

They Talk Away Their Nervous Ills

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BRIGHTON, Mich.—Methods somewhat similar to those originated by Alcoholics Anonymous are being used at Brighton, Mich., to alleviate severe nervous disorders.

Advocates of the system, originated by a Chicago psychiatrist, Dr. Abraham Low, believe it might be used to help thousands escape confinement in mental hospitals.

Known as Recovery, Inc., the organization uses group therapy on the community level (the Alcoholics Anonymous plan) to treat mental upsets.

About 20 persons with severe nervous disorders have banded together in Brighton to help each other. There are similar groups, in Chicago, Louisville, Denver, and several smaller cities in Illinois, Indiana and Iowa.

MEMBERS CLAIM the simple formula they follow has several advantages:

1—It is generally useful, but particularly advantageous for those who cannot afford the expense of a long series of individual treatments by a psychiatrist.

2—It eases pressure on overloaded mental hospitals, thus lessening a tax burden at the same time it keeps the afflicted person at his or her normal work.

3—The plan is simple enough to operate so that it can function anywhere.

4—It has been used extensively in some states to prevent relapses among former mental patients.

Brighton members report that their project is having remarkable success.

Worry Controlled

MEMBERS CLAIM that they are now able to control worries and anxieties that were ruining their lives.

Broken homes have been patched up; children saved from the menace of living with a parent with uncontrolled "nerves."

No miracle worker, the Recovery, Inc., plan centers on one theme: Train the patient to use his will power to control his fears. There is no searching for events in early childhood that caused the nervous upsets—just concentration on eliminating unreasonable fears.

For nervous persons, this is easier said than done. Before detailing the results claimed for Recovery, Inc., let's review the theory behind the plan.

THIS HOLDS THAT everyone at some time is beset by emotional conflicts that produce tensions.

The average "normal" person adjusts to these stresses by lighting a cigaret, going to a movie, having a drink. Soon the disturbance is forgotten.

But not certain individuals.

These get to the point where they fret over the most trivial problems. They cannot make a choice when faced with the simplest kind of a dilemma.

As tensions develop, they find they cannot sleep. "Splitting" headaches begin to nag some.

As tensions are allowed to multiply, the personality starts to fall apart. Some persons blow up in tyrannical rages. Others "crawl" into their shell.

Tortured by Fear

MEANWHILE MOST of these individuals find themselves tortured by sonic dread fear—one is sure she is dying of cancer, another suspects that his wife is running around, a third is positive that all the neighbors are saying nasty things about him.

Soon the sufferer bangs head on a panic:

He is swept with terror. His heart beats wildly; he is overcome with the feeling of burning fever, tightness clutches at his throat and chest, nausea overcomes him, even his vision may blur.

He races to a physician, certain he is a goner.

But the doctor finds nothing organically wrong. Another case of "nerves." Treatment: A sedative and advice to "take it easy."

THOSE IN RECOVERY, INC., claim that such a person, if left alone to his fears—or goaded by taunts of "it's all in



DR. LOW became convinced that the patient will cure himself. . . . First test was with ex-mental patients. . . . They were able to develop "the will to bear discomfort" when the psychiatrist substituted simple words for technical terms.

NEXT CAME DUANE, 22-year-old factory worker. His trouble: Explosive temper and resulting pains which had sent him running "almost dead" to a doctor many times.

"I asked my brother-in-law out to supper last night but the so-and-so forgot to come," Mike snapped, his face flushed. "I worked myself up until I was in such a rage that I couldn't get to sleep. My throat started hurting. But I didn't call the doctor. Finally I remembered about asborage and calmed down."

Arlene, a housewife, spoke up: "My husband dumped ashes over the floor. I tried to be calm when I told him that was a darn fool way of doing things. But he got huffy and I really blew up."

"In the past I would have had the mullygrubs for days. But you know what Recovery says about controlling temper. So by night I was okay. I didn't say a single nasty thing when my husband got home."

Added Joan: "You all know I was sure I was going blind. And I had a fight with my husband that lasted all winter."

"Well, we went to Detroit today and had a wonderful time. I didn't worry about my eyes once. I can see fine."

Setback

LAST TO TALK was Betty, mother of two children. Her fear of germs was so overpowering that her husband left home in disgust.

For months she was unable to touch anything without "sterilizing" it.

"I'm having a setback," she announced glumly.

"I had company the other night. When they left I couldn't resist the impulse to scald the cups they used."

AFTER THE GUESTS had been served lunch and had gone, Mrs. "Smith" explained:

"First thing a newcomer learns is to get over his stigma. He hears from others who have troubles like his own and he begins to feel better. He's understood here, even if that isn't the case at his home."

