

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

Published as a community service by The Abell Foundation

“Street-smart” activists use street wisdom to turn around broken lives and broken neighborhoods

ABELL SALUTES

The Quarterway Houses, Inc.; for effecting recovery from drug addiction with a program of “talking and listening.”

Is it possible for hardened drug addicts to recover merely by *talking and listening*? Dr. John Hickey, Executive Director of Quarterway Houses, Inc. and his deputy director, Debra Lawson, are believers. They see it happen every day at Tuerke House.

The method, developed by Dr. Hickey's predecessor, Dr. Joseph Verette, is based on a deceptively simple view of personality: “You feel the way you feel because you think the way you think,” a way of looking at oneself, Dr. Hickey says, known in lay circles as “cognitive therapy.” But getting the addict to ingest this cerebral discipline is not all that simple.

It takes, for starters, rigorous, classroom work and after-hours study for 28 straight days to move the addict from the point where he (she) enters the program to a point where he or she can leave it, and take responsibility for him (her) self from there on out. In those challenging,

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“We believe you have to change the minds and the hearts of these people, that you have to empower them to enhance the quality of their own lives, and that you have to do it one human being at a time.

“We believe that to get people out of trouble you have to give them a sense of humility, so that they come to see for themselves that there is another way to go. We believe that if you treat troubled people as human beings, not just talking to them but listening to them, too, you bring out the human qualities in them.

“Then, then, they can handle criticism, and get on with the kind of free open exchange that leads to the building of a trusting relationship. Getting this trusting relationship is our goal—it's the ticket out and up.

“They have to come to believe that you, the person or the organization looking to help, is really trying to help them, and not looking to make a reputation for themselves.

This is Clayton Guyton, a 42-year-old African American, who works nights as a prison guard, stripping the vocabulary of a hundred years of the healing arts down to street-talk ideas on how to change a world. He carries no credentials as social worker, psychologist, or psy-

chiatric counselor. No diplomas hang on the walls of his spare, bare, first floor office/classroom/store room at 831 Rose Street at Ashland Avenue on a forgotten corner of East Baltimore. But he, and his friends, Elroy Christopher (retired on disability from the BG&E), Vincent Richardson (retired from the Marine Corps), and Ms. Callie Brown, have taken it on themselves to treat street-bred problems with street-bred wisdom. Theirs is, by size and structure, barely an “organization”; they are the “organization,” three very concerned men and one very concerned woman, products of the untamed street culture they are fighting to tame (drug gangs have already burned them down once), and armed for their mission with only experience and saintly resolve.

The four of them live in the neighborhood of Ashland and Rose Street and watched in frustration and anger as the drug culture swept through the tiny streets like a poison cloud, snuffing out the lives of young men and young women, forcing them into dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy and parenting, crime—both petty and hard. But they refuse

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to accept what so many in impoverished, drug-infested neighborhoods seem resigned to—the slow, grinding deterioration of life and property. They declared all-out war; they wanted to stand and fight and turn lives around. But in a world where many sophisticated programs designed to deal with the city’s drug and drug-related crime problems already exist, what could three men and one woman with no background in programming human services, and little in resources, do?

They decided that if they could get to talk to the victims and earn their trust, they could then reach them, and turn their lives around, one on one, and so make a difference too in the Rose-Ashland neighborhood. They conceived the idea of spending time hanging out on the corners with the victims and those who prey on them. The frequency of their presence won them a level of acceptance that led them to their next step. They invited preachers, with the gift of talk, to come talk to the hangers-out on the corner.

Preachers were advised that sermonizing about reform, redemption, and religion would fall on deaf ears. “We told them,” Clayton says, “no heaven and hell stuff.” These mostly-young men and women had to hear a different message: about how much smarter it is to stay in school, get a job, earn money, buy a home, marry, and build a stable family life. And how that process could begin if they would come talk to Clayton, Elroy,

Vincent and Callie at their newly-established “Rose Street Community Center,” at 831 Rose Street (a house they acquired in May, 1999 from Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition). The four sat day after day, night after night, waiting for takers.

All in all, two years had gone by until their wait and patience were rewarded. But then, in they came, the disenchanted, the frightened, the beaten, one by one, saying things like, “I been through a lot of stuff. I got to get straight.” The aspiring had come to the right place.

Talk, one on one (Rose offers no lectures, no “group therapy”) would draw out specific needs. In one case, to get on with life, a school dropout was enrolled in a General Education Degree (GED) course; in another, child supports payments were made to lighter a too-heavy a burden; in still another case, a young man was placed in a de-tox program. With financial support from the Abell Foundation, the four are able to provide the dollars it takes to provide help where it is needed and to set up the promise of a new life.

