

Family Connections

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Families as Advocates

Parents need to be advocates, because there is no one else who can speak better about the needs of the family, especially when it comes to issues related to adolescent substance abuse. Parents understand what it is like to wait up for their sons and daughters, who they know will be high or drunk when they come home. Parents lay awake at night wondering if their daughter is safe. Parents wait anxiously by the phone waiting for their son's first call from treatment. Parents love their children no matter what. The strength of parents when it comes to making decisions for their kids is incomparable.

The challenges of parenting are the best kept secrets, especially if you are parenting a child with a substance abuse issue, a mental illness or a co-occurring disorder. Families need varying levels of support during their lives together. They need the most support when they are in crisis. Adolescent substance abuse is a family crisis that demands support from outside the family. Parents are put in a position to have to advocate for the needs of their families and of their teen.

Speaking up can be frightening because of the stigma attached to admitting not only that there is a problem in the family, but also that the problem involves a child abusing alcohol and or other drugs. Parents and families find the strength to go beyond the stigma and find the help they need. The more parents speak up and share with each other the more likely the stigma of adolescent substance abuse will diminish and other families can get the help they need.

Adolescent substance abuse is a social issue that needs advocates and people willing to speak up about the truth. The author, Flannery O'Connor said, "The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it." When it comes to adolescent substance abuse, accepting the truth for yourself, then helping your teen accept the truth is no easy task. Educating schools, religious institutions and communities about the truth of adolescent substance abuse is no easy task either. Families speaking passionately are as valuable as experts reciting statistics and research.

Parent voice is important



Speak Up!

because parents speak passionately about issues that affect them. Whether its voicing their opinion about state and federal funding for treatment programs, educating or mentoring other parents about substance abuse, or calling or writing letters to big alcohol companies, parents can speak to these issues without flashy statistics or political savviness. Parents can speak up by telling their personal stories of how families are affected by alcohol and other drugs. There is nothing more powerful than the truth.

The next time you see an issue effecting adolescent substance abuse in this newsletter or read about an issue in the newspaper, trying speaking up! Your voice may make all the difference.

Quote of the month

Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not presidents and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country.

-Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1938

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Parity—the quality or state of being equal or equivalent.
-Miriam-Webster

What is Parity anyway?

The definition of parity, according to Merriam-Webster, is “the quality or state of being equal or equivalent.” On October 3, 2008, when the U.S. Congress approved the Wall Street bailout package, it approved a provision that mandates parity for mental health and substance abuse services from insurance companies. The “parity” in this case occurs between behavioral health services and medical services included in health insurance plans. Health insurance companies can no longer put caps on mental health and substance abuse services, unless they put caps on other medical conditions. Health insurance plans do not have to include mental health and substance abuse ser-

vices, but if a plan does, it needs to be supported in the same way as medical treatment.

The passage of this Mental Health Parity bill was a long 12-year struggle that brought together Congressmen from both parties. The congressional representatives receiving regards for their diligence include Rep. Jim Ramstad (R-MN) and Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) for sponsoring the House bill. Sens. Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Christopher Dodd (D-CN) and Pete Domenici (R-NM) sponsored the Senate parity bill. In addition to congressional heavy hitters, there was a groundswell of support from the grassroots supporters. Many,

many people called and wrote letters and e-mails to their congressional delegates urging them to support the bill. Several advocates of the bill suggest the push from those directly affected by the legislation was significant in its passage.

The new parity bill will go into effect for most plans by January 1, 2010. With many of the practices of insurance companies that discriminate behavioral health issues gone, more people will be able to get the help they need.

For more information go to www.jointogether.org. Search under “parity.” Also go to www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org.

Check out the new
IFF website at:
www.ifcmh.net!

Remember to Vote!

- Wondering where the candidates stand on Substance abuse treatment issues? Go to:
 - www.JoinTogether.org—Go to the “Voter’s Guide.”
 - Senator John McCain’s website—www.JohnMcCain.com
 - Senator Barack Obama’s website— www.BarackObama.com
- Trying to understand the pro’s and con’s of the Illinois Constitutional Convention Amendment? Go to www.voices4kids.org.
- Wondering about substance abuse issues in Illinois? Go to www.iadda.org.
- Want to learn more about national recovery issues? www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org.



