



Substance Abuse
Family Education

Evaluation Report



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A Program of this magnitude could not have been completed without the support of a wide range of individuals. We would like to acknowledge and thank the following people and organizations, all of whom made valuable contributions to the undertaking of this project:

Maple Ridge Community Foundation

Garfield Weston Foundation

Finally, we would like to thank InnerVisions Board of Directors, for without their support this Program would not have been the success it has.

Substance Abuse Family Education Program

IDENTIFICATION OF NEED

The **Substance Affected Family Education (SAFE) Program** was initially developed through insights gained in the course of working with women in our Women's Centre. Working with women at Hannah House forced us to take an intensive look into the family unit and the barriers to "family wellness."

In 2004, InnerVisions' Executive Director was involved in a Masters Degree Program and decided to research and explore this problem - the problem of families and problematic substance use. Subsequently the SAFE Program was created. This six-week family-oriented program was designed to provide a forum whereby substance affected families could receive information and support, and be able to address the fundamental social and environmental factors surrounding problematic substance abuse within the family unit. Our aim with this innovative Program was not only to increase awareness and provide education to all family members, but the added benefit of strengthening the family relationship in the wake of addiction, as well as the development of new understandings between the addict and the family were goals we thought would be greatly rewarding to both.

The Program also sought to facilitate family reconnection, which in turn increases the likelihood all concerned will live positive, productive, and healthier lifestyles; *research has consistently shown that the single prevalent predictor of successful recovery from substance abuse is family reconnection*. Thus, successful family reconnection increases the potential for successful recovery, which in turn reduces the negative impact of addiction on society.

The Substance Abuse Family Program assists participants and their families to, a) develop healthier attitudes and approach life in a more holistic manner, b) gain awareness about the unfavourable health and social impact of problematic substance use, and c) give the family “tools” to help them make better choices in regards to their loved one’s problematic use. During the course of our Program, participants explore resources for the family, learn how to identify problematic substance use, develop communication skills and coping strategies, and will complete individualized assessments to determine a future-focused “plan of action.” Our vision for the creation of this Program meant that we would be better able to advocate prevention and promote community health through supporting the family unit. Literature has often identified the family unit as the cornerstone of the community; thus family wellness equals community wellness. Families struggling with the issue of substance abuse need to become involved on a deeper, more profound level in the process leading to recovery.

HISTORY OF INNERVISIONS RECOVERY SOCIETY

InnerVisions Recovery Society was founded in 1991 by Billy and Kim Weselowski. They had both successfully addressed their own addiction issues and had a common desire to share their success and offer support to others struggling to recover from drug and alcohol dependency. Their message was simple, one can live free of addiction when offered the proper support and strength.

Their vision led to the development of InnerVisions Recovery Society which continues to provide a safe and nurturing environment where people suffering from addiction can go and learn a new way to live, free from alcohol and drugs. The Society began with half of a duplex and has grown to a stage where InnerVisions currently offers over sixty residential beds, providing two homes for men and one for women. The organization has continued in its quest to offer the

best in quality service and the founders are committed to continuing education and strive to make addictions treatment available to those in need.

InnerVisions Recovery Society mission statement reads: *InnerVisions Recovery Society provides guidance, support and care for all people affected by addiction with recovery programs based on integrated, holistic approaches, which is contingent on their ability to participate.*

HISTORY OF TRICITY EDUCATION

Seeing a need for deeper community involvement, in 1992 Billy and Kim established TriCity Education. TriCity Education is a dynamic agency that provides counselling and specialty training services to a multitude of schools, organizations and businesses.

WHO THE FAMILY PROGRAM SERVED

In 2005 there were 135 participants in the Family Program. The Program has attracted spouses, parents, siblings, grandparents, and in-laws. Participants have attended from a broad geographical base throughout the lower mainland.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FAMILY PROGRAM AND CONSUMER SATISFACTION

The data revealed four major themes that categorically defined participants experience in the Family Program:

- 1) acquiring a better understanding of addiction;
- 2) inspiring and honest speakers;
- 3) being able to take responsibility for one's life (taking care of oneself), and
- 4) gaining tools to cope.

By far the greatest impact made by the Family Program was the ability of participants to connect with the facilitators because of their inspiring and motivational delivery and attitude. Countless evaluation forms talked about the facilitator's honesty, genuineness, humility and vulnerability.