"For every trouble, we try to suggest a Recovery technique which will work. One of them is the importance of just being average, not stewing about being unable to do something better than the next one—like having a bigger illness."

"We learn to express all our feeling, even irritation, in logical terms. But we try to avoid anger which is a danger signal."

"Recovery doesn't demand that we be saints, that we never slip. In fact, it's common for us to have setbacks."

"That's when we turn to each other for help. We telephone each other a lot between meetings. One feels stronger if he can help someone else over a pitfall."

Help for Others

THE BRIGHTON GROUP is so encouraged by its progress that it would like to help other units get started.

But it wants to stay anonymous. Requests for information may be sent to Recovery, Inc., c/o Detroit Free Press Sunday Department, Detroit 31, Mich. They will be forwarded to Mrs. "Smith."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Smith plans to petition the State Health Department to permit the forming of Recovery, Inc., branches in State Hospitals.

Such a program, she feels, will cut down on the number of discharged patients who must be re-admitted after encountering panics.

BUT SHE GIVES this warning:

"Recovery, Inc., is no cure-all. It is not intended to replace the legitimate role of doctors."

She adds: "For nervous people like myself—who couldn't afford unlimited medical attention—it has been a godsend."

"Recovery, Inc., has been working in Brighton for six years and I'm positive will go on being worthwhile for years to come."

The plan, she concluded, offers the only way to "blow off steam" and get rid of dangerous tension in a healthful, safe manner.

Under the stimulus of friendly, sympathetic surroundings, the Recovery, Inc., members began to conquer fear.

Those who made the most complete recovery were groomed as leaders of other units. Recovery, Inc., was on its way.

Dread of Crowds

IN 1947, THE Brighton chapter was founded.

It came about because of Mrs. Theresa Smith (the name is fictitious), wife of a professional man.

Theresa had a normal childhood. She was pretty and popular. After singing with a dance band, she spent one year at the University of Michigan.

Marriage followed. She became mother of two children, had a beautiful home. Life seemed ideal. Then trouble struck.

Tensions developed, then the inevitable "symptoms." Her mind finally centered on a dread of crowds.

Appearing in a public place, like a restaurant, became a nightmare. Usually she would have to leave in a panic.

FOR SEVEN YEARS she grew progressively worse. Her husband and youngsters became victims of her routs.

Desperate, she turned to psychiatrist. Once a week she paid \$25 for a consultation, but still the fear persisted.

Finally, she says, she was told she could be helped only if she stepped up her treatments. The cost would be \$75 a week.

"We couldn't afford that much money," Mrs. Smith recalled. "I thought I was doomed."

Then she heard about Recovery, Inc.

"I rushed to Chicago, attended some group meetings and read the literature," she said. "Since there was no Michigan branch I could join, I asked to be trained as a leader."

On the train trip home, she was able to enjoy her first meal in public in years.

Three Members

MRS. SMITH HELD the first Recovery, Inc., meetings in a restaurant. Fellow members were a law student who was afraid to attend classes and a housewife who could not sign her name in front of anyone.

"Our progress was pretty slow at first," Mrs. Smith declared. "I got awfully discouraged at times. But I kept practicing, and all of a sudden things started to clear up."

Since 1947, about 45 people have attended Recovery classes, now held at homes of members in Brighton. Some dropped out after calling themselves completely cured.

Not one Brighton member has had to go to a hospital. Two who joined Recovery after spending some time in institutions are reported "doing fine."

As a result of the weekly classes, several divorce suits have been dropped.

Members pay small annual dues and generally purchase a book by Dr. Low which serves as their text and inspiration. That's the extent of the cost.

UNANNOUNCED TO the members, a Free Press reporter sat in on a typical Recovery meeting at Mrs. Smith's home.

It might have been any small town gathering. Members represented a cross section of the community: A salesman, factory employe, a school teacher, housewives.

Outwardly, they looked and acted as they. They joked with Mrs. Smith as they came in, helped her dry her dinner dishes.

But once the meeting got under way, they began to expose the tortures that bedeviled them.

After reading a chapter from the book, Mrs. Smith asked how life had been going.

Stomach Trouble

ARCHIE, A LABORER, was the first to speak.

For the benefit of new members, he reviewed his troubles.

"I've had stomach trouble for years. Couldn't eat hardly anything. Since coming to Recovery I eat everything. When I start getting pains I think about the Recovery rules and the trouble goes away."

Ann, a 26-year-old housewife, announced proudly: "Today was the first time in three years that I was able to walk downtown. And I even went to a banquet with my husband the other night."

Everyone nodded in appreciation of her victory.

For Ann and her husband had lost their home trying to pay endless doctor bills to quell her fears. Broke and ready for a State hospital, she had turned to Recovery, Inc.