At this writing, there are thirteen people voluntarily seeking help from the four—eleven men, two women. About as many have been in the program but have moved along to other support programs. Each is in an “Action” status—in Gate working for a GED, in Turke House in a de-tox program, in a job search.

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Call him Albert.

He comes into 831 Rose Street, looking slightly bewildered, a young African American in his mid-teens. He wears the uniform of the street—torn jeans, worn low, oversize sweat shirt, athletic shoes of a dated vintage, black cap pulled close over his head and low on the forehead. Clayton greets him but not warmly, and asks, “You got a watch?”

Albert answers that he does.

Clayton asks, “What time is it?”

Albert checks his watch. “Ten of three.”

“Right. And what time were you supposed to be here?”

Albert says with a pause, not missing the point, “Two thirty.”

“Right again.”

Albert starts an explanation, but Clayton gently interrupts, “We’ll talk about promptness this afternoon.”

Albert is a tenth-grade drop out who attended Southern High, and left when he did because, as he put it, “I was having a lot of trouble at home”

He says, “I’ve been through a lot of programs. I’ve been pretty messed up. So many seem the same, and none has really worked for me. I came here because I was hoping this would be different.”

And is it?

“So far.”

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Clayton, Elroy, Vincent and Callie keep no case records. They see

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it the way it is. This is the way it is:

Elroy: “A young man walks in. He is African American, maybe nineteen years old, and likely an addict. He has lived on the street. Probably, he has dropped out of school, and fathered a child. He has been a thief, a pimp, maybe even a murderer. And when he walks in he knows full well that the murderers in the drug gang he is leaving may seek in turn to murder him—for leaving the gang and then betraying it.”

Vincent: “We sit down and we talk. We talk about his problems, his family, how he feels about people that he loves and that once loved him. We ask him to talk to us about what kind of future he sees for himself. What does he think he needs to make that future happen? A high school diploma? A de-tox program? A job? At some point we ask him to write a letter to someone that he loves—people that once figured in his life, but who now don’t want him around any more. These letters are so painful to read.”

Callie: He tells a loved one that he has left the drug gang and has got himself help—in the Rose Community Center program, and that this one is different. And that he is going to make it work this time. He will wind up by expressing his remorse about the pain he has caused, and with his promise that this time he going to make it.”

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The phone rings.

Clayton answers, “Rose Community Center.” He presses the speaker button so his co-directors

can hear. This is what they hear:

“Clayton, is that you?”

“It is”

“I’ve got the budget you asked for, Clayton. Are you going to be there a while?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll bring it right over.”

What budget?

Callie explains: “Her husband is an addict and we got him in a treatment program in Tuerke House. So he is off the scene—leaving a wife, and four children ages six, eight, ten, and twelve, to get along as best they can. She works but needs additional money to make ends meet. In order for us to apply for this support money from The Abell Foundation, we need to see her income and expenses—how much she needs for rent, food, clothing, the necessities of living.

“What she is asking me to look at is the budget she has prepared that will show us these expenses and income and allow us to approach the Abell Foundation for the funds.”

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In the days that tumble endlessly and often hopelessly one into the other in the forlorn Ashland Avenue and Rose Street neighborhood, there will be other Alberts walking into Rose Community Center, disillusioned by so many failed programs, but looking to try again. They see this opportunity as different, perhaps because of what some professionals may see as a weakness, a lack of programming sophistication. Which lack may in the end be its strength, making it for some a last best hope.

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abstinence-based, activity-packed days, the addict attends lectures on 20 different themes, combined with as many or more group therapy and one-on-one counseling sessions. The client must talk as well as listen, help and be helped, and do what amounts to homework. The theme around which the lectures and interchange revolve include “Anger and Depression,” “Controlling Feelings,” and “Relationships.”

Dr. Hickey makes no claim that the Quarterway House treatment program is effective for all addicts; individual cases vary.

After the 28 days the client moves out of Tuerke House and into an outpatient program that requires him (her) to attend, for another 90 days, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. Many patients stay close to Tuerke House and the out patient clinic for their personal support system and clinical services needs.

Close to 800 people, or 75% of the clients entering the Quarterway House system, complete the entire 28 day program each year. This experience is just the beginning of the recovery process and each person is referred to a continuing care (outpatient) program) and may move to halfway houses.

Dr. Hickey believes partnering with other community-based agencies and programs can result in successful recovery for most if not all program graduates. “For example,” Dr. Hickey says, “Over the past few years the Men’s Center, a family counseling facility in East Baltimore, has

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referred a total of 29 men to Tuerke House. Twenty-six of these men are still living in recovery today.

