

*Words of Wisdom for the People
of Saskatchewan from the 2010
Studies in Addictions Class,
University of Saskatchewan*

Society should get together and help all people in need. If we leave out our bias and judgements of people, we could help. Walk in someone else's shoes. Educate yourself about addiction. There is a problem here. How can we help?

Addiction is a loaded word - trying to paint a picture of understanding a situation that really should be defined by the individual, for it is unique and specific to that individual. Providers, policy, and decision makers, friends and family need to listen and not be afraid to ask questions. It doesn't need to be personal for you to understand through another's eyes.

Don't close your eyes or turn your back on what is happening now. It's all around us, in our cities and communities - ignoring addiction is like ignoring a wound. If no care is taken to clean up and facilitate proper healing, the wound will spread and infect the entire body. The province is like a body - it requires care, attention and regulation for it to function and prosper.

Saskatchewan needs to work on acknowledging its pervasive racism and work to reserve judgment on those struggling with difficult life circumstances.

Saskatchewan faces many problems with addiction that need to be addressed and geography plays a huge factor in our cities and province. A west-side Saskatoon youth may abuse alcohol and cannabis, while an east-side youth may pop pills or coke, while a youth from Northern Saskatchewan may abuse solvents. Specific programs of intervention (not criminalization) must be addressed to certain areas, and not just major centres.

Look beyond circumstance, look beyond appearance, look beyond judgment, look inside the person.

Keep an open mind. There is so much more to every story than we see. You can't make judgments about anyone because you don't know the cultural, social, psychological, and other aspects of their life that led them to the space and time they are in now.

Addiction may be something that service providers and policy makers know about, but is not presented informatively enough to the public, especially high school students. Instead of ignoring it and hoping it won't happen to our youth, we need to inform them. Ignorance won't stop alcohol/drug/etc. abuse, but perhaps sharing information may save lives. Pretending addiction won't affect you or people you love doesn't mean it won't happen. Not all addicts are criminals or evil people, nor is addiction an excuse for anything.

Addiction abatement programs that do not incorporate the active participation of the populations whom they attempt to target would appear counter-intuitive and destined to fail. An enforcement philosophy should undoubtedly be replaced by a harm reduction strategy as formulated, in part, by the very populations these programs are aspiring to reach. Anything less, frankly, seems ridiculous.

We are all affected by addiction, and addiction will continue to cause problems for all unless change can happen. Change is possible, and it is in the power of you and I to change. Stand up for change on how addiction is educated and criminalized not only in our town or province, but our country as well. Ignoring the problem is not the answer. Locking up the problem and throwing away the key is not the answer; you and I are. We need to change the approach on drugs and addiction that we currently take and help the victims, whether they are the victim of the addict, or the addict themselves. We can no longer ignore this; so begin to change your world and the people around you one at a time, and don't let go of your goal.

I, myself, am the sister, the friend, the daughter, the granddaughter, and the niece of addiction.

Do not judge. Focus on the person themselves and their inner issues which are most likely attached to the reason for their using. Offer different treatment centres for each addiction. Realize that not all addictions are the same.

I don't think people should come to an addictions issue, or any issue as political. When dealing with ethical decisions about people's lives, you're not a conservative, liberal or NDP, you're a human being. It is as a human being that addictions issues should be approached, analyzed and resolved.

Drug policy needs to be more evidence-based and less rooted in public and political opinion. In trying to address addictions issues in the province, more attention needs to be focused on the factors leading to drug abuse and reducing demand, rather than supply. A lot more work also needs to be done to reduce the level of stigma faced by individuals with addictions issues and empower them to connect with their larger communities.

The citizens of Saskatchewan need to be educated. Teachers need to be provided with resources to teach their students. More community events need to get the word out there.

Compassion, humility, people, families, acceptance, humanity, hope, evidence, healthy.

For each of us to better understand addiction and all of the direct and indirect effects of addiction, we have to step outside of ourselves and what we think we know. Saskatchewan is a vast province, with strengths that stretch equally as vast. It's far past time we acknowledge them!

Addiction knowledge needs to be more present in society. "Addicts" are simply people who made the wrong choice, but they also may choose sobriety and change their lives. Society needs to stop giving up on them. More services need to be provided and policy makers need to take their heads out of their butts. I don't want to sound rude or disrespectful, but we all need to be real and honesty is a good start.

