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Renewing Hope and Transforming Lives

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Above and Beyond: Renewing Hope and Transforming Lives

By Mary L. Datcher

Defender Senior Staff Writer

One of the biggest epidemics in the U.S. is drug addiction. In the last four decades, the cycle of drugs sold and consumed in the African-American community has deteriorated generations down to walking shadows. Once, many flourishing areas in the Chicago Black communities represented pride, stability and progression to do better — be better.

In the early 1980s the quick cash flow of crack cocaine transitioned from heroin, ravishing throughout our communities increasing death, prison sentences and leaving many parentless children. This vicious cycle has left us with irreparable damage today.

The White House has issued an official report on the damage of heroin — reaching beyond the urban cities into rural America. The residue of state budget cuts and free-clinic programs that gave a glimmer of hope to those seeking rehab are in jeopardy. For many, the hardest steps are to admit when you have a problem whether it's drug or alcohol addiction — sometimes both.

The opium epidemic has created a task force sponsored by the top city and county legislators launching Chicago-Cook Task Force, including Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle and others. According to the Chicago-Cook Task Force on Heroin Final Report issued October 2016, opioid overdoses have shot up in recent years.

Between 2001 and 2014, deaths in the United States from prescription opioids more than tripled — and deaths from heroin rose six-fold. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that the number of people with heroin dependence or abuse was 467,000 in 2012 (twice what it was a decade earlier) and 2.1 million for pain relievers.

On the West Side in the Garfield Park community, there is a ray of hope for those battling drug and alcohol addiction. A year ago, Above and Beyond, a non-profit, outpatient recovery center, opened its doors to those seeking help.

It was founded by Bryan Cressey, a founding partner of the Chicago private equity health care firm Cressey & Company who raised \$615 million for various health care services and facilities. He's invested and created Cressey House and Higgins House, working with the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse un-



Above and Beyond staff, l-r. Brenda Dixon (Lead Counselor/CADC) and Siri Hibbler (Housing and Job Readiness Director). (Photo by Mary L. Datcher)

der ReVive.

Cressey's latest property, Above and Beyond continues the philosophy of compassion, competence and communal healing.

600 Helped in Last Year

Since January 2016, the center has serviced 600 patients. Executive Director Dan Hostetler is grateful for Cressey's contribution. Unlike other programs that rely on state funding and federal grants, Above and Beyond is privately funded.

"He's the sole contributor at this point. He did that with a purpose that we would become self-sufficient, we're in the process of doing that right now. We have a DUI preventive program that we're putting on its feet right now," he said. "We just became Medicaid approved. We're in the process of realizing that his idea was to put a walk-in clinic on the street so that people who had no access, no insurance, no other place to turn could walk in off the street and receive the same level of treatment that people of privilege could receive."

With a small staff of volunteers, there are several methods of helping patients through a more holistic approach.

Hostetler says, "We follow them for a three-year period of time. They come in and go through an assessment. The assessment follows SM standards — six dimensions, stages of change. We put together an initial treatment plan with them and then we have something very unique — we're the only people that have this. We put them in a vestibule where they're shown a four-minute film, giving them choice to go with 'smart' recovery or with Alcoholics Anonymous."

In showing the film to incoming pa-

tients, AAB feels it eliminates any kind of prejudice. With the choices given, they choose what fits for them and the AAB team writes a treatment program.

Brenda Dixon is the recovery center's lead counselor. Growing up on the West Side, Dixon is also a pastor and found herself at a crossroads trying to counsel those who were going through some major challenges.

"I got an on-hand view of our people — what they need and how we can help them. I've had family members that had issues and I was so happy when I finally found Above and Beyond," she said. "Being a pastor, I really feel that the church should be the beacon in the community. One of the reasons why I began to educate myself was to be able to help my neighbors. I had the word, but when people have domestic violence issues, addiction problems or they need housing it's different."

Dixon volunteers faithfully and feels the approach that is utilized to reach their clients is refreshing and allows her to apply the same patience and nurturing as a pastor.

"When I came here, the thing that amazed me was Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) because it teaches the client how to change themselves. We teach positivity, faith, how to trust so here the client is taught how to change himself to better his life. Change what you say about the situation, change how you see the situation. That also helps them in their recovery."

Above and Beyond has a trauma group that meets five hours a week that is guided by the curriculum of *Seekingsafety.com*. After following the guide for the first hour, they break into gender-based groups, which is a unique way of being sensitive to the patient's need if some-