Marian House has proven to be an effective partner for the recovery of women. A survey suggests that 53 “shared clients” since January of 1994 at least 22 and perhaps as many as 40 are living productive, pro-social lives.

The Abell Foundation recently recognized Tuerke House by funding a support program which Dr. Hickey believes will serve as a bridge to long term recovery for increasing numbers of Turke House graduates.

There are about 100 clients currently being served in three separate facilities at any one time. Tuerke House is the 28 day residential intermediate care facility, with 76 beds; Nilsson House is a halfway house serving 11 women; Weisman Kaplan House is a halfway house serving 17 men; the Quarterway outpatient Clinic offers a continuing care program and a peer support group.

For those who do not reside in halfway houses, at the completion of 28 days in Tuerke House, the program’s recommendation is, first, on-going professional counseling in an outpatient continuing care program, with the length of participation depending on an individual’s personal needs; and second, daily attendance at either AA or NA, starting with 90 days attendance and continuation as needed.

The Abell Foundation recognizes the significant results of the Quarterway, Inc. program, and the proven technique that are making such heartening results possible.

Recent Grants by The Abell Foundation

American Farmland Trust	\$45,732	the Gunpowder River watershed as part of Maryland Rural Legacy program.	
Challenge grant for a comprehensive review and analysis of the current effectiveness of the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program in coordination with Maryland’s Smart Growth initiative.			
Baltimore Efficiency & Economy Foundation	\$45,000	Greater Homewood Community Corporation	\$35,000
For start-up costs to establish an organization to research and promote greater efficiency and stronger fiscal health in Baltimore City.		For the creation of a master plan of the Jones Falls Valley watershed.	
Baltimore’s Festival of the Arts, Inc	\$25,000	Homeless Persons Representation Project	\$5,000
Challenge grant to enhance the Y2K CityARTS Grant program that provides annual awards to cultural arts activities in local neighborhoods and schools.		To develop a litigation strategy to overcome the use of criminal histories by employers to deny employment.	
BCPSS/Lynhurst Elementary School	\$62,000	Maryland Center for Community Development	\$24,380
For equipment, technical support and part-time teachers to implement a project to determine the impact of technology in the educational process.		For a six-month study of the loosely-regulated check cashing industry in low-income communities in Baltimore City.	
BCPSS/Lake Clifton-Eastern High School	\$130,000	Maryland Children’s Initiative Education Fund	\$100,000
For the implementation of NOVEL, a school-based educational program designed specifically for at-risk students who are in danger of dropping out of high school.		Second-year support of a campaign to educate Maryland citizens and policy makers about the need for universal health coverage.	
Catholic Charities/Project FRESH Start	\$75,000	Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development	\$60,250
Three-year funding for an expansion of the program for homeless families. The program provides rent-free housing for a year and comprehensive supportive services		For the marketing of the Maryland’s <i>Live Near Your Work</i> program.	
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	\$27,825	Maryland Public Interest Research Foundation/MaryPIRG	\$40,000
For the commissioning of a report, “Enhancing Maryland Child Support and Welfare Policies to Increase the Earnings of Non-Custodial Parents”. This report will set forth a design for a new system of matching payments of subsidies to children when child support payments are made by low-income non-custodial fathers.		In support of the Baltimore Environmental Health project with specific focus on monitoring sources of air pollution in Baltimore City.	
Drug Strategies	\$23,774	Quarterway Houses Inc./ Tuerk House	\$35,000
For the preparation of an independent profile that focuses on drug treatment initiatives in Baltimore City.		Planning grant for an expansion of residential drug treatment services for residents of Baltimore City.	
Genesis Jobs/Job Opportunities Task Force	\$20,000	St. Frances Academy	\$500,000
For strategic planning to determine the organizational structure and future agenda for the Job Opportunities Task Force in its efforts to address the needs of both low-skill job seekers and employers in the Baltimore region.		For the construction of a community center including a gymnasium, multipurpose rooms, conference rooms, and a child care center. The Academy, serving disadvantaged students, offers a college preparatory curriculum.	
Gunpowder Valley Conservancy	\$22,000	Second Genesis	\$150,000
For staffing costs to implement an extensive conservation easement program with landowners within		Capital funding for the construction of a residential substance abuse treatment center in Baltimore City for women and their children.	
		Vehicles for Change	\$116,250
		Two-year funding for the establishment of a transportation program to provide cars for low-income residents of Baltimore to encourage economic independence through job placement.	
		University of Maryland/Center for Substance Abuse Research	\$49,762
		In support of a study of Baltimore City substance abuse treatment programs.	