

Recovery Coaching with Homeless African Americans with Substance Use Disorders

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This article outlines an approach to recovery coaching with homeless African Americans with substance use disorders developed by The Association of Persons Affected by Addictions in Dallas, Texas.

KEYWORDS *Recovery coaching, African-Americans, substance use disorders, homelessness, addictions*

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The addictions field is shifting from an acute care model toward a recovery-oriented system of care, which is designed to support recovery long-term. Recovery-oriented systems of care move beyond detox, treatment planning, intensive outpatient, inpatient, and discharge summaries toward community development, nation building, and help with long-term recovery. Recovery-oriented systems of care reframe aftercare as continuous care, rather than as an afterthought, and anchors ongoing recovery in the person's natural environment. Recovery-oriented systems of care often utilize recovery coaches to provide pre-treatment, in-treatment, and post-treatment recovery (White, Kurtz, Sanders, 2006).

Recovery Coaching with African Americans Who are Homeless

At the Association of Persons Affected by Addictions in Dallas, Texas, we provide recovery coaching for chemically dependent African Americans who face homelessness and many co-occurring conditions. Most of them live in communities that are high risk for relapse. Our philosophy on recovery coaching is, "We go where no man has gone before." When those we serve are released from treatment, we work with them in their natural environments. Our recovery coaches will meet with them any- and everywhere in the community, with the exception of a crack house. We philosophically agree with Arthur Evans, Ph.D., Director, Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Mental Retardation, who states, "It does not make sense to help people initiate recovery and put them back into communities that fail to support their recovery. In Philadelphia we work to ensure that they have resources in those communities to support recovery" (White, 2007). We also agree with Don Coyhis, who writes about Native American recovery. "You remove a sick tree from sick soil in the tree forest, then nurture, fertilize,

and water the tree in a tree treatment center. The tree gets well! At discharge, all the tree counselors are pessimistic, because they know that tree will go right back to the same soil. We treat the soil! We view the whole community as the treatment center” (White, Kurtz, and Sanders, 2006).

In summary, the recovery coaches at the Association of Persons Affected by Addictions spend a great deal of time working with homeless chemically dependent clients in their natural environments. There are a number of aspects that go into making this recovery coaching successful. They include:

Creating a Welcoming Environment

When clients are released from treatment, the recovery coach will often bring them to the center where they meet many African Americans in short- and long-term recovery. This instills hope and breaks down barriers to participation. In the communities where those we serve live, there are not many visible signs of recovery. Entering this community can be inspiring.

Matching

In order to facilitate engagement, we attempt to match those we serve with recovery coaches who have similar backgrounds, including incarceration histories, gender, co-occurring disorders, aspirations, etc.

Types of Recovery Support

The association provides a number of types of recovery support, including

- Resources. The recovery coaches help secure housing and funding.

- Occupational support. Recovery coaches help with job placement, make referrals to job training programs, and provide support throughout the job search process.
- Transportational recovery support. Recovery coaches often provide transportation between meetings and help those we serve organize appointments. Homeless individuals often do not have many possessions, and they may lose track of their appointment dates.
- Emotional support. This involves providing support for dealing with myriad challenges that are faced in recovery, including feelings of uselessness, family-related stress, and the stress that accompanies homelessness.
- Resource development. Recovery coaches also go into the community to develop mutual aid groups for homeless chemically dependent African Americans. Some of the communities are devoid of these groups.
- Advocacy. We advocate for those we serve who may be involved in the criminal justice or child welfare system.
- Long-term recovery support. As individuals are in long-term recovery and have secured housing and/or employment, there are a number of issues that emerge, including the presence of process addictions, such as compulsive gambling, the presence of a hidden psychiatric disorder that was masked by their drug use, or negative feelings about their cultural identity. Our recovery coaches have worked hard to establish referral resources that specialize in these areas and make referrals accordingly.

Conclusion

At the Association of Persons Affected by Addictions, we believe that if we wait for those we serve to hit rock bottom, they can out-wait us. Rather than waiting, we reach out as soon as possible to provide recovery support in their natural environments. We have been instrumental in facilitating recovery for many of those we serve who previously lacked the vision that recovery was possible.

REFERENCES

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