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## Recovery and Citizenship

William L. White, Pat Taylor, and Carol McDaid

The organizing constructs (or “governing images”; Room, 1978) for the resolution of alcohol and other drug problems have evolved through three overlapping stages:

- 1) A pathology paradigm, where knowledge is drawn primarily from studying the problem
- 2) An intervention paradigm, where knowledge is drawn primarily from studying prevention and treatment
- 3) A recently emerged resilience and recovery paradigm, where knowledge is drawn primarily from study of the lived solution (White, 2005, 2008).

The growing interest in recovery as an organizing concept has sparked multiple efforts to more precisely define *recovery*. Two of the more prominent of these efforts are illustrative.

The Betty Ford Institute hosted a field consensus conference that defined addiction recovery as a “voluntarily maintained lifestyle characterized by sobriety, personal health and citizenship” (Betty Ford Institute Consensus Panel, 2007; also see McLellan, 2010). The United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission (2008) subsequently defined recovery as “voluntary sustained control over substance use which maximises health and wellbeing and participation in the rights, roles and responsibilities of society.” Both recovery definitions posit a changed relationship to community as an essential ingredient of addiction recovery. The purpose of this essay is to discuss the role of citizenship in addiction recovery. More specifically, it explores three questions:

- 1) Why is *citizenship*—reconstruction of the person-community relationship—proposed as a criteria for addiction recovery when it is not a criteria for recovery from other medical disorders?
- 2) What does citizenship mean in the context of addiction recovery?

- 3) How can addiction treatment programs and recovery community organizations enhance core citizenship skills and activities of the individuals and families they serve?

## **Why Citizenship?**

Recovery from any disorder is measured by changes in the precise areas affected by the disorder. The historical precedent in medicine is an inextricable link between each criteria or measure of recovery and the specific source and symptoms of the disorder. For example, recovery from a burn to one's hand is not measured by how well one can ambulate nor is recovery from cancer measured in terms of reduced criminality because there is no known connection between these dimensions. So why is citizenship one of the criteria for recovery from a substance use disorder? Would making citizenship one of the key recovery criteria reflect the moral overtones that have historically been attached to people with addiction? Would it constitute an inappropriate imposition of prejudice and moral values into the arena of medicine? It is our contention that citizenship should be considered a critical dimension of addiction recovery. Distortions in character and disruptions in social relationships are hallmarks of addiction (White, 1996).

Addiction inevitably involves a process of self-encapsulization, drawing into oneself, and reducing or withdrawing from intimacy with others. The addictive relationship with the drug drains and distorts the self, progressively displacing all other needs in importance and recasting others as objects to be used in service to the drug relationship. As the drug assumes the central value and ever-growing space in one's life, addiction becomes a disease of disconnection—from one's own aspirational self, from family and friends, and from identification with and relationship to community and culture. Addiction wears the mask of narcissism, but it produces a self-centeredness that is more aptly described as drug-centeredness. The self is actually lost in the process—a loss further magnified by family and community disconnection and social alienation. What remains at the end is either extreme isolation or migration towards a subterranean culture of addiction.

Recovery from addiction is thus rediscovery or development of an authentic self, a reconnection or reformulation of family, and a new social contract with one's community and culture. Citizenship is a component of recovery because addiction so often leads to the abandonment of one's connection and commitment to community. For some, this involves withdrawing their assets from the life of the community; for others, this involves threat to or inflicting harm on the community and its citizens. It is therefore not surprising that for nearly two centuries, addiction recovery frameworks have involved public confession, public

commitment, socially supported recovery maintenance, and amends by the individual to the community via various forms of service work.

## **Citizenship and Recovery**

The social contract of citizenry holds that each of us accrues certain rights and privileges if we accept the responsibility of contributing to the health and wellbeing of the whole society. Those rights and privileges require various tickets of access: an identity card, a driver's license, a voter registration card, an employee or student ID, proof of insurance, a professional license, a checkbook, a credit card, a library card—all evidence of connection to community. These symbols convey, in part, that we are productive members of society. It is not unusual for persons in later stages of addiction to have lost all of these symbols of community connection. Thus, over its long course, the recovery process for many must involve:

- a renewal or reformulation of self (visibly evident through the acts of story reconstruction and storytelling—the cleaving of one's life into categories of before and after to depict both addiction and recovery),
- a shift in social identity from outsider to insider—seeing oneself as a piece of the community whole,
- community connection via the expansion of non-drug social relationships, and
- community service—a shift from being a community burden to being a community asset.