InnerVisions Recovery Society & TriCity Education
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Many participants commented that they finally understood what was going on for the addicted member, and that they had a better understanding of addiction in general. One stated (and many echoed similar thoughts) that with this new understanding he moved from prejudice against the addicted family member to sympathy for them.

Another theme that arose from the data was the participants understanding that they could not do it for the addicted member, but that they could support them. They repeatedly stated how the Program helped them to realize that they had to take care of themselves first, and only then could they provide proper assistance to the addicted member.

Participants spoke about how they now had tools and resources to cope with the problems inherent in dealing with addiction.

Other comments that surfaced were:

- The Program progressed well
- that the Program was long overdue
- that it should be taught in schools

Other than their pleasure with the facilitators, the second most commented feature of the Program was the videos; they were extremely well received although some did say though that they should be updated.

Participants stated the program could improve by spending more time on family emotions and personal situations. Others felt the last session should be extended to focus more on a review / check in, and on action plan development and discussion. Family members also thought the Program should be longer and should be expanded into other geographical areas. Finally, some participants said there should be more handouts, so that information could be revisited at home.

STAFF EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS

A focus group was held with staff participating on the Family Program to develop a better understanding of the issues and concerns they identified and experienced while providing information and services to family members. Staff stated that family members consistently noted the effectiveness of the facilitators being in recovery themselves; it turned out to be an invaluable part of the Program when staff shared their personal experiences.

Staff also confirmed the value and effectiveness of the Program, and articulated how rewarding it was for them to be able to offer this assistance to family members. In addition, a local addictions physician (Dr. Paul Sobey – his letter is attached) was consulted as a resource; he corroborated how beneficial it was having this resource available to the family.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall the services provided by the Family Program appear to have been very successful. The transformation of participants through a better understanding of addiction was well evidenced.

The apparent success of the Family Program clearly falls within the InnerVisions ‘ and TriCity’s mandate and mission to provide supportive recovery environments to individuals suffering from the effects of addiction. The support and services offered by the Family Program are one component of a supportive environment in the efforts to deal with problems that accompany addiction in the family unit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations for future discussion were developed based on the experiences of the participants of the Family Program.

- As there is an absence of available, affordable and timely programming for families struggling with addiction, look into introducing the program to more diverse geographical locations
- Look at introducing the Family Program to school districts

- Look at updating curricula to provide more time for discussion on participant family issues and emotions

Finally, given the success of the Family Program and its ability offer assistance regardless of participant funding, it is recommended that funding be sought to maintain and expand the Family Program. In doing so, care should be taken to address the issues outlined in this evaluation; overall, however, the success of the program merits its continued service to families seeking support and information regarding alcohol and drug use. The Program's promotion of health and the prevention of addiction through support, counselling and education to those affected by addiction and their family members, the provision of referrals, and increased community awareness regarding the issues is commendable and important work.

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To Whom It May Concern:

My association with InnerVisions began in 1999 when I assumed the role as the institution's treating physician and Addiction Medicine consultant.

Briefly, I have been certified to practice medicine in the Province of British Columbia by the College of Physicians and Surgeons since 1987. My clinical background is in Family Medicine where I practiced in Surrey, British Columbia for twelve years. I completed Fellowship training in Addiction Medicine in the United States in 1999. I am certified by the American Society of Addiction Medicine as a consultant in Addiction Medicine and I have been qualified as an expert witness in British Columbia Supreme Court. I have limited my practice to the treatment of patients with Addictions for the past six years. My CV is available on request.

I enthusiastically support InnerVisions Family Program. As an Addictions Specialist, I appreciate and acknowledge the connection between successful recovery and family reconnection; it is a critical component of a comprehensive recovery program. The literature looking at indicators of success in Therapeutic Communities confirms reconnection of the family as an apex marker; when family reconnection occurs multiple other markers of recovery tend to benefit. Parameters mental and physical health, living conditions, personal and social relationships and employment and vocational opportunities improve and substance use and criminal behaviors are reduced.

I have no hesitation in offering InnerVisions my recommendation. This group of individuals has been working as a team to make a significant difference in their community for many years. I refer patients to InnerVisions specifically because I know the family will have the option of attending The Family Program and I commonly speak to patient's family about the importance of family reconnection in the recovery process.

In these times of tight financial constraints, I realize that funding options for Programs such as InnerVisions Family Program are inadequate. I urge all to support this cause as it is a cost effective intervention to reduce the negative impact of substance abuse.

Sincerely,

Paul W. Sobey MD