

Support Group Meeting

Nyack College School of Social Work

SWK 658 ~ Professor Brandenberger

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On March 25, 2021, I had the opportunity to attend a virtual Alcoholics Anonymous open group meeting with Brooklyn Intergroup. Since the pandemic, the group has been meeting virtually every Monday at 8pm. The group consisted of 15 participants, myself and another MSW colleague (one african american woman, five caucasian men and nine caucasian women). The meeting started out with everyone introducing themselves, they were very welcoming when we informed them that we were MSW students. There was a facilitator, a guest speaker and they called on group members to read and share as they felt lead but there was no obligation to share.

The meeting started with the preamble which is recited by one of the group members, it states: Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking. The preamble stood out to me because it does not say you will stop drinking or you better stop drinking it merely states that you are only required to have the will to want to stop drinking. I can imagine hearing that can feel like a weight lifted off of someone's shoulders to know that there is no added pressure in the group you just have to show up.

A couple of things during the session caught my attention. There were Christian centered readings, such as, the serenity prayer. The Alcoholics Anonymous program adopted the prayer in 1941 when a member saw it in The New York Herald Tribune and requested that the secretary at the time print it on cards for it to be distributed to the members. All members wishing to share their thoughts started with a declaration, "Hi my name is (state name) and I'm an alcoholic." I have always wondered why, according to quora.com, it is a means of identification, allowing the people listening to differentiate between who is visiting to support someone or learn about the movement and the actual alcoholics in attendance. It is also about being honest with yourself and

accepting your addiction and your need for support. I often wondered why that was a practice of the meetings I have seen on television and the meeting I attended in undergraduate school.

Everyone was greeted with jazz hands, someone exclaiming welcome or an emoji in the chat. Most of the members seem to know each other besides the one african american woman, she informed the group that she had four days sober, to which everyone excitedly said congratulations. The sober times ranged from four days for the newcomer to twenty plus years for the facilitator but each one was celebrated with the same enthusiasm. The african american woman told her story saying that her dad was also an alcoholic who frequently went to AA meetings, it was not until she got older that she realized he went so often because he fell in love with his sponsor and eventually left their family. This delayed her from attending any meetings because of the hurt those thoughts brought to her but she admitted that she was glad that she attended the group because she needs the support.

One of the male members discussed his moment of enlightenment, realizing that he always had a defiance about him, saying that he did not have the skill of listening when he was younger. He explained how he swayed between his potential to do the right thing and his tendency to do the wrong thing. He has been clean and sober for the past twenty years but it was not until he recognized his lack of compliance, worked towards establishing structure in his life and applying those learned lessons to his life was he able to remain in his sober process.

It was now time for another member to share her story, in short she spoke of moments when she regretted being an alcoholic and the fact that she did not like it but she did not have the ability to refrain from drinking because she thought there was no other option available to her. She also spoke about not wanting to be sober at times because she was miserable when she was and was only happy when she was drinking and partying.

There was also a guest speaker who shared her story. She was affiliated with another AA group who she said incorporates meditation in their meetings. She spoke about starting her experiences with unhealthy relationships with television and chocolate, often bingeing on both. Her habit with drugs began at the age of 14, saying that she did it to be appealing to boys. By the age of 16 drugs was a daily routine for her. She recalls that she thought her life was normal because she was attending school everyday, she was on the honor roll and excelling in her academics. Eventually her family recognized her downward spiral and sent her away to a meditation retreat for four days. She recalls that it was the first time in four years that she has not had drugs or alcohol in her system. The retreat was impactful for but she eventually relapsed when she went away to college. She recounts that she was not able to “kick her unhealthy habits” until she admitted that she needed support during her sober process. She reassured the group that thoughts of using drugs and alcohol still enter her mind but she realizes she has to honestly name and admit to those feelings and lean on her support system during those vulnerable moments.

It was evident to me that although everyone attended the meeting due to alcohol they all had different narratives to their journey to that road. They all acknowledged their addictions and were in the active process of refocusing their lives. They realized they all need a sponsor, an accountability partner, to hold them accountable and who they could check in with when they needed to. These sponsors would become a part of their safety plan, who was there to assist them in staying sober. One member explained it saying, she doesn't know how a light switch works but she knows when she flips the switch the light comes on, she is not sure how sobriety works she just knows when she calls a sponsor or goes to a group it works for her.

According to the Las Vegas Recovery Center, “addiction recovery is more than stopping drinking or using. It’s an ongoing process of growing and healing -mentally, emotionally,

physically and spiritually”. There is a process to becoming the best version of yourself and for some Alcoholics Anonymous is a part of their process that they can not skip over.