The process of recovery involves reconstructing character (an alteration in beliefs, values, and behaviors) to redefine a person's relationship to community.

Community-Facilitating Recovery Values: To guide this new or renewed social contract, certain key values need to be cultivated or re-embraced. These recovery-grounded values include:

- primacy of recovery (maintaining recovery by any means necessary—under any circumstances),
- identification (empathizing; recognizing self in others),
- humility (accepting personal imperfection; when wrong, admitting it),

- respect (considering the needs of others),
- nonmaleficence (stopping injury to others),
- service (helping others),
- responsibility (doing our duty),
- restitution (making amends to those we've injured),
- forgiveness (letting go of past grievances),
- honesty (telling the truth),
- discretion (respecting confidences; avoiding gossip),
- loyalty and fidelity (keeping promises and commitments),
- justice (being fair),
- gratitude (passing on good fortune to others), and
- tolerance (respecting differences) (White, 2001).

These recovery-grounded values pervade religious, spiritual, and secular frameworks of recovery across time and cultures. Actualizing these values creates opportunities for people to reconnect with families and communities—a process central to addiction recovery. These values shift the focus from *recovering from* to *recovering to*—from what a person is removing from his or her life to what is being added.

Core Acts of Citizenship: Recovery-grounded values can inform daily activities in a range of areas including family, social, cultural, economic, and political participation, as well as shared life meaning and purpose. Here are examples of representative activities.

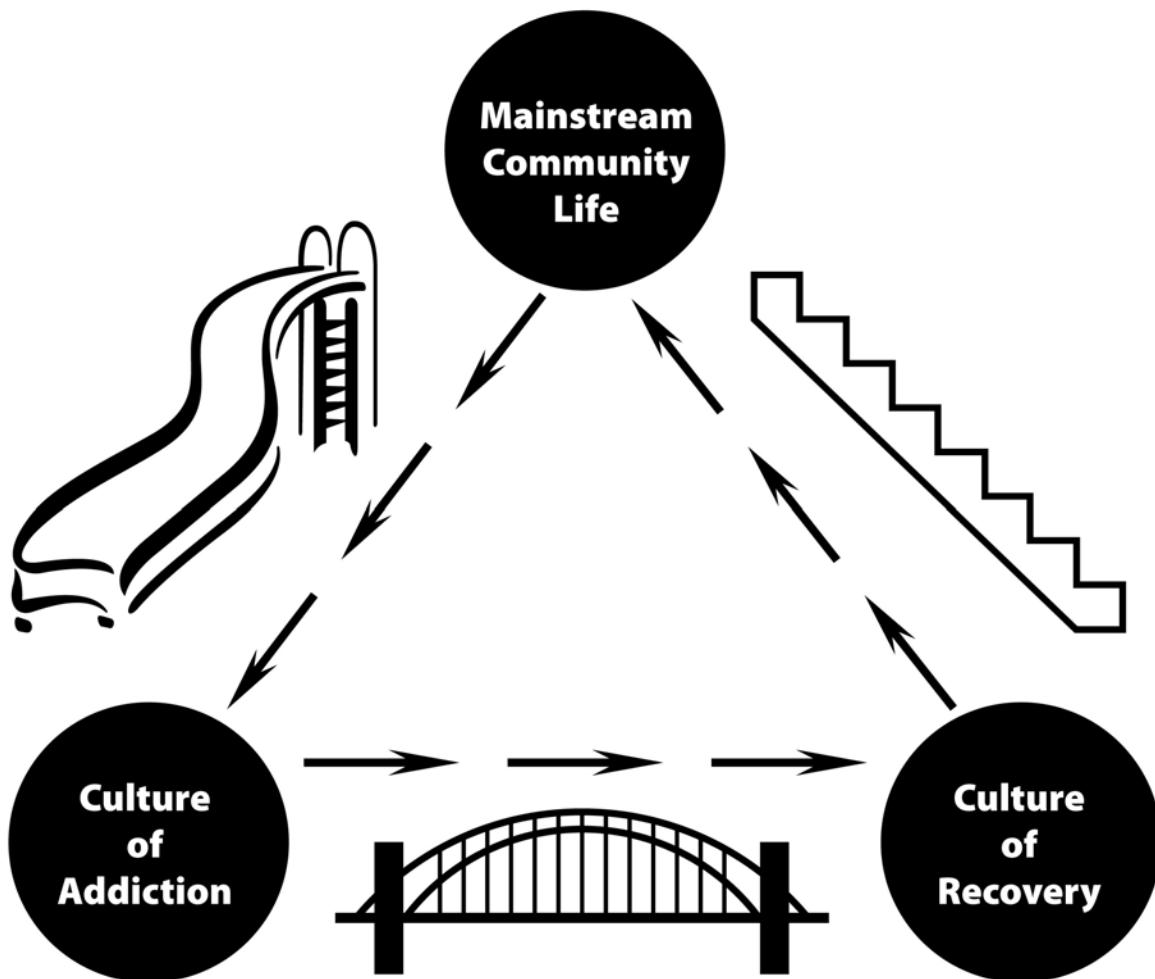
1. Family Participation (intimacy and legacy)
  - Accepting support from family members
  - Participating in family rituals and activities
  - Offering support to family members
  - Repairing intimate relationships
  - Accepting parenting responsibilities
  - Paying child support
  - Caretaking of elders
2. Social Participation
  - Sober socializing with friends
  - Social networking via the internet
  - Participating in a social support group
  - Visiting with or helping a neighbor

