

Youth in OA e-Newsletter First Quarter 2008

This is the first 2008 "Youth in OA" (YIOA) Committee quarterly e-Newsletter for those in the OA community interested in helping youth in OA. YIOA currently sees its role as networking facilitator for OA members around the world interested in helping youth in OA.

The YIOA Committee is currently a Board of Trustees (BOT) committee with three Trustee members. The Youth in OA web page – http://www.oa.org/youth_in_oa.html – is up and running. If you go to www.oa.org and click on the "Is OA for you?" drop-down menu the last selection is the "Youth in OA" page.

Previous issues of this e-Newsletter are available from the Youth in OA web page or directly using the link http://www.oa.org/pdf/YOIA_newsletter07.pdf. At the Youth in OA page scroll down to the bottom of the page.

Here is a view from OA in Suffolk County, NY

I have copies of the Kid's View and use it for the teen meeting we started (which no one comes to). It is clearly written and would be good for kids, but 13-year-olds and older are going to think it is a joke. I actually thought of asking the group about putting the easy-to-understand step under each of our steps and traditions for our meeting. A few members looked at the Kid's View and saw the steps and traditions much clearer. I thought maybe it would help define it in easier-to-understand terms.

I think there is no question about creating literature geared for teens, something in between "A Kid's View" and our adult literature. There are many adults that would benefit from an easier-to-understand version.

I also suggested a teen Web site; teens need a place to go that speaks their language. No 13-year-old is going to maneuver around any of the sites. Can you imagine trying to decipher that at that age? We will never reach them if we don't try to reach them on their level. Teens in an adult world just don't get it. Many adults don't get this too easily either. Teens don't have the perseverance to do the back-to-back keep-coming-back like adults do. We have to think like a teen. I would have felt like I was in a foreign country, hearing a language that made no sense if I came into the rooms as a young member. Again, just my opinion. As the mother of four girls, one of them 17, I hear where the kids are coming from. I have lots of experience, and I know what it is like for the teens. They are in an isolated, lonely place with no understanding of what is happening to them. So, if we create the awareness for the young ones, we have to offer a place to go. I speak for kids under 17 who don't fit in regular meetings.

It is my hope that someday OA will be there for the younger generation of kids suffering, to catch them early and give them the choice to find recovery. In my opinion, adult meetings are not suitable for teens. I get calls from parents looking for OA for 12 and 13 year olds, and I have nothing to tell them. It is frustrating because the need is there.

Let me know if help is needed on this, I will definitely be part of it.

Peace,
Janice
Angelyn8@aol.com

Please send questions to youthinfo@oa.org. If you have experience with youth in OA to share with other OA members, please send it to youthinfo@oa.org.

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The YIOA Committee is currently a Board of Trustees (BOT) Committee with three Trustee members. The Youth in OA web page (http://www.oa.org/youth_in_oa.html) now has suggested meeting formats for young people and the First Quarter 2008 e-Newsletter (in addition to all the issues for 2007) for download. If you go to www.oa.org and click on the "Is OA for you?" drop-down menu, the last selection is the "Youth in OA" page.

Region 8 Young Peoples Committee

Members of the Committee will be contacting the International Conference of Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous (ICYPAA - <http://www.icypaa.org/>) about handling youth in AA programs to see what works for AA in this area. The members will also attend Al-Ateen meetings to gather information on what works with youth.

The following story is an example of the value of exposure of young people to the existence of OA. The important role of cyberspace in accomplishing this exposure for young people is also noted.

Morgan's Story

March 8, 2008

My name is Morgan and I am a recovered, not cured, bulimic and compulsive overeater. I have been free of grips of the disease of bulimia for a little over 3 years now. I did not understand anything about myself, as a person with a spiritual malady when I walked into my first OA meeting on Tuesday December 12, 2004. I did not know that I used food to block out feelings, reward myself for accomplishments, or to cope with life. I used food for everything. I was emotionally 13 years old when I walked into the rooms at age 23. I had lost ten years of my life to the disease of bulimia and other dependent behaviors. My life had been unmanageable since I was about 10 years old, and had become completely unbearable. I wanted to die.

The only solutions I could conjure up were to drive my car into a wall, commit myself to a psychiatric ward and to be straight-jacketed in an empty room, or to drown my sorrows in food, alcohol and drugs until my heart stopped beating. I had become a full-blown addict and everyone and everything was my problem, but me...

Little did I know, I had become my own worst enemy. I lived a very scary wasteland that was located behind my eyes and between my ears. It all began in middle school, when I began to feel the pressures around me to be thin, girly and popular. Inside I wanted to be a boy. I dressed in army fatigues, played manhunt, ice-hockey and participated in many other masculine activities. I also was a cheerleader and a gymnast. I was very conflicted. I tried to deny that I was becoming a woman. I remember the terror I experienced at my first sign of

womanhood. I tried to hide it. I was never taught to embrace my femininity and that it was very special. I immediately thought something was wrong with me. What was happening to me?

The surge of hormones, change of my body and lack of emotional support drove me to find solace in food. Food quickly became my best friend, my support, my love, and progressed over the years into my life. I withdrew from society to eat. I snuck food out of the pantry and stashed it in my bedroom and then blamed others in my family for the missing items. I began eating massive amounts of sweets when I got home from school to stuff down the feelings of becoming a woman, and struggling to be accepted and popular.

