



## **Faces and Voices of Recovery/Lost & Found in America Potential Media Project**

### **Summary**

*Faces and Voices of Recovery* and *Lost & Found in America* (LAFIA) are interested in pursuing a potential media project together that will explore the emergence of long-term recovery communities as the new paradigm of response for those struggling with alcohol and drug addiction.

The *LAFIA* media team produced the documentary film “Lost in Woonsocket” which tells the story of Mark and Normand, two homeless alcoholics found living in the woods in Rhode Island. *Faces & Voices of Recovery* is committed to organizing and mobilizing the millions of Americans in long-term recovery from alcohol and drug addiction, their families, friends, and allies to speak with one voice. Both organizations are interested in telling the untold stories of individuals who are living the long-term implications of getting sober and the impact this courageous act has on their families, friends and communities.

This summary includes:

1. A brief history on the evolution of treatment paradigms for alcohol and drug addiction.
2. A review of the themes current network television programs present about addiction.
3. Addressing “where’s the drama” in the recovery story.
4. What we want to show in this recovery series.
5. How we see moving forward.
6. First action steps and fundraising.

### **Recovery: The Next Frontier**

William L. White MA (2004 excerpted)

The history of the addictions field has been one of evolving paradigms (organizing constructs), evolving core technologies and evolving definitions of the field’s niche in the larger culture whose needs it must serve. The fields organizing paradigms have developed in three overlapping stages, a problem-focused stage, an intervention-focused stage and the emerging solution-focused stage. These paradigms can be viewed as competing models, but are best viewed as developmental stages, with each preparing the emergence of the next.

The problem-focused stage was birthed in the late eighteenth century sparked by a break from prevailing moral and religious frameworks of understanding and responding to chronic drunkenness. Compulsive and destructive AOD use became defined as a disease of the body and the will, a redefinition that has sustained more than 200 years of research on the nature of psychoactive drugs, their acute and chronic effects, the multiple sources of individual vulnerability to AOD problems, and the stages of AOD problem development.

The intervention-focused stage emerged from efforts to personally and socially resolve AOD problems resulting in social policies, education and prevention efforts, early intervention programs and addiction treatment. This country has made an unprecedented investment in professionally-directed treatment of AOD problems and has witnessed a transition of treatment from an unfounded folk art to a highly professional and commercialized industry. A lot has been learned about how to interrupt addiction careers, about engagement, detoxification, problem stabilization and recovery initiation. We know a lot about what people look like during treatment, but very little about what people look like in the months and years following treatment.

The emerging solution-focused stage was inspired by a vision of an ever-expanding recovery community. Those involved champion the birth of professionally-directed treatment as a special doorway of entry into a community for the many people who can not make the transition from addiction to recovery on their own.

Unfortunately, these advocates see an ever-growing treatment industry that views recovery as an afterthought or adjunct to itself. They see “addiction studies” in curricula in colleges and universities, but no “recovery studies” curricula. In short, they see a field that knows a lot about addiction treatment, but seems to have lost its focus on the goal and processes of long-term recovery. These advocates are joining with visionary policy leaders, treatment professionals, and addiction researchers to shift the field’s kinetic ideas and slogans from the nature of the problem (“addiction is a disease”) and the alleged effectiveness of its interventions (“treatment works”) to the living proof of a permanent solution to AOD problems. (“recovery is a reality”) Collectively, these voices are saying that it is time to use the foundations laid from the study of the problem and its treatment to build a fully developed recovery paradigm.

The movement forward to a recovery paradigm is already underway. The evidence of this shift in grassroots communities includes the:

- Growth and diversification of American communities of recovery.
- Emergence of a multi-branched new recovery advocacy movement.
- Rapidly spreading Wellbriety movement in Indian Country.
- Growth of faith-based recovery support structures, particularly in communities of color.
- Organization of recovering ex-felons into mutual support networks.
- Growth of self-managed recovery homes.
- Spread of recovery employment coops.

## **Media Coverage/Storytelling.**

The current focus on short-term crisis intervention for alcohol and drug addiction is reflected in the stories being told by our media networks. Two examples, The HBO series “Addiction” and A&E’s “Intervention” highlight the crisis of addiction and short term treatment options, but stop far short of showing what happens to individuals who complete their short term treatment and now must completely re-invent their lives in sobriety with little sustained help.

Currently, 25 million Americans struggle with addiction. This number does not include their families, friends and communities who are impacted by their behavior. Al-Anon reminds us that each addicted person directly impacts 4 other individuals around them. The really sad statistic is that of the 10% of individuals that seek treatment, 50% return to heavy using and 90% have some type of lesser relapse.

The new “recovery” paradigm that is emerging in the addiction community is a response to the short comings of crisis intervention that does not include long term emotional, psychological, financial and social support for individuals who cope with their addiction tendencies everyday of their lives. We intend to tell their stories and shine a light on what it *really* will take to address the epidemic of addiction that is gripping this country.

## **Where’s the Drama in Recovery?**

It is easy to see why television networks tend to focus on short-term crisis intervention when they tell stories about alcohol and drug addiction. As subjects careen around drunk on screen or go through the heated emotions of being confronted by their families, the fur flies. Engaging television is we call it. The common question about the “recovery” story is where’s the drama?

