

One Family at a Time

As an adviser to families for over 27 years, I thought I'd seen and experienced just about everything in the world of family dynamics. I was wrong.

I was recently invited to participate in the three-day Family Workshop at Caron Renaissance, an addiction treatment center in Boca Raton, Florida. In treating the patient, Caron understands that addictions are a family disease with each family member playing a role or part. Recovery is more likely to occur when the entire family is treated and the root causes of the addictions are addressed. Over the course of three days and evenings, I sat in on each session as patients and family members looked into the past to uncover the why of those behaviors as they began their family restructuring. Some family members were there as spouses; others as siblings or parents.

Mary and Nate were the counselors that led my day group. Working in tandem, they questioned each patient and family member and asked them reach back into the past to uncover disappointments, episodes of shame, issues of anger, and explore how to get more in touch with their unvarnished feelings. Through the sharing of this information, patients heard loud and clear how their addictions affected each of the lives of their loved ones. One grandmother told the group she came to find out where her adult granddaughter wanted to be buried, as she had been through ten rehabs already and she just wanted a chance to say good bye. The adult son of a patient last saw his mother as she flat lined at the hospital from an overdose. Fortunately, she survived, but he had not seen or spoken to her since that event until he decided to attend the Family Workshop; a decision he made at the last minute because he didn't really think he wanted to do it. This husband hung in there for many years, having gone through extensive therapy himself trying to understand why this addiction was tearing his family apart. These sessions were very intense and everyone cried at some point. Some patients threatened to leave group, but none did. Some patients had relapses even during their 90 day stay, much to the surprise of their family.

The evening sessions were with a larger group of patient peers, the family members and an incredible therapist. During this group, the day was reviewed and every misstep was brought out into the open to be discussed and then receive feedback. The peers are tough on each other, but are very supportive. Nothing is too personal or embarrassing to be addressed in open session. There is no hiding, no excuses and no holding back; the language is direct, sometimes brutal, but always truthful. Accountability and working the program are important tools towards recovery. Living one day at a time, every action having a consequence and taking ownership of one's behavior are the cornerstones of helping families recover.

The sessions began at 9:00 in the morning and ended each evening around 9:00 p.m. We took short breaks and had an hour for lunch and dinner. The entire day was invested in family sessions. By the end of the day, I was physically, mentally and emotionally drained. When we concluded on Friday afternoon, I was exhausted and it took me the entire weekend to process what I had just experienced. I perhaps intellectually understood the concept of recovery, but now I also had the humbling opportunity of feeling it and experiencing it in person.

I headed home for the weekend at the conclusion of Family Group; however, many of the families were staying on for another two weeks of intensive restructuring. I know that they are in good hands. The therapists, counselors, assistants, and staff are all world class professionals. Addictions and substance abuse, perhaps coupled with psychological disorders, are not something that people want to talk about. It is easy to stay in denial, and wealth can enable a great deal of dysfunction. The problems, however, will remain, fester and grow. Fractured families exist everywhere, and the fortunate ones get help. Needless to say, recovery is not an easy road for the patient or the family, but Caron Renaissance delivers miracles on a daily basis.

As part of the Family Workshop at Caron Renaissance I was given a report written by Dr. Tian Dayton entitled *High End Deprivation, the Dark Side of Wealth*. The focus of the report is on understanding children of wealth. Children of wealth often begin life with prescribed identities and a sense of

social and financial superiority. This can make it difficult to form a personal identity. Even though this is a clinical study, it is well written and made for very interesting reading and I would be happy to share this report with you. If you would like a copy, please call me at (561) 839-1111; or you may email me at p.vattiato@capitalguardianllc.com.