



SCREENING TOOLKIT

**Q&A WITH FILMMAKER
GREG WILLIAMS**

THE ANONYMOUS
PEOPLE

**MANY
FACES 1VOICE**

Q&A WITH *THE ANONYMOUS PEOPLE* FILMMAKER GREG WILLIAMS

Excerpts taken from 2013 Interviews with Tom Hedrick from The Partnership at DrugFree.org and Emma Edelman from Phoenix House.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES THAT HAVE LED YOU TO TAKE ON THIS PROJECT.

GREG WILLIAMS: During my first five years or so in recovery, I was hyper-aware of feeling like I was living in two worlds—a son and student by day and a secret person in recovery by night. I was very uncomfortable knowing that people in the recovery meetings supported and encouraged me, but outside of the 12-step rooms, I thought I wasn't supposed to talk about how great my life was.

As a part of working on my Masters degree, I began to talk to people who felt the same way. I had the good fortune of learning from people like Bill White, who is probably the nation's authority on the history of addiction treatment and recovery advocacy. I was taught that anonymity did not mean I couldn't share about my recovery status publicly and advocate for others.

YOU'VE DESCRIBED THE DEVELOPMENT OF *THE ANONYMOUS PEOPLE* AS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF YOUR LIFE. CAN YOU SHARE SOME OF THAT LEARNING WITH US?

GREG WILLIAMS: Last year when I put *The Anonymous People* out there as a Kickstarter campaign—and we received nearly double our donations goal—I thought, “Wow, there are a lot of people out there who really care about this issue.”

Throughout each step—test-driving the movie earlier this year in select markets, KinoLorber picking up the distribution rights and establishing the Gathr theatrical on demand model—I got a little more excited.

But truthfully, the most gratifying part of this entire experience was meeting and talking with people like Maetta Broadus in Kentucky who is featured in the film. Her love and appreciation for her recovery life is infectious and I'm humbled to serve as a recovery advocate with thousands of others across the country just like her who will no longer stay silent.

ANONYMITY HAS BEEN BOTH A FOUNDATION OF THE EARLY RECOVERY MOVEMENT AND ALSO CONSIDERED BY SOME TO BE A BARRIER TO ITS PROGRESS IN THE FUTURE. CAN YOU SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THIS ISSUE?

GREG WILLIAMS: Bill White says, “We will shape the future of recovery with a detached silence or with a passionate voice.”

Throughout history, we've watched other movements struggle without a unifying message. Our message is pretty simple. We are people in recovery from a disease who now live dynamic, productive lives, just like people who are in recovery from heart disease or cancer. But others can't know that we get well unless we tell them. Congress can't know and neither will the media.

If it weren't for people in recovery and their family members sharing their stories and advocating for addiction treatment in the 40's, 50's and 60's I very likely wouldn't be alive today. It is my duty to carry this forward for future generations.

Q&A WITH THE ANONYMOUS PEOPLE FILMMAKER GREG WILLIAMS CONTINUED

WHAT ABOUT FOLKS WHO DO CHOOSE TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS IN THEIR RECOVERY? DO YOU THINK ANONYMITY WORKS FOR SOME PEOPLE, OR DO YOU THINK EVERYONE HAS AN OBLIGATION TO SHARE THEIR STORY AND REDUCE STIGMA?

GREG WILLIAMS: This is not about “people should.” This is about “people can.” It’s about normalizing the recovery identity in mainstream culture. We want to give people permission to come out and talk about their recovery if they so choose—to say “Hey, here are other people who have done this before you and maybe together we can change the system.” There are over 23 million Americans in recovery, and we don’t need all of them to be “out.” Look at the LGBT rights movement; not every gay person is an activist, but all of them have felt the repercussions of stigma and discrimination. When people “come out” about being in recovery, they offer hope to those still struggling and inform policymakers at the same time. Someone who’s still using drugs might look at them and think, “I’d like to be a part of that. How do I get into recovery?”

YOU MENTION MEDIA COVERAGE AS EXACERBATING THE PROBLEM BY FOCUSING ON CELEBRITIES AND THEIR ACTIVE ADDICTION. WHAT ROLE CAN THE MEDIA PLAY IN DECREASING THE STIGMA SURROUNDING ADDICTION?

GREG WILLIAMS: It’s all about talking about the solution as well as the problem. We saw this happen, maybe for the first time in mainstream media, when Matthew Perry was on the cover of *People Magazine* for nothing other than being in recovery. It wasn’t about ratings, it wasn’t about sensationalizing addiction. It was, “Here’s a guy five or six years in recovery, let’s put him on the cover because he’s doing great and helping others.” Telling both sides of the story is crucial, but so many people never hear both sides. The media covers the car accidents, the overdoses, the deaths—but when someone celebrates five years or ten years in recovery, we don’t hear about it. Tragedy and disaster are easy, sensational stories, but we’ve told the easy story for years. It’s time to focus on the drama of recovery instead of the problem while ignoring the solution.

