

## **It's not about being sponsored—its about sponsoring others that is a predictor for recovery**

A Baltimore, Maryland study of 500 former and current heroin and cocaine injection drug users over the course of one year indicated having an AA/NA sponsor was not correlated with any improvement in sustained abstinence rates than a non-sponsored group (Crape 2001:291). However, being a sponsor was found to be highly correlated with sustained abstinence. In fact, 75% of the sponsors group maintained abstinence over the one year period and showed the most improved lifestyle changes (Crape 2001:298).

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous claimed similar statistics:

*"Of alcoholics who came to A.A. and really tried, 50% got sober at once and remained that way; 25% sobered up after some relapses, and among the remainder, those who stayed on with A.A. showed improvement. Other thousands came to a few A.A. meetings and at first decided they didn't want the program. But great numbers of these--about two out of three---began to return as time passed" (AA 2001:xx).*

Moreover, *"This seemed to prove that one alcoholic could affect another as no nonalcoholic could. It also indicated that strenuous work, one alcoholic with another, was vital to permanent recovery" (A.A. 2001:xvi - xvii).*

How does sponsoring others contribute to the addict's ability to maintain continuous abstinence successfully over long periods of time? First, the act of providing direction to the alcoholic/addict who still suffers is a predictor of improved psychosocial adjustment. Furthermore, sponsoring others in addiction improves feelings of self-value and social usefulness. The sponsorship model also reinforces successful behaviours, public commitment to behaviour change, and improves relationships and strengthens new social networks. Lastly, the act of sponsoring others is valued within the community and to maintain their valued role, sponsors seem highly motivated to stay abstinent. All of these factors seem to reinforce the sponsor's resolve to continue working with other suffering addicts and improve their chances of remaining abstinent (Crape 2001:297).

Thus, the conclusion of the study suggests that sponsoring other addicts in a 12-step program is highly associated with continuous abstinence, but for those being sponsored, there was little indication of improved rates of alcohol or drug abstinence.

### **References:**

*Alcoholics Anonymous*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001.

Crape, Byron L, Carl A Latkin, Alexandra S Laris, and Amy R Knowlton. "The Effects of Sponsorship in 12-step Treatment of Injection Drug Users." *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 65, no. 3 (February 2002): 291–301. doi:10.1016/S0376-8716(01)00175-2.