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Recovery Radio in Philadelphia

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Something quite remarkable is unfolding in communities around the world. More than at any time in human history, people who were once part of the global addiction problem are stepping forward with their families and allies to become part of the recovery solution. Secular, spiritual and religious addiction recovery mutual aid groups are spreading and growing in size. New grassroots recovery community organizations are rising in local communities and networking to form national and international recovery advocacy movements. New recovery support institutions are springing up—from recovery homes to recovery schools, recovery industries to faith-based recovery ministries, recovery cafes to recovery-focused sporting events. Vibrant cultures of recovery are spreading across the United States in tandem with these related trends. Within these cultures, the growing varieties of recovery experience are being expressed through ritual, symbols, language, music, art, dance, and theatre. Communication media of all varieties—from radio and television to film and Internet are being mobilized to carry recovery-focused messages of hope, help, and healing.

Nowhere is this recovery revolution and its vibrant cultures of recovery more evident than the City of Philadelphia—a city that has pioneered addiction treatment and recovery support resources for more than two centuries, a city that has hosted the largest recovery celebration marches in the world, and a city that has moved beyond hiding its problems to celebrating its solutions. Addiction flourishes in supportive communities and no community has done more to create the physical, psychological, and social space within which recovery can flourish than the City of Philadelphia. Earlier papers have profiled Philadelphia's recovery-focused transformation of its behavioral health care system (White, 2007), including its Recovery Advisory Committee, its consumer councils, recovery community centers, recovery murals, and some of its most creative and effective treatment and peer-based recovery support services (Achara-Abrahams, Evans, & King, 2011; Evans, Heriza, & White, 2011; Johnson, Martin, Sheahan, Way, & White, 2009; Maguire, Sheahan, & White, 2011; NET Consumer Council et al., 2007; White, 2009). The purpose of the present article is to profile recovery-themed radio programming in the City of Philadelphia.

Recovery Radio: A Vision of Service

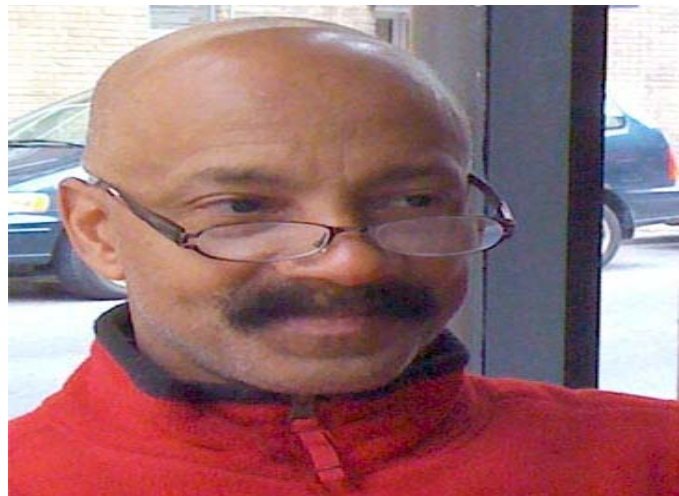
Where there is no vision the people perish. Proverbs 29:18.

Recovery radio in Philadelphia is inseparable from the fulfilled visions of three men: Derrick Ford, Vincent Faust, and Fred Barber.

In 2007, Derrick Ford had an epiphany while listening to local talk radio. He thought of all the talk radio shows spanning everything from politics to sports, astrology to cooking, and asked himself, “Why is there no talk radio focused on recovery?” Within a few minutes, he was able to visualize a program focused on recovery that could reach far more people than those currently “in the rooms” of local recovery support meetings. From that vision came a one-hour program that for the past five years has aired each Saturday night between 6-7:00 PM on WURD 900 AM. (<http://tunein.com/radio/Rick-Ford-Show-p199387/>)

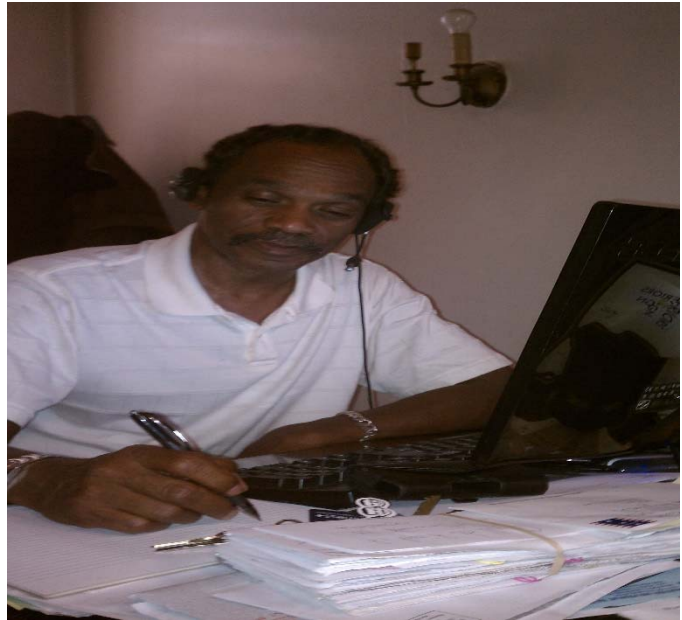


In 2008, Mr. Frederick Heard, Executive Director, Sobriety through Outpatient (STOP), shared his idea of a client-run, recovery-themed radio show with staff member Vincent Faust. Fred knew that Vince had worked for years in radio before coming to STOP and challenged him to create Recovery Media—internet-based radio programming designed to engage people in recovery in therapeutic activities. Today, STOP streams through the Internet 20 hours of recovery-themed radio and television per week. (www.stop-recoveryradio.com)



