The Ice Breaker

Moms and Dads Against Meth, Inc.

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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 lead 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

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."

St. Croix County Drug Court celebrates its first graduate

Handshakes and pats on the back marked the occasion nearly two years in the making: the first of what is hoped to be many Drug Court success stories.

Travis, the first graduate of the program, basked in praise from Judge Edward Vlack, county prosecutor Dave McQuillan, and Drug Court facilitators at the February 20 event.

After being congratulated on his dedication to the program and his family, Travis shared a story of his early days in Drug Court, when Judge Vlack called him to the bench and extended his hand for a handshake. The judge told him, "You've got to focus on your sobriety, and you've got to focus on your children. Don't ever underestimate your ability to take control of your life." Travis was so moved by the gesture, he vowed to start listening and learning.

Admitting that his life changes didn't happen overnight, he stated that it has been, and continues to be a process. He concluded his remarks by stating "I can truly say that I owe my life to Drug Court."

Congratulations, Travis! You're an inspiration!

How do we keep the "A" in AA and NA?

Alcoholics Anonymous. Narcotics Anonymous. Why *anonymous*? What does it mean? AA's founders included the principles of anonymity in the *Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous*:

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- 11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
- 12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

In other words, anonymity is maintained in reference to the General Public. No photographs, films, or advertising to promote AA/NA members is necessary.

However, since some members didn't understand the fine points of those traditions, AA founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob later pointed out ways in which the traditions could be broken:

"In some sections of A.A., anonymity is carried to the point of real absurdity. Members are on such a poor basis of communication that they don't even know each other's last names or where each lives."

- As Bill Sees it, page 241

- "... [Dr. Bob] said there were two ways to break the Anonymity Tradition:
- (1) by giving your name at the public level of press or radio; (2) by being so anonymous that you can't be reached by other drunks."
- -Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers, page 264

Those who go out promoting and breaking anonymity at the level of press, radio and film, are operating below the level of anonymity that is intended, their egos are trying to get attention, and they have lost their humility. The truth is that ego and failure to practice the steps in all one's affairs can do more damage to sobriety than all other circumstances combined. Members should be ever mindful that nothing they do as individual members should affect A.A. as a whole.

In an organization that relies on members' ability to help each other, it doesn't make sense to carry anonymity to extremes. In small towns, such as the groups in Western Wisconsin, it's virtually impossible to carry anonymity to that level. "Where everybody knows your name" certainly could apply to local AA groups, and may include knowing where you live, where you work, and members of your family.

That much knowledge about other members of the group could set the stage for a violation of core AA principles: gossip about members or meetings.

"What we say here stays here" is the code often spoken aloud at meetings. Believing that all members will abide by that code gives everyone the freedom to speak openly about struggles, challenges, family problems, and other life circumstances that could compromise sobriety.

To violate that trust can change the dynamic of the group, or even the entire club, and trust is such a precious commodity to AA/NA groups and clubs, it must be guarded and defended. Without *trust*, all the other principles are *impossible*, because no alcoholic or addict is going to be able to get help from someone or something he or she doesn't trust.

Once trust is broken in a group, resentments can follow, digging an ever-widening hole of anger,

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

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":

Reflect, Redirect, Remember.

Reflect: Take time to think when a craving starts. Reflect on how good life has been since you stopped, think of what consequences you will suffer if you slip. Pick up your meditations book, call your sponsor, pray for guidance, and THINK before you drink or use!

Redirect: Your mind in the spell of a craving can be much like a young child throwing a tantrum; if you redirect its attention, it will forget about the thing it wanted, it just needs to be distracted. Move your body and your mind out of the craving zone. Take a walk, a run, or do a dance. Repeat a positive mantra while you're moving: "I am sober, I am well, I am serene."

Re-tool your thinking: What prompted the craving? A trigger you can dispense with? (Your dealer's phone number, an advertisement for alcohol in a magazine, or a forgotten piece of paraphernalia.) Make a ceremony of dumping it out of your life; tell it "you're outta here" and throw it away. Face the craving down and tell it to back off. Imagine yourself in an epic battle against the craving, you have the Higher Power weapon, and you will win.

Set a time limit: Set a timer for what you think is the maximum time you can stand the craving, then put your mind and body to some other activity (baking, drawing, writing, exercising). If the timer goes off before the craving has passed, set it again and stay busy. Repeat this as many times as needed, and in the meantime, call your sponsor!

Distract yourself from the craving: count or sort something, do a simple activity very fast, trying to beat your fastest speed (shuffle cards, fold paper airplanes or origami, etc.), learn to recite a poem or scripture by memory, recite the alphabet backwards, count all the red cars you see, make up words or phrases from the license plates, do math problems in your head. Do you see what we mean by distraction? Do what will take your mind off the craving long enough for it to pass.

Remember: Cravings don't last. They may come at you like an overloaded semi truck, but they will pass safely, if you get out of the way. Remember why you are staying sober: for you, for your kids, for your family. Remember to be proud of yourself for not drinking or using drugs. Remember that there are people who want to help you stay sober, if you will be brave enough to ask. If you can't get in touch with your sponsor, call someone else from your AA/NA club, or call a hotline for help.

A family member shares the agony of loving a meth addict

Paranoia, anger, edginess, agitation, love, hate, nauseous, pain, resentment, shame, guilt, horror. Just a handful of words used to define the up and down emotional roller coaster you ride when a loved one is addicted to meth. Each day passes you by while you feel you're simply in existence—of a living nightmare!

Your mask, which you wear so well in life—starts to crumble. You're faced with the cold, harsh reality—they might not make it. You hold onto hope, but you know the reality of the statistics. You stand by their side, until; you get to the point of—are you willing to go down with them too? Let them hit "rock bottom" your told. What will "rock bottom" be—death, permanent brain damage, prison? You think—the latter, of course, would keep them alive.

Before they perhaps were "the criminal", they were "the meth addict", before either of the two—they were, and still are, a human being, your brother, your sister, your parent, maybe your child. To just sit back and watch them slowly commit suicide is horrid—to be caught up in the "meth drama" makes you feel like you're losing your mind. Sometimes, you think—a funeral would be so much easier—it would be done—it would be over. The pain might linger, but the chaos would stop. What an appalling thought to have.

You don't know who to turn to—you're afraid of "saying the wrong thing". You hear, "they are an adult, they have to choose treatment". You think to yourself, "Are you kidding me? How many meth addicts are capable of even making that choice?" Finally, through never-ending tears, sleepless nights, a gnawing in your stomach like you wouldn't believe—you've had enough. You don't have a choice but to walk away—you have yourself, your kids to think about—you ban this person from your home—you spend a gorgeous sunny day—fighting off tears—writing this letter—trying to cope with the words/feelings above along with new one's that have just entered into your world. I HATE meth!