Our answer is that it is embedded in the daily lives of individuals in long term recovery. Everyday they get up and face the decision not to drink or do drugs. They deal with a myriad of emotional, psychological, financial and social challenges as they rebuild their lives. In a sense they go through what we all go through in this complicated world, but in the extreme.

In the case of Normand and Mark the contrast is striking. On the surface it looks like Normand has made the decision to remain sober and Mark is still sliding in and out of making a commitment, but it’s much more complicated than that. Each man has a different history. Normand, according to his family, was the “winner” in their tribe, the best job, the most fun, and the center of family life. That’s why his slide into hopelessness was so shocking for his family to deal with. Mark on the other hand was always on the fringe of questionable businesses, troubling interactions with his alcoholic father and a lifestyle of bad decisions. Yet, as Normand interacts with his children again, do they completely trust him? Of course not. They are watching, waiting, fearful that Normand will relapse. Is Normand really out of the woods? Not by a long shot. Does he have all his answers? No, he is just beginning his journey into long-term sobriety.



The answers to Normand's and Mark's long-term recovery are not just about drinking. Both have to find sustained work and a supportive place to live. They must repair relationships that have been crushed by distrust and abuse. They both must also deal with their "success".

As we continue to struggle with Mark, it's easy to forget that he was sober for 8 months helping Normand and many others. He became a beacon in his community AND then something changed. What was missing? Normand on the other hand continues to emerge as a national spokesperson for sobriety and homelessness. He is impressive when he speaks in front of film audiences and intervention programs. But as he freely admits, he is still street "hustling" on an elevated level. Old habits die hard or not at all. What happens when the excitement of his notoriety wears off or one of his children won't really forgive him? What happens when he needs to find long-term employment and his own place to live? What then?

The passion play that is long term recovery plays out everyday in the lives of millions of American's. Where's the drama? You have to know where to look for it and be willing to wait for the revealing moment when something powerful arises. You have to ask the question that confronts all of us everyday. If short-term treatment is working so well, why do so many of the treated, revert to their addictive lifestyles?

We will demonstrate what we mean by "drama", when we create the short form "recovery" pilot from new follow up interviews with Normand and Mark's community of family, friends and associates and combine them with what we already have. This pilot will be representative of the type of stories we will create as we expand the concept to include individuals that will emerge out of the Face and Voices of Recovery community groups.

In these new interviews we will explore the question of "what now." How do they want to live the rest of their lives? When someone goes through the "change" we witness their core truth emerge and that, as we all know, can be good, bad and ugly. How many of us faced with the question of the "meaning" of our lives have any answers. How many of us distract ourselves with a myriad of behaviors that might not be alcohol and drug addiction, but threaten to rob us of lives well lived all the same. This condition is universal. Where's the drama? It's right there, waiting in the shadows.

### **What We Want to Show**

We want to show what happens when a pebble, in the form of a newly treated addict, is dropped into their metaphorical community pond. We will explore the ripples that result. Normand's and Mark's continuing story is a representative model of this process.

We will explore among other things, the consequences of long-term sobriety for everyone in their community? What are the true costs from high relapse rates vs. long-term support? What hurdles must these individuals overcome as insurance coverage is denied,

housing is not available, meaningful employment does not materialize, psychological demons emerge, social pressures mount and emotional relapses beckon?

We also want to show why the emerging long-term recovery paradigm is the next step in the evolution of how we respond to addiction in our society. We want to illuminate what thinking needs to change to embrace this new concept and the positive results such a program can have on our communities across the country, not just for addicts and their families, but for all of us. What happens when we care for our brothers and sisters struggling with their demons? Are not our lives transformed?

## **Moving Forward**

We have an opportunity to continue tracking Normand and Mark as the subjects of our pilot presentation. We already have lots of footage in the can, and we are going to be in the Woonsocket/Pawtucket area at the end of September and again in October-December time frame.

As we have discussed, we want to create a short (15-20) minute pilot piece that will demonstrate the importance of the long-term recovery story in their lives. We will partner with Faces and Voices in Recovery in using this pilot to germinate conversation in your network of community groups during the holiday timeframe *and* encourage others to come forward with their experiences. We will mount these *new*, evolving stories as webisodes on the Internet.

We will then put together a pitch piece for television networks like HBO and/or documentary film investors that uses the original pilot and the new stories it has inspired to show the power the recovery concept. We will also help you promote *all* these stories in your legislative campaigns.

There is one other element we want to examine that will help us position this concept for network television or as a documentary series. We are stuck by the “connect the dots” scenario of how this story is unfolding. From the simple helping hand that was offered to Mark, we found his dad Gene, Joe the Barber and Pastor Brian. Normand’s son Tim showed up next when he wrote us his E-mail and then we re-found Normand. Then you guys showed up. Tom brings Patrick Kennedy to the Woonsocket screening etc, etc.

Following this “connect the dots” scenario allows us to offer the celebrity stories that will naturally show up in our journey (politicians, entertainers and sports figures) in the television series version of the concept. Television loves name value. We will then offer the entire web of individual stories we have explored on the Internet portal. This allows both mediums to present what they do well and play their part in the complete vision. Television gathers the millions of eyeballs that celebrity stories bring and drives them to the web portal for a deeper and more varied exploration of *all* the stories we gather from extraordinary individuals from all walks of life.