tail would wag, his short little legs would pump as if running, and he would woof or whine with excitement. We wondered what kind of creatures he might be chasing, or whether he was reliving an experience like running with the neighborhood children (one of his greatest joys). It was

comforting to know that even a dog can have dreams.

Our cat, on the other hand, has dreams that are probably no less vivid, but only his twitching tail lets us know that deep in sleep, he has found some prey to stalk.

So it is with humans. We must dream, to let our brains sort out the information of the day. While part of our brain dreams of having tea with the Queen of England and Marge Simpson, another part is busy filing and discarding, and making sense of our thoughts.

Sometimes, our dreams are warning us of some impending crisis, some information we took in, but overlooked, which will be crucial later. Other times, we'll wake with a laugh when we think of what nonsense we dreamed.

People want to believe that *all* of our dreams have meaning, so there are about a million books and websites to help us interpret them. It may be helpful to get a psychologist's perspective on the meaning of dreams. For example, to dream of taking care of a tiny baby could be signaling that you feel helpless and vulnerable in some aspect of your life; if the baby is crying throughout the dream, perhaps that pertains to some part of yourself that is "crying" for attention.

No matter how crazy our sleeping dreams may be, it has been proven that we need them, whether we understand them or not.

Dreaming permits each and every one of us to be quietly and safely insane every night of our lives.

–William Dement, in *Newsweek*, 1959

Day Dreams

This is the area where human beings can shine. The dreams we have in the daylight hours. The dreams we have for ourselves, our careers, our children, our country, or our world, are all a part of who we are.

It has been said that if we can dream it, we can achieve it. That statement rings true throughout history. The inventor of the wheel dreamed of a better way to grind grain to flour, or to get a heavy object from point A to point B, or maybe he was an artist, and the shape just appealed to him; he dreamed, he chisled (or cut a slice from a log), and made it happen. Indeed, all the great gadgets in our modern life started with a dream.

Lofty ambitions and high ideals start with a dream. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream, and it comes closer to reality every day. We would all do well to ask ourselves what are our dreams, and what can we do today to achieve them.

In our work or play, we need to chase those dreams just as surely as a little dog chasing chipmunks in his sleep.

Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night.

–Edgar Allan Poe (1809 - 1849), "Eleonora"

Dreams

Hold fast to dreams

For if dreams die

Life is a broken-winged bird

That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams

For when dreams go

Life is a barren field

Frozen with snow.

–Langston Hughes

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Dealing with cravings and compulsions

Remember the popular tv commercials about drugs? “This is your brain,” the spokesperson holds up an egg. “This is your brain on drugs,” the spokesperson says, as he cracks the egg and pours the contents into a hot frying pan. It was a graphic demonstration of the various disturbances that occur in the brain on drugs.

Drugs interfere with brain chemistry, the neurotransmitters that carry messages to the receptors: “feel pleasure,” “there is pain,” “act quickly.” Dopamine, in particular, is a neurotransmitter that signals pleasure; the more dopamine that is transferred, the more pleasure is perceived.

Cocaine and methamphetamine, for example, cause huge amounts of dopamine to be released, for a large surge of pleasure. This depletes the amount of dopamine in the brain, and changes the receptors so that they respond to the drug in the way that they used to respond to the natural dopamine. Eventually, with continued use of the drug, pleasure will only be felt when the drug is used.

Addiction to any substance causes similar chemical changes in the brain. The brain of an addict or alcoholic responds to stimuli in very different ways than the brain of someone who is not an addict. Add the psychological changes that occur in addiction to the physiological brain changes, and you get a host of behaviors and thought processes that promote the continued use of drugs.

Inherent in addiction is the presence of cravings and the compulsion to use. Cravings are an almost overwhelming urge to go back to one’s drug of choice, so an important part of recovery is for the addict to learn ways to cope with them. The suggestions below are not meant to minimize how serious and strong cravings can be, and it is important to note that there are medications available to help alleviate cravings. However, these are ways that other addicts have used to successfully get beyond them.

An obvious way to avoid having to deal with cravings is to avoid circumstances that bring them:

- * Stay away from bars and other places where alcohol is served.
- * Avoid people you used to use with, stay away from your dealer’s place, find alternate routes to avoid driving by places where you used or bought drugs.
- * Assure that no one brings alcohol or drugs into your home with a zero tolerance policy for visitors.

Keep soft drinks, coffee, and juices on hand for yourself and guests.

Many people find that they can fight back cravings by using the “three Rs”:

