

Recovery from Addiction Strengths Weakness Opportunities Challenges

STRENGTHS

One of the greatest in Ghana is the strong belief in GOD in the general population. Focusing on God as Spiritual Principles without any particular secular point of view is the NA (12 Step) programs greatest tool for recovery. Honesty Open-mindedness and Willingness can be practiced at any point in the process of coming to believe that recovery is possible for the individual and the Ghanaian society with the support of other recovering addicts. An NA preamble called "HOW It Works" states, "These are the principles that made our recovery possible." Relationships built on unity, goodwill, acceptance, and tolerance can work in the general population regardless of tribe, religion, gender or political persuasion. Working with business, governmental health agencies and international support agencies can transform the addict into a productive member of society. This program can save money used to house and maintain addicts in institutions and puts them to work in the long term. Overall health and wellness is a goal that can increase the productivity of the greater population. As Bill Moore put it "When Spiders Unite- Their Webs Can Tie-up the LION". Addiction can be reduced in Ghana when the political and social climates permit one recovering addict supporting another.

WEAKNESS

There is a perception that Addiction is a curse. Many believe the people who use drugs are possessed and in a sense we are. However, the spell can be broken and the addict set free with the support of other recovering addicts. Many also believe addiction is a moral issue. If you loved us you would just stop using. They do not see that the addict believes he or she has no choice. Which brings me to the next point, disclosure of the recovering addict is difficult because of the perceived stigma and fear of being known as an addict, recovering or not. Denial is a direct result of this disease and its deadly effects by the addict and society as well, especially the health related industries and the church. Lack of government support as no profit can be seen in the short-term by investing in the kind of support for treatment and creating an atmosphere of acceptance of the 12 step support like NA and AA. The political and social environment does not support an atmosphere of recovery from addiction. The idea of funding treatment seems new to even the governmental health agencies. Finally, there are not enough people who understand and are willing to communicate the benefits of recovery for whatever reason, the concept of a 12 step program that deals with no particular drug but on recovery from addiction is not fully embraced. Those who are interested are new themselves and do not understand HOW the program works, this is

no one's fault but makes communicating the true impact of the program difficult because of the mis-interpretations and misunderstandings created due to the lack of knowledge of such a program.

OPPORTUNITIES

There is a major opportunity to build relationships with government, business, especially health-care and the faith-based communities to develop policy and a business plan to support the creation of a national treatment program. Overseeing and supporting the efforts of local citizens and international support in creating a strategic plan will open doors to many opportunities. The Narcotics control board has asked my organization Aid for AIDS Africa for support with this idea; however, few international investors are willing to support a government that has not committed to at least providing a workable plan of its own. As I have already mentioned is the opportunity to recruit members of the recovering community around the world to come to Ghana to help build the understanding necessary to pull the pieces together to address recovery in a real way. This all takes time.

CHALLENGES

Finding a cohesive group of people to spearhead this kind of idea is a major challenge. Recovery in Ghana as in most of the world requires an overall concept that includes Harm Reduction, Detox, 12 Step programs and transitional programs so that people can re-enter society as productive citizens. Funding this kind of effort requires major research of the programs that work in other parts of the world then conversion into something that will work in the various cultural and social settings common to Ghana. Developing a Task force to look at the effects of addiction and recovery especially as it relates to the productivity of Ghana's workforce and transforming the addict into a recovering member of society is worth the cost. Discrimination and fear of disclosure need to be discussed in national forums especially as it relates to diseases like HIV and Malaria, common effects of drug usage (alcohol is a drug) due to exposure to the thinking and behaviors that lead to infection.

CONCLUSION

No single entity can address this issue alone. An overall strategy is necessary that includes the voice of all the stakeholders as it relates to the health and well-being of this society. Time is of the essence as addiction is a Huge gap in the prevention efforts being made by the HIV community in Ghana. Lives of some of the most gifted and brightest are being lost. The people of Ghana deserve to be saved from the ravages of these diseases by arresting the thinking and behaviors that lead to jails, institutions and death.

Sincerely,

Maurice Graham

Recovering Addict

Aid for AIDS Africa President