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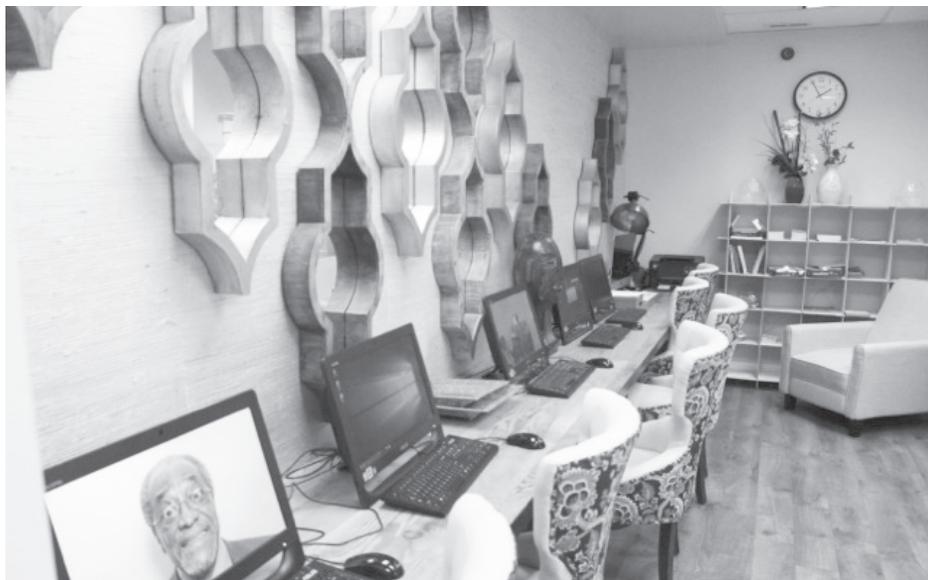
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Bertha Cromwell



Verified has conducted an audit of printing, distribution, and financial records, as well as other data to substantiate circulation data submitted to Verified. This audit followed guidelines prepared in conformity with generally accepted circulation auditing procedures involving records covering all distribution methods utilized for qualified circulation during the period(s) covered by the reports. The results of this audit warrant the issuance of this audit report to as a true and accurate statement of the qualified circulation of the client publication. We certify to the best of our knowledge all information set forth in this Publisher's Statement in true and in accordance with VERIFIED AUDIT CIRCULATION Procedures and Regulations.

COVER JUMP



The computer lab sanctuary at Above and Beyond Family Recovery Center.
(Photo by Mary L. Datcher)

Above and Beyond, continued from, Page 02

thing becomes too traumatic. If something goes left, counselors are on site to immediately get them the help they need.

Lindsey Saltor is part of the recovery program at AAB, and at the time of our interview was going into his sixth week clean and sober. He found out about the recovery center at The Boulevard, a housing and holistic facility that helps people seek permanent residence while they are being treated for behavioral and addiction problems.

Helping Others

Saltor, 41, relocated from Mississippi to Chicago and ran into immediate conflicts with his child's mother, finding himself homeless within 6 months. His life has changed since arriving at AAB.

"I thought I'll be judged about my past or what I went through. I was on drugs and drinking a lot. They opened up their arms. I've been in rooms before, but I've never been in the rooms like these rooms. They're like a blanket. You can't do anything but fall in love with it," he said.

Located along the Lake Street 'El' train tracks in the Garfield Park area, the center is in a beautiful rehabbed building. The reception area is surrounded by open windows and earth tones that welcome visitors with beautiful affirmations that cover the walls. From the comfortable sofas, to the natural, bright sunlight that pierces throughout each room within the building — everything is warm and welcoming. The center features a computer room, conference room and various breakout rooms where sometimes workshops and job-training sessions are held.

Saltor says knowing the resources provided by AAB has encouraged him to do things he had never done. "That's the first for me. I hadn't thought about doing a resume. Hadn't thought about even working. It hit me, maybe I can try. I'm trying to better myself mentally, physically and spiritually."

With a small but effective staff on site, the center can only take adult patients but is working diligently to expand to servicing youth clients.

"Youth is going to be a prominent

piece in what we do. Family unification is one of the pillars that is going to give us three years. We're looking to get three years of stability out of the people that come through here. We're not looking to get them stable for 30 or 90 days but for three years, but they can't do that without balancing and they can't do that without a job," said Hostetler.

With a background in leadership and a master's in non-profit management, Hostetler is familiar with AA and the 12-step program. As a recovering alcoholic, he has been able to step out and become a facilitator for SMART recovery — using his experience firsthand to help those dealing with similar demons.

In order to help those to help themselves, the staff of volunteers must also cope with taking on the weight of their patients. The secondhand shock is called "compassion fatigue."

"Somebody comes in and gives you trauma that happens in their life, you walk away with those psychological shocks. It's very hard to shake that. So, we have a unique program," he explains. "Ms. Brenda runs the group and it's called our Wellness Group, and we hold ourselves accountable to make sure we take care of ourselves through diet, exercise, emotional control and spiritual control. Everybody can construct whatever works in their life. Then we hold each other accountable."

Dixon shares her experience as a counselor and educates listeners on her weekly radio show every Thursday on Big Gospel Xpress 1570 AM. Volunteering at Above and Beyond is not just a mission. She feels it's a calling.

"I am really animated because it helps the client. It reaches out to the people to have a place in this community, and all the services are free. You don't have to pay for it."

She says there's a lot of stress the client has when they're trying to recover and required to pay for services, especially for those unemployed.

"This is something that we're doing from our heart. We're learning how to love ourselves, to accept ourselves that's the first step to moving up. Learning how to accept you. Whether you're a drug addict or alcoholic. Learn how to love you."



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