The world will never be perfect, and every generation has its own problems that challenge moral, political, and social norms and issues. Addictions are the current challenge. In order to overcome this, we must stop looking at drug users as "others" and see past their addiction to help our fellow brethren. When reduced to our raw natural form, we all come from the same place, are composed of the same molecules, and are all interconnected in some way, shape or form. Racial and socio-economic differences should not be the barriers that prevent us from helping our brothers and sisters. If we grow together and fall together, let us help one another to ensure good health and love for all.

The consequences of addiction in Saskatchewan are devastating and widespread. The hopelessness felt within myself for people with addictions is scary. Addiction is not an individual issue, it is a family, community, and societal problem, and it is on everyone in Saskatchewan to do their part in prevention and intervention. It is everyone's problem, not just the individual's.

When beginning or attempting to understand addiction, the user, policies, mitigating factors, consequences, and interventions, there are two things that are mandatory on any level. First, you need to wipe your slate clean of anything you thought you knew - you don't know anything, and you'll never know everything. Being a user doesn't make you an expert either. Everyone's situation is different. Secondly, any strong beliefs or morals need to be set aside, as hard as it is. Addictions is not black and white, and just because you were raised to believe that administering safe needles to crack addicts is supporting their habits, does not mean that what you believe is best for society.

I think if we want to make a change or difference, we need to take a look at ourselves first, and make a change (how we see others and not be greedy and ignorant). The only way we can help others is if we help ourselves first. Be open-minded and know you're not the only person in the world. We need to educate ourselves and others.

Approach the problem with an open mind. Take the time to educate yourself about addiction, but more importantly the "addict". Realize the necessity for resources to be put in the proper place and that all addicts are different and require different treatment. At the same time, remember that an addict is still a human being first, and the reasons for addiction are far greater than you can comprehend unless you have been in their shoes.

To overcome the forces behind addiction it is necessary to find yourself, only then will it be conquered. Drugs and alcohol are continuously ruining lives; addiction is a problem that can affect anyone and everyone. Until we are educated, the lives of millions will continue to be lost. Every day we become more aware; more aware of the issues in society that cause problems for many people. How have they been ignored for so long? Be patient.

Saskatchewan needs a better approach to treatment and intervention. In some places (such as campuses) excessive substance abuse is encouraged in regards to alcohol. Something needs to be done to help the addicted and educate in all areas (psychological, social, health, etc) those who are not. The addict also needs to be seen as a person who needs treatment, not a criminal. Reserve that label for the dealers and the producers, but not the users. Importantly, have no assumptions about anything.

We need vast knowledge about addiction as a bio-psycho-social-spiritual problem. Consider the linkage to mental health and illness. Regardless of the addiction, drug, gambling or whatever, the key is to treat addiction like any other chronic disease, like hypertension, diabetes, or asthma. The key is also to implement preventative education and awareness. Perhaps the government should take addiction more seriously by implementing bans on alcohol advertising and promotions. Much like the banning of smoking publicly. We need this knowledge targeted to youth, for they are our future. It's a global and communal problem, not just an individual's problem.

I think that, like it was said at the beginning of the course - we need to think outside the box. Before you make a judgement, try to come up with an opposite opinion and think about it. Also, don't assume something is done for a reason before you know and are educated about the reason. I talk to people not educated on addiction and the conclusions they jump to are terrible. Don't judge a book by the cover. There is always the story inside.

Behind the ignorance of stigma & mis-education, you will find "an addict" who was once/is a child, parent, friend, or the centre of someone else's life. Addiction is a family disease. Stand up for what you believe in, everyone can make their opinions heard.

It is sad that the public hears more about the negative aspects of life when there are so many wonderful/inspirational/empowering stories of recovery. Society must start recognizing and promoting positive stories to inspire others and highlight the good in people.

"Community is the individual". Addiction says more about a society than all the positive aspects of that society. Not coming to terms with Saskatchewan's history with Native peoples is an obstacle to Saskatchewan's success. The impact of ideology needs to be re-evaluated.

Building emotional intelligence and teaching ways of coping successfully at a young age could prevent the development of addiction problems.

Addiction is a lifelong disease that anybody can fall into. Once you crossed the line into that lifestyle, it takes a long time to come back, and it is easy to fall back into it. If you go too far, there may not be any coming back.

There will be no cure until there is a definite cause. What causes addiction? We know most of that answer. Now we need to act.