Then my parents announced that we were going to be moving to a new city. I was devastated, angry and empty. I thought they hated me so much that they were ripping me out of my comfort zone and dropping me into a new scary place where I didn't know anyone. It was all about me. I turned to food instead of integrating socially into my new society. I gained a considerable amount of weight and I was miserable and fat. Now I have really blown it, I thought. Nobody is going to want to be my friend or boyfriend now; I'm so hideous. So, I decided to go on a diet like my mom, who was always going on and off the newest diet on the scene. I took it so seriously because I was going to beat her! I began exercising obsessively at 4 am and restricting my food to a degree that I quickly dropped from 135 to 92 lbs (I am also 5 feet tall, to give you an idea of how big an impact 43 lbs can have on a small frame).

I began to feel angry and deprived because I had cut so much from my diet. I became fat-free and calorie obsessed. I bounced from fad diet to fad diet, going up and down, up and down. I soon made some friends who ate like I ate.

Then a friend introduced me to bulimia. It was the solution to my problem (or so I thought). I became addicted to the behavior like a junkie is to heroin. From that day on, there were few days that I was not overeating and then throwing up for the next 10 years of my life. At first it was a fun game I played with myself. I began to hide my behaviors, and it was my little secret. I finally felt I had control over something in my life. Something my parents could not touch. Boys started to notice me and I became obsessed with being thin, pretty and popular. I did anything and everything to be noticed. I gossiped, I stole, I lied, I ate, I judged, I purged, I used laxatives, I over-exercised, I hid, and I lost my dignity, integrity and soul to my lover, my god, my warden: food.

We moved one more time, at my senior year in high school, and I plunged deeper into my disease. I had trouble making friends with other women, so I naturally gravitated to the men, who were easier to get along with and they gave me the attention I needed, or so I thought. On the outside I looked normal, but on the inside I was empty, angry, lost, confused, and sad. I was a shell of a person.

I don't remember much of my high school and college years because I spent so much time concerned with myself and my little plans, weight loss schemes, tumultuous/codependent relationships, and substance abuse. In college, my disease escalated when I discovered other substances that I used after purging to hide the guilt, avoid weight

gain and escape from reality. I was in full flight from reality 24/7. I had no idea what my problem was, but I suspected something was wrong. My mom had sent me to a therapist, but I was not honest with her, and I just got really good at lying to lead people to believe things were ok. I believed that if the outside looked ok, then nobody would notice the insides were black. That worked for a while.

As I lost touch with reality, things became more and more confusing for me. I dragged my feet through college and more unsteady relationships. I always managed to do really well in school because I used food to reward myself for my achievements. My body had begun to feel the effects of the malnutrition, erratic exercise and drugs/alcohol. I began to look really sick. People started to comment on my behavior and appearance. I just brushed it off and pretended I was ok. I started to look for answers. I began with a counselor and progressed onto a cocktail of anti-depressants, boyfriends, geographic changes and pets. Nothing filled the hole.

After graduating and taking a full-time job and trying to be a functioning member of society, I had a mental breakdown. I could no longer keep it together. I broke down and was ready to die. I didn't think there was another way. I finally asked my mom for help. I checked myself into a dual-addiction treatment center for eating disorders and substance abuse. I lasted for 3 weeks in outpatient therapy. I began to hear some things that I never heard before, but I still could not stop my crazy behaviors with food. Once I started eating, I could not stop. It no longer pertained to only my binge foods. It was anything and everything. Sometimes binges began with juice or sodas and then progressed on to the full gamut of drive-through foods, desserts and massive amounts of carbohydrate. I could never predict the outcome of that first bite. It had become fatal. I decided to do some online research and found OA and decided to call. I had no idea what motivated me to take action, but something did. I called and the next week I went to my first meeting. I don't remember much of what was said or who was there. I cried the entire duration of the meeting. I had finally found a place where I felt like I belonged.

I was not an immediate success. I struggled with the idea of asking for help, getting a sponsor and needing a God to recover. I thought I had left God in church when I was a kid. I didn't know that I was searching for a spiritual answer in all of the wrong places. I finally gave in and asked a woman to be my sponsor and she smiled and said, great, call me at 6:30am. I almost croaked. I hated her. But some greater force dragged my lazy rump out of bed the very next morning and I reluctantly dialed her number. She greeted me cheerfully and immediately put me to work. That is where my journey through the 12 steps began.

I followed all of the suggestions she gave me, and managed to put a few days here and a few days there together, but nothing long-term. I kept focusing on the day count and the food, rather than asking God to remove the obsession. She suggested for me to "act as if." I thought that was weird, but I tried it anyway. I thought praying was corny and it felt uncomfortable, but I did it anyway. Every time I had a slip, I was terrified to tell my sponsor for fear she would reject me (kind of the image I had in my head of angry parent or angry God). But she was kind and loving and loved me until I could love myself. I kept doing

the steps and moving forwards. I did not have immediate abstinence, as I expected, but it got better. Over time, I stopped obsessing and hating myself. Days started to become weeks, which I would have never imagined a day in my life that I didn't eat uncontrollably and then purge it all up, or feel guilty and ashamed of what I had done. God was beginning to do for me what I could not do for myself. I was amazed. I started to feel better. My world got a little bigger. Each time I was willing to share a bit of myself with her, layers began to fall away. I continued on through the steps and began to help others, which is the bright spot of my life today. I also immediately got involved in giving service to the organization that saved my life. I started making amends and my relationships started to improve. People I had wronged began to invite me into their lives and ask for my opinion. I couldn't believe what was happening. I was changing from the inside out!

Today I go to meetings regularly, sponsor women, call my sponsor daily, give lots of service, talk to God, show up at work, participate in family activities, eat consciously and take care of my body, to the best of my ability. I don't always do it perfectly, but I am willing to show up every day. I love my life in OA and am proud to be a member.

If anyone has questions for Morgan or anything else about Youth in OA, please send them to youthinfo@oa.org. If you have experience with youth in OA to share with other OA members please send it to youthinfo@oa.org.

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