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Alcohol, Drug, Well-being and Recovery in New Zealand

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Abstract

Addressing dependence on alcohol or drugs involves much more than merely stopping heavy drinking or drug use. National and international literature shows that there are many dimensions to recovering from alcohol or other drug dependence (AOD). Though some of these aspects have previously been explored in detail there is still insight to be gained about what makes recovery from alcohol or other drug dependence possible. One of the fundamental questions that warrants exploration is: what enables people with AOD dependence to achieve and maintain abstinence and improve their well-being, in the first two years, within the New Zealand context?

This thesis explored, in detail, the lifestyle changes of 11 New Zealanders with two years or more of abstinence-based recovery from alcohol and/or other drug dependence. In particular, it examined what they perceived were the necessary lifestyle ingredients to maintaining abstinence and improving their quality of life. These lifestyle changes happened within a recovery community context that supported their need to have belonging, relating, meaning and purpose.

More specifically, the key recovery ingredients for this recovery population were found to be: identifying with other people with AOD, following a structured recovery programme (12-steps), processing challenging emotions, developing high levels of self-honesty, building relationships with other recovering people, serving others, managing alcohol and drug saturated environments, experiencing higher power encounters, and establishing hobbies, interests, and fitness routines.

Involvement in these dynamic recovery communities resulted in a number of behavioural changes and shifts in participants' outlook on life that could otherwise take years of counselling or therapy to achieve.

The treatment field has a lot to learn from these rich community-based alcohol and other drug recovery fellowships; a number of implications and recommendations for alcohol and other drug treatment professionals have been identified.

“it was magical... being part of a really big WE” (study participant)

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