

**SUPPORT 4 RECOVERY**

**Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors**



# **ALUMNI SURVEY STUDY AND RECOVERY WALL**

**Findings and Recommendations**

**Tuesday, September 11, 2012**

**“The Law must recognize a leading fact,  
MEDICAL not penal treatment, reforms  
the drunkard.” Slaying the Dragon,  
William White**



**September 11, 2012**

**Dear Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors:**

Since the inception, Support 4 Recovery (S4R) has always acknowledged the importance of aftercare services as an extension of treatment, and the development of active alumni associations for all alcohol and other drugs recovery programs. We have a dream that one day S4R would be the connection that brings all alumni groups together, and that we could organize the recovery community to eliminate the stigma and illegal discrimination against our community. Our hope is that by creating an organized voice, we can then advocate for the services that we deserve.

In 2011, at our Annual Retreat the S4R Advisory Committee selected as a priority the identification of alcohol and other drug programs that have aftercare and strong alumni associations. In doing so, we found programs that had neither. We also learned that medical model and/or private-paid programs have aftercare and sometimes alumni associations because they have allocated funding. Conversely, publicly funded, community based non-profit organizations are less likely to have alumni organizations due to limited resources. To better understand the value of aftercare and alumni associations to recovery, we decided to center our attention on programs with successful alumni associations and conducted focus groups with their alumnae's to learn from their experience. Interestingly, those associations had some very common practices; those findings are included in this document, along with the comments written on the **RECOVERY WALL** by participants at the Recovery Walk corresponding to the last two years.

We hope that you find the **ALUMNI SURVEY PROJECT** as a helpful tool for system quality improvement. You will find common themes that are woven through the honest responses of the participants provided with faith and hope. Treatment on demand, housing and sober living remain priority issues for people in recovery, and until we as a society remove the stigma associated with chemical dependency, addiction and recovery, individuals and their families will be deprived of vital services.

As consumers, we strongly recommend that you 1) Support and develop local and state policy and legislation toward treatment on demand and after care services; 2) Identify funding opportunities to expand underfunded AOD treatment; and 3) Encourage treatment organizations to start or directly support alumni organizations which are necessary to support us and our families.

We take this opportunity to remember Supervisor Uilkema's commitment to recovery, and thank those members of alumni associations that participated and made this project happen.

Sincerely,

P.O Box 31114 | Walnut Creek, CA 94598 | 925.980.8638 tel | [www.support4recovery.org](http://www.support4recovery.org)  
*community organizing, advocacy, and support services for individuals and their families in recovery from alcohol and other drugs*

## ALUMNI PROJECT FINDINGS

### How did your Alumni Association get started?

**DVR:** It was started by alumni.

**CFR:** We started around five or six years ago. While there are bylaws and we are an incorporated organization, there is no historical information at hand.

**BASN:** There were 3 co-founders. Initially it was program mandated. Mandatory meeting were every Friday morning. We all had to go, and counselors participated. Importance of this group for people who are working through their own treatment program. Upon release there is no association with the outside once coming out of prison. Reentry people have different issues, there got to be a group for folks like us to help stay out of prison and provide mutual support

### When you were first introduced to your Alumni Association?

**DVR:** Alumni came to our program and introduced us to the association.

Alumni came and did service in the program.

Residents sat in on alumni night while in program.

Saw alumni while I was in the program and I wanted what they had.

**CFR:** I was in the program but had no idea about alumni, I heard it at a picnic and would also hear it from people like you, but had no clue. I also kept hearing from folks: I'm an alumni. I heard it the first day I was here. Five years ago, same day when I was in detox, camel chip, 150 people in the room. That was my first alumni meeting. Alumni meetings every Thursday, folks in recovery came to recruit and encourage to participate. Impressed about how they were living their lives. Hear it a lot. Bring people to residents. Would say to us: We graduated from what you are beginning today, If you stay here long enough. Get some knowledge then go onto 12 steps. At first I was confused about what it means to be an alumnus. Anyone who steps into and out of the program can become part of alumni, how do you become one? Someone who will stick with the group and participate in activities.

Came in a Friday, Cindy gave me a sponsor first day, day before alumni meeting. You have to go to a meeting, strongly suggested by the assigned sponsor within 3 days of admission into program. Because of picnic, impressed with openness of members. I was six months into recovery, I started attending the program. Did crab feed before attending meeting. First time in life ring. Initially, did not make the connection that residents ever go to meetings. Residents had an open house and invited alumni to come. Alumni volunteered Saturdays in the AM. So, I got acquainted with the alumni because, I was into residency. Now, I see there are many ways that alumni are introduced.

**BASN:** While in the program (Treatment) by a counselor. Can't remember if I had a BASN bed back in 2003 when I was first introduced. I felt at home upon exit from sunrise 1992 we all got together and got pizza to talk about recovery.

When I first came to DVR on a BASN bed, I used to go to parole office to report, this is no longer the case. Back then, that is how he learned about BASN directly from parole officer. They told us to help us stay connected and supported. Learned from Ed at Discovery House two years ago. Ed's friend, knew he was clean, he followed him to the car wash, took him to the meetings and since then he has not missed a meeting. He likes this meeting. This meeting works for him, they talk about his issues.