- Participating in a professional association
  - Participating in a health club or exercise class
  - Participating in a PTA, club, or civic organization
3. Cultural Participation
- Parks
  - Museums
  - Libraries
  - Theatre
  - Cinema
  - Concerts
  - Athletic Events
  - Keeping up on local, national, and international news
4. Economic Participation
- Financial restitution
  - Employment or educational development
  - Debt Management
  - Bank account
  - Paying child support
  - Paying taxes
  - Home ownership
  - Business ownership
  - Making charitable contributions
5. Political Participation
- Supporting a recovery advocacy organization
  - Participating in a recovery advocacy event
  - Speaking publicly about recovery
  - Attending a political event
  - Voting
  - Testifying before a legislative body
  - Attending community governance event, e.g., town council, tribal council
  - Making political contributions
  - Campaigning for a particular candidate or issue
  - Writing an issue-focused letter to the editor or blog
  - Participating in a political protest event
6. Shared Life Meaning and Purpose
- Attending spiritual/religious services
  - Belonging to a spiritual/religious institution

- Participating in religious or community service work

### Recovery as a Cultural Journey

Many people with addiction become progressively isolated from mainstream community life and enmeshed in drug-focused subcultures. Their immersion in this lifestyle makes it very difficult to re-enter community life following recovery initiation. There are cultures of recovery that can act as sanctuaries and way stations to prepare and guide people back into mainstream community life. This process of withdrawal and re-engagement could be graphically depicted as the movement from mainstream community life into the culture of addiction, the journey from the culture of addiction to the culture of recovery, and the subsequent re-entry into mainstream community life.



Addiction and recovery journeys are highly personal and variable. Some people with addiction continue their illness while maintaining an active life in the community; others have never been part of mainstream community life and may have even been born and raised within the culture of addiction. Some people in recovery remain cloistered within the culture of recovery while others participate in the recovery culture and become fully involved in the larger life of the community. Still others initiate and sustain recovery without connection to communities of recovery. These variations of addiction and recovery have been described as culturally enmeshed, bicultural, and acultural styles of recovery (White, 1996). For people with the most severe, complex, and chronic alcohol and other drug problems, extreme disconnection from mainstream community life is likely. These individuals may need guidance in reconnecting to community and assuming their citizenship rights and responsibilities.

### **Facilitating Citizenship in Recovery**

Addiction treatment programs and recovery community organizations can play significant roles in enhancing citizenship skills and community integration of people in recovery by:

- assuring access to community participation by reducing social and professional stigma attached to addiction and recovery,
- evaluating degree of community disconnection and citizenship skills as part of the global assessment process,
- facilitating acquisition of citizenship “credentials” for persons seeking recovery,
- providing education and training to enhance citizenship skills,
- providing personal guides to facilitate community re-entry, and
- sponsoring or linking to opportunities for community participation and community service.

Addiction recovery is being increasingly defined in terms of three core elements: 1) sobriety (or diagnostic remission), 2) progress toward global health, and 3) citizenship. Frameworks of recovery (e.g., religious, spiritual, and secular recovery mutual aid societies) have long suggested activities that facilitate reconnection to community. We are just beginning to understand this third dimension, citizenship, and how it can best be enhanced and measured. This frontier is a worthy arena for research and service experimentation.



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