Fred Barber and two business partners launched a Philadelphia-based life-coaching business. In 2011, they decided that a radio show about recovery from addiction and mental health problems would be a great way to reach out to working people who were encountering behavioral health problems. The result is INSIGHT, a one-hour show each Monday night, 9-10 PM, on harambeeRadio.com—an internet-based radio program reaching African Americans in more than 30 cities. The URL for the program is:

<http://www.harambeeradio.com/insight.htm>



Recovery-themed Programming

Each of Philadelphia's recovery radio shows has its own style and format. The Rick Ford Show uses a live, call-in format featuring presentations and discussions. The show's guests represent a broad spectrum of Philadelphia's treatment and recovery support resources. STOP's Recovery Media features a series of shows on sports, health, fitness, poetry, and music—shows sporting such titles as Minds of Men, Men's Views, Women's Views, and Brutally Honest. INSIGHT features interviews with program directors, counselors, and people in recovery discussing behavioral health issues from a recovery perspective. Guests on the show range from national celebrities, local political figures, and local experts on treatment as well as people sharing the lived experience of recovery.

All three programs are designed as a forum for community outreach, with all of the shows linking people to resources where they can find help. That help is extended through conversations off line with people who call in for help and through the chat rooms linked to some of the shows. STOP's programming also illustrates the ways in which persons in treatment in Philadelphia are being actively engaged, empowered with new technical skills and confidence, and mobilized to give back to the community. The anonymity that can be afforded through radio programming also allows individuals in 12-Step recovery to share their stories and the resources that have helped them without violating personal anonymity at the level of press.

Philadelphia's behavioral health leaders view recovery radio shows as a beacon of hope within the City. Roland Lamb, Director of the Office of Addiction Services in Philadelphia, says the following about such programming.

Recovery radio in Philadelphia has been a beacon of hope for those who have lost their way and a source of guidance for individuals and families who are rebuilding their lives. Our City is very blessed to have these voices of expertise and experience reaching out every week to our citizens.

Sponsorship of recovery radio programming in Philadelphia varies. Recovery Media and Insight are each self-sponsored, and the Rick Ford Show sponsors include Wedge Medical Center, Livengrin, Self-Help Movement, Men & Women for Human Excellence, NU-STOP, Northeast Treatment (NET), Self, Inc., Malvern Institute, One Day at a Time, and STOP.

Recovery Capital of the World

In my interviews with Derrick Ford, Vincent Faust, and Fred Barber, all acknowledged that their shows were part of the larger culture of recovery developing in Philadelphia. When asked about references to Philadelphia as the “recovery capital of the world,” all agreed that this title was well-deserved and that Philadelphia has become “a Mecca” for people seeking and in recovery. They attributed this status in part to the recent leadership Dr. Arthur Evans brought to the City of Philadelphia’s addiction treatment services, but they also acknowledged Philadelphia’s deep historical recovery roots and their recent revival.

Personal Reflections

So who are the people behind these leading recovery radio voices in Philadelphia? Their lives are as remarkable offline as online. When not on the air, Derrick Ford works as a case manager and therapist with individuals experiencing substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders; volunteers for community programs—including the Brothers Reaching Back mentoring program, which he founded and directs—and raises his daughter, Quadia, as a single parent. Vincent Faust works full time as the Coordinator of Multimedia and Marketing at Sobriety Through Outpatient and invests his community service time with the Philadelphia Mural Arts Project, the Lupus Foundation, the Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, Women Organized Against Rape, and the Philadelphia Recovery Walk. Fred Barber works at the Wedge Recovery Center in Philadelphia (Program Director of the Germantown Education Center), serves as a volunteer at the Harmonious Volunteer Center, and shares with his wife the joy of seven grown children, including four college graduates, and two grandchildren.

When asked what this radio recovery ministry has meant to them personally, the responses included the following.

It’s been an overwhelming experience for me—just understanding my niche, finding what God wants me to do. Helping others in this way has been so rewarding.

I’ve always wanted to give back to the community for the support the community has given me. This was the way I found to give back.

Personally, I just like the business of helping other people do better with their lives. It’s given me another outlet to reach out to other behavioral health professionals and to reach out to people who are looking for a lifeline. And this is, of course, part of my own recovery process—to be able to pass on the hope of recovery. It’s really gratifying to be able to be in this position—a real privilege.

There is a recovery revolution in Philadelphia, and the revolution is being carried on the radio.

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