IN THE FILM YOU SAY, “IT ISN’T PARENTS FAILING YOUNG PEOPLE. IT’S THE HEALTH SYSTEM.” WHY IS THIS, AND HOW CAN THE HEALTH SYSTEM DO A BETTER JOB OF SERVING THOSE WITH ADDICTION?

GREG WILLIAMS: We’re currently dealing with a square peg in a round hole: using a crisis-oriented criminal justice approach to address a chronic health condition that’s costing us money as taxpayers and profoundly affecting families and communities. That’s the infrastructure that we’ve built in this country. We are almost decent at helping people initiate recovery and get into mutual support groups and/or treatment (at least for those who can access it) but we do a terrible job with ongoing recovery support. With cancer, we assertively monitor people for five years after they go into remission. Addiction, on the other hand, is deemed “acutely stabilized” in just five to 28 days—90 if you’re really lucky. Then we pat people on the back, toss them out, and say, “Well, good job! You probably should go to some meetings! I don’t know where they are, but good luck!” And if people have a criminal justice history, they face discriminatory barriers that keep them from jobs, housing and education. And then we have the audacity to blame them when they don’t stay sustain their recovery?

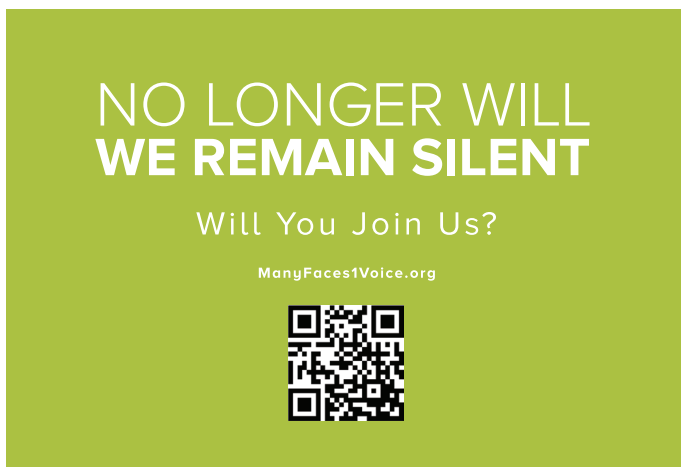
Q&A WITH *THE ANONYMOUS PEOPLE* FILMMAKER GREG WILLIAMS CONTINUED

THE FILM SHOWS EARLY ADVOCATE MARTY MANN SAYING THAT ALCOHOLICS BELONG IN TREATMENT, NOT IN JAIL—AND THIS WAS ALMOST 70 YEARS AGO. WHY DO YOU THINK WE ARE STILL INCARCERATING PEOPLE WITH ADDICTION TODAY AND HOW CAN WE CHANGE THIS?

GREG WILLIAMS: It's complex, but shame is one factor and anonymity plays into that. We were making strong progress in the late 1960s and early 1970s with Congressional hearings and passage of the Hughes Act, which recognized alcoholism as a major health problem and established the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. But then in the late 1970s we went largely silent as a community as the War on Drugs grabbed headlines and people with addiction were demonized in a sensational, fear-mongering way. It was a huge cultural setback; if you were a person with addiction in the 80's, 90's, or 2000's, you lived with a great deal of societal shame as a result. We still haven't dug ourselves out of that debacle, but we're starting to. I hope that when people see my film and share it with others, it will start a conversation that doesn't stop—a conversation that decreases shame and begins to tackle discrimination and talks about truly addressing the most important public health crisis of our time. This is a conversation we must have if we want to help the next generation to have it better than we do today.

WHERE DO YOU SEE THE RECOVERY MOVEMENT GOING FROM HERE, AFTER BOTH STUDYING IT AND LIVING IT SO INTENSELY OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS?

GREG WILLIAMS: I think the future looks really bright because we have grassroots momentum on our side. Education, organizing and a new language are some of the answers to many of our pitfalls. We are no longer willing to be silent. We have a new action campaign, in partnership with Faces & Voices of Recovery, called ManyFaces1Voice.org. It's a response to the one question everybody asks after seeing *The Anonymous People*: What can I do to help? This site elevates personal passion for recovery with the tools needed to build the recovery movement.



EMAIL info.theanonymouspeople@gmail.com to get your ManyFaces1Voice Call-To-Action Post-Cards Today!