THE ANONYMOUS PEOPLE

RECOVERY IS OUT – TO CHANGE THE ADDICTION CONVERSATION FROM – PROBLEMS TO SOLUTIONS

TEACHERS/GROUP LEADERS: This guide is meant for you to facilitate a small-group discussion after students watch the 50-minute documentary, The Anonymous People. The primary objective of this discussion is to help students become aware of their own thoughts, feelings and attitudes about addiction and recovery and how what they believe may be different from actual facts. It is suggested that you establish a few ground rules; suggestions for those are located at the end of this document.

THE FILM

THE ANONYMOUS PEOPLE is a feature documentary film about the 23.5 million Americans living in long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Deeply entrenched social stigma and discrimination have kept recovery voices silent and faces hidden for decades. The vacuum created by this silence has been filled by sensational mass media depictions of people in active addiction who continue to perpetuate a lurid public fascination with the dysfunctional side of what is a preventable and treatable health condition. Just like women with breast cancer, or people with HIV/AIDS, courageous addiction recovery advocates are starting to come out of the shadows to tell their true stories.
The moving story of The Anonymous People is told through the faces and voices of the leaders, volunteers, corporate executives, and celebrities who are laying it all on the line to save the lives of others just like them. This passionate new public recovery movement is fueling a changing conversation that aims to transform public opinion, and finally shift problematic policy toward lasting recovery solutions.

APPROACH TO THE FILM

The trend in mainstream reality television, including shows such as Intervention and Celebrity Rehab, and in mass media news coverage of celebrity rehab scandals, intently focuses on the drama of behavior that marginalizes people suffering from a serious health condition. Graphic and sensational depictions of active drug and alcohol use may garner ratings; they also inform public opinion and policy. This unrelenting fascination with people’s lives in active addiction ignores the other side – that people can and do recover. For people still struggling with addiction and their families, the portrayals of America’s addiction epidemic may appear hopeless.

The Anonymous People shines a light on the personal and societal value of recovery through the moving stories of people who are public about what their lives are like now that they’re no longer using alcohol or other drugs.

PRE-SCREENING

1. Framing The Anonymous People:
   a. Give background on the film by reading the paragraphs under “The Film” and “Approach to the Film” in this discussion guide.
   b. Give a viewing prompt before students watch the film. Here’s an example: As you watch The Anonymous People, keep in mind that no one is acting. These are real-life people sharing real-life experiences of addiction and recovery. Please try to keep an open mind about the people you see in the movie. Also, try to be aware of your responses to what you see and the questions that come to mind.

2. At the end of the film, you’re going to break into discussion groups and you’ll be given a set of questions to answer about our impressions of The Anonymous People and addiction in general.

SCREEN THE MOVIE

POST SCREENING: SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION GROUPS

1. If possible, consider creating group sizes of seven or eight, no more than nine. The smaller the group size, the more everyone will be encouraged to speak out about their individual impressions and thoughts about The
Anonymous People. Have the small group members sit in a circle, whether in chairs or on the floor.

2. **Facilitators:** The film may reveal some sensitivities about substance use disorder or even recovery for some of the youth. Some may have experience with active addiction or addiction recovery in their families. Still others may have involvement with friends who fall into one or both of these categories.

3. Begin with a welcome/ice breaker that looks like this:

   "Welcome to this small group discussion of The Anonymous People. In just a moment, we’re going to talk about certain aspects and ideas presented in the film but before we do that, I’d like for us to get to know each other a bit.” (This piece is for groups of students who don’t attend classes together. If members of the group already know each other, skip this piece and go on to #4.) “I’d like to go around the circle, say your name and tell us one thing that few people know about you. I’ll start by telling you that my name is ____________ and most people don’t know that I competed in three MS 150 bike tours, the first one on a three-speed bike! Okay, now it’s your turn.”

4. Okay, now that we all know each other, I want to go over the ground rules for our group discussions today (Have someone post the suggestions where everyone can see them). In order for you to have an open and honest dialog, please agree to follow these ground rules and hold each other accountable. If as a group, you decide there is another suggestion that needs to be added, feel free to do that within your groups.

**POST SCREENING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (in small groups)**

1. Let’s begin with your first impressions. Did you like the film? Why or why not?
2. How do you perceive people with addiction? Has your perception changed since watching the movie?
3. What do you think about the young people in the movie? Did they accurately depict the nature of the drug problem in your school or on your campus? Anything they didn’t say that needs to be said?
4. What does “being in addiction recovery” mean to you?
5. How do you feel about the possibility of becoming addicted to alcohol or other substances? Do you think your feelings about it might affect your willingness to seek medical help?
6. In your experience, do people face stigma or discrimination because of their addiction or because they’re in recovery?
7. Did you know about recovery in high schools or recovery programs on college campuses before you saw the movie?
8. Do you think schools and colleges should provide help for addiction and help in preventing addiction? If so, what might that help look like? If not, why not?
9. Do you agree that addiction a disease? If so, then is it a mistake to
punish it as criminal behavior?
10. Based on what you saw in the film, do you agree that addiction and
recovery need to become more mainstream and portrayed in a positive
light, especially within the medical community and among the media? Is
that possible?
11. What role do you see young people playing in the fight against addiction
and recovery stigma and discrimination?

* SUGGESTED GROUND RULES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION (feel free to
add more)

a. Let everyone speak without interruption or comment.
b. Respect each person’s views and opinions.
c. When it’s your turn to speak, try to use “I” statements.
d. Remember that the opinions and statements made within the group
are not to be shared outside the group.
e. Although we’d like to think that what is shared within the group will
be held in confidence, if you’re not comfortable, don’t share
anything that you don’t want others to know. If you’d like to talk
with one of the teachers or counselors after the group discussion,
please let us know.

The Anonymous People – ManyFaces1Voice.org