Betsy first time he heard in 2000 from his parole officer. Suggested a BASN bed at Oz. Limited only few people knew about BASN, staff connected her to meeting in Walnut Creek once a month. Dennis Venegas told her about a meeting for women out of prison. Lots of camaraderie, good to know other alumni think about you, even though you have not been here. Things never changed.

Eddie said he is the product of the work of drugs. Has seen a lot of things in prison. For him it was just a drug issue, was caught in possession. He was an spectator for stabbings, political things that he did not need or knew about before prison. Appreciates support of BASN

Doug this is his core group. Talk about things that do not talk in other meetings. This group is growing, but know that he must start coming to business meetings. Good feeling when someone asks your opinion- he is thankful that we are here to ask. This is good stuff, and if we could help someone else, why not?

## **What keeps you involved?**

**DVR:** I get a lot of peace and serenity working with the residents and watching them grow. As long as we are clean and sober we can come anytime of the day and night. Watching the newcomers come in and change. Brotherhood and comradery.

I see alumni stay clean and I see that it works to stay involved. Been through many programs which do not let alumni come and go as we please. That keeps me coming back. This is a very spiritual place to come back to.

**CFR:** Went to first picnic and realized: I am part of this, I felt like I belonged. In order for me to make it, watch key people Kathy, Jack, etc. in watching them at this events on their sobriety, needed to be of service and stay sober while belonging. Now I get the benefit. This year amazing, had so many rewards from giving back. Important to show the way to do it. Leading by example. Nice to see the girls from detox, they don't remember names, still do not have color, but they are happy that they are making it. For some, 12 steps don't work, but the alumni. The alumni is supporting counselors, not Nina, is new ones and old ones, members just like me and you. I have grown into the alumni, best thing that ever happened to me. By giving back, I owe so much to CFR, is important to me what I got is through the alumni. Incredibly grateful to the alumni that show me the way to stay sober.

Getting involved with a larger community. Involves more than me and meetings, changing a life style. I want to keep giving back. It is impressive to see how big the recovery community is. Helped me so much in my recovery want to keep giving back.

**BASN:** Love. Homeboy love, different feeling. Grew up. Learned to be a man in prison, how to walk and talk. Homegrown love, in school. Only ,meeting he goes to. Has prison mentality, slowly but surely mentality better than anything ever. Same people but not in prison.

## **What does your alumni association offer you?**

**DVR:** Fellowship and the opportunity to grow doing things outside of the program.

The key dates in our recovery life that we spend together. At Christmas time every client receives a gift.

This is a real positive thing for me to be a part of. I can be proud of this alumni.

Belonging and the pride you get when you have a 1 year bracelet (symbol). People notice it.

I am offered family involvement in everything. Family growth and interaction. All of our meetings are open meetings that we can also bring friends to.

The bracelet the alumni offers me when I earn it with 1 year time. The alumni are like family.

**CFR:** Opportunity to give back to CFR. Is through the alumni that you get to be of service. John Muir has given us so many opportunities to give the patient still in treatment hope. This place changed my life, now I want to give back.

Allowing us during after care to come back is a huge factor.

Alumni (Ross) schedules people, patients have someone special visiting evenings in treatment and detox. All the volunteer opportunities that are available. Staff makes opportunities but gives us the responsibility of schedules and most importantly, it give us some autonomy.

For example, the young people ambassadors positions were created, they listened to us (staff), now is growing into after care. 12 step meetings started by alumni mostly twelve steps and one non twelve step, as suggested by FSAA. By giving us opportunities to volunteer it indirectly opens other resources or activities, including partnering with other treatment organizations, Women's retreat, etc.

**BASN:** Meeting place for us, our issues are different unlike regular alcoholics. We stab repeat offenders; we talk to each other to stay out of vicious cycle. We have done things others have not. Glimmer of hope, hopelessness goes away. Hard to be accepted by society, this is a ray of hope.

## **What do you like about your Alumni Association?**

**DVR:** Structure and goals. You become faithful to the group and learn from those ahead of you.

That we are so involved and set examples to the new comers. I would not have gotten a sponsor if not for the alumni.

**BASN:** 2 years in recovery. Addicts with other issues did not think this would work. Who is going to employ a robber, did not know how to apply job skills. Now assistant superintendent of a construction company. Pleasure being in a committee with Tracy.

### **What do you dislike about your Alumni Association?**

**DVR:** Missed opportunities there is a lot of untapped talent that we could use to get grants and do things to help our community as a whole not just those in recovery. We have become comfortable within ourselves. We no longer who limit our growth and overall potential.