A Story of Recovery-Matt

"Nothing is impossible," explains Matt S. "Sobriety is one of those things that is hard to explain. You have to try it on to know it."

Two and a half years ago, Matt couldn't imagine these words coming from his mouth. During his four-year addiction to alcohol, Matt was kicked off of sports teams, thrown into jail and placed in a psychiatric ward. Now, Matt is excited about his life in recovery, his relationship with God and his future career in psychology.

"I'm interested in how the mind works. I want to be an addictions counselor someday," says Matt. "Without the help of others, my life would not be the same. I feel that a career that is centered on helping people will be worth it."

Matt dedicates his spare time outside of studies to working

in a youth group at his church and speaking on recovery. Being in Rosecrance inpatient and outpatient programs for more than six months, Matt has a lot to share with adolescents and their families at Rosecrance.

"Telling people about your experiences can be helpful for others as well as yourself," Matt says. "Speaking to others motivates me because I have to reflect on where I used to be."

Matt honestly shares his feeling that recovery is not always easy, but it is worth it. **He tells others who are struggling with an addiction that treatment may take a small portion of time, but active addiction will take away their whole life.**

"I believe that recovery is a lifelong lifestyle," states Matt. "Addiction is a cunning dis-

ease. It can bring a person down, even if the person had more than 25 years of sobriety before he/she returned to using."

To keep grounded in recovery, Matt meditates, prays and reads the Bible every day. The tools he learned in treatment and the love of God is paramount to his recovery. He also participates in recreational activities to stay balanced.

"I do the things I did before—play sports and run—but now I do it sober. There is more joy in it now, because I can remember what I did the day after."

This article first appeared the 2007 Rosecrance Health Network Annual Report and is reprinted with permission. To read other stories of recovery, visit www.rosecrance.org.

Knowing where I'm going in life and walking with God has changed my life. I have a deep-seated feeling of joy that I didn't know existed before.
-Matt

Have a recovery story you want to share? Contact Stephanie at sfrankiff@yahoo.com

IFF Conference enjoyed by all!

The annual Illinois Federation of Families Conference on "Parenting Youth with Emotional Challenges: Effective Interventions" was attended by 75 parents and professionals. The conference was co-sponsored by the Department of Human Services-Division of Mental Health and Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, and the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership.

IFF's Executive Director Cindy Shepherd reported that everyone who registered attended the conference. An amazing statistic for a Saturday Conference!

Dr. Mary McKay was the key note speaker and talked about

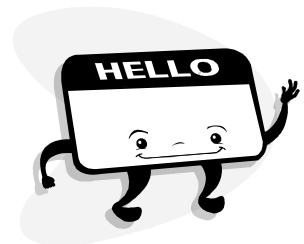
ways agencies can be more inclusive and respectful of families. Parents and agency representatives talked about the barriers that prevent parents from participating in services. Dr. McKay offered solutions to agencies for engaging families in the treatment process.

Attendees of the conference also heard speakers on co-occurring disorders, stigma, legislative advocacy, navigating transitions for young adults, child trauma and other relevant topics.

Barnes and Noble sponsored a booth and offered a number of books for sale on topics of interest to parents and professionals.

Cindy Shepherd summarized the day by saying, "The conference was a huge success. Both parents and providers commented on how much information they gained through this event. Dr. Mary McKay was a dynamic speaker that engaged the entire group with her key note address on evidence informed practice and family involvement in the treatment and care of children with mental health needs. We feel very fortunate to have had so many wonderful presenters contribute to our annual conference."

A downstate conference is being planned for the Spring! Watch this newsletter and the IFF website at www.iffcmh.net or www.illinoistreatmentworks.org. Go to the parent page.





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Newsletter?

Contact Stephanie at
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**Supporting Families
Across Illinois**



The Illinois Federation of Families is an advocacy organization that helps families and children with mental health needs seek a better quality of life.

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