**CFR:** I was used to life ringers, a bit intimidating at first, but now I love it. I have aversion at nick picking everything. Procedure for everything prefers simplicity. It comes with the territory, more flexibility and spontaneity. I have seen people that only come when they are getting a chip, New York, Sacramento, loyalty factor. Big deal, not hear trying to get what is important. Nothing that she does, she dislikes. Not really an issue, would like to see more ideas, people approaching the board with more ideas. Not negative, but would like to see new ideas. Maybe giving them a suggestion tablet. While is not nearly so why I got involved, the alumni is still a little "clicky", I think is still an effort to be part of, but not as much as it has been in the past. If it persists, it has definitely improved in the last five years. You almost need entry into a particular layer of the alumni. Some people want to stay in charge and that is just the way they are. There is a sense of entitlement in a volunteer organization. We have created more service positions, or more avenues to be able to comment or suggest. Have created a Website and newsletter. Newsletter should be available and reliable lots of people awaiting. Not negative, just needs improvement

**BASN:** Too bad is only once a month, this type of meetings should be more frequent.

Would like to see it more at Disco House. He has never has been into prison, therefore, he is unable to relate to experience, he wants someone from BASN to speak at Discovery House. Alumni at DVR this meeting helps, we need more like this. Afraid to speak in regular meetings. If it was not for you guys, burning desire when he sees a purse. Afraid outside, appreciate guys here. Do not like struggling for money, need to figure things and raise money. Heard that DVR is going through lots of cuts. Are we getting more funding for BASN beds? Paralegal offer his help. DVR alumni

### **What else do you need that you do not get from your Alumni Association?**

**DVR:** Not getting enough help from the new members. The old timers are getting burnt out.

We need more focus when we get together.

Not doing enough outside of these rooms.

We used to have transitional housing.

We are not using our non-profit status enough.

More fundraising opportunities.

**CFR:** Hiking club, meeting at the beach, different outings. Not necessarily sponsored by the FSAA. More opportunities organized by alumni without being too elaborate almost like a movie night. Such a welcoming alumni, I'm having this hike, an automatic.

R) Alumni has powerful hookups for those not living in the bay area. We have access to them, we can contact out of town people. Alumni could help.

Motorcycle club just signed up. Salsa dancing, computers, put your interest, can be part of media, don't know how it works. One activity on the month, calendars designate a weekend or day, push it month before, easier. Even like a dog walk meeting. We live in San Ramon, bike ride.

**BASN:** Need coffee and have a honorary BASN status. He is not one of us.

### **What is the average attendance at the monthly meetings?**

**DVR:** 40-50

**CFR:** Average is close to 140, money collected usually 150. Basket RAF lev\$200

Relapse prevention detox sucks, don't want to be in that place July meeting low attendance.

**BASN:** Average is 50

### **What does your alumni association do for the program?**

**DVR:** We offer big support to the new comers.

We provide ongoing fellowship and set an example for the residents.

Show the residents how it is done and give them guidance.

We are living proof to the residents that it works. We show them that they have a future and we give them hope.

**CFR:** Clients need a ride to pick up a check

Bridge group and Saturday morning

Detox maintenance

Residents monthly barbecue, Sunday meeting at residents

Rides to medical app, individual interaction with residents

Life rings coordinated

Adopt an alumni, letters on file. Helping hands volunteer program. Sponsor outreach one on one contact with Clients. Alumni volunteering will be called directly by staff

Aftercare facilitators, 65 hours of volunteer significant number to the program

Purchased audiovisual equipment in classroom b

Took barbecue located outside and took it to the program for the patients.

### **How does the program help your alumni association?**

**CFR:** Big yes. Totally supported. Meeting room, facilitate volunteer efforts. Pay alumni to distribute newsletter.

Bring van of residents to late meetings.

If in evening program if you are in the residence, it is mandatory to come to alumni meetings. No longer is the case in detox, first step in recovery to participate but Von stiff would say, get out there! I think back and that was me, someone just got 90 days, they stay in we talked to them. We should give them 24 hour chips.

John Muir's Outpatient is a 6 weeks program 3x per week and all day Saturday starting at 8: AM. Not necessarily covered 100% by health insurance.

### **General comments made after the questions were asked of BASN:**

- If we had food and a raffle many more people would attend.
- Reluctant to say much, will be off parole in two weeks. Lives on Taylor Rd in Concord, needs after care. Is imperative to receive aftercare after prison. When there is no connection after prison, then we fail. That is why we must have a connection, having a place, or maybe even more than one place. Reluctant to go back to his own neighborhood even though we all recover. There should be more network, flyers in Safeway, churches.
- His first meeting. Anywhere he goes there is a homeboy, recovery is a struggle every day. If we support each other, we are more likely to stay out.
- Considers BASN a public service, when we relapse the public is in danger! BASN is harm reduction (meaning society is safe) If someone qualifies for BASN, besides personal recovery -BASN does something to seriously protect the community. Streets become a lot safer because we are here. This is real stuff, we can think of other things than committing a crime.
- (Female) Wollam needs transportation. Needs to come to meetings and there are other women at the Oz who must be transported.
- Most of the time, parolees have no job skills, homeless and deep into substance abuse, unable to get a job and need transportation. If we start at prison to let them know about BASN, they would come here. BASN considered after care for reentry. Must stay away from Richmond and come to this area. Everyone is looking for a job, this is America. We ought to use the same skills but in a positive way. Parole officers do not know about this group.











