

# SMART Conference

Good morning ladies and gentlemen my name is David Ford and I'm a facilitator here in London.

I want to start by taking this opportunity, if I may, to express my thanks, on behalf of everyone who attends SMART meetings, to a couple of the unsung heroes of SMART and this project.

Most of us have heard of Fraser and the reputation that precedes him, of David and the board of SMART, and Dr. Gerstein who is responsible for setting up SMART Recovery, I thank you guys for all that you have done.

But I want to make a special thanks to Carol Hammond who sits up there in Scotland working tirelessly for the organisation. To Liz Ainsworth who has been working so hard down here in London for the project on behalf of Alcohol Concern; and Laura Graham who is a researcher in the field of recovery and has been a real good friend and ally, not just to me but to SMART and to many of us who have had the good fortune to come into contact with her, **thank you.**

## PAST

So here's the question, "How many of us here in this room have been through recovery, or had to give up something addictive, anything?"

Most people think of drugs or alcohol when they think of recovery, but there are all types of addictions, there's gambling, there's smoking, chocolate, you can be addicted to literally anything. And as we know SMART Recovery views addictive behaviour as a complex maladaptive behaviour, not as a disease.

How many of us here know what it is like to have an addiction, an addiction that steals your dignity, that strips away your self-worth, that evaporates your very soul, not to mention the relationships that they ruin, the material wealth that they rob you of?

I suspect there's a few of us.

You know you don't have to wake up on a park bench dirty, wet and cold, trying to work out if it's the damp or the withdrawal that's making you rattle; you don't have to do that, just to feel the pain of an addiction.

You don't have to lose your family, your friends, your loved ones to know that your addiction is sucking the life from your soul. NO.

We are all unique and addictions take many forms, all as someone needs to know is that they have one, whatever that may mean to them.

Well I feel honoured, honoured to be in this room here today, to be with so many amazing people who have had the incredible strength to fight a huge battle and win.

I applaud you.....

But what about the ones that haven't?

What about the ones that haven't?

## **PRESENT**

So what does SMART mean for me and how has it been developing in South London?

In order for me to answer that I want to take you back in time to **March** 2004, when a cocky young man who had spent 3 years completely stoned, pulled up outside a college, put out his Spliff and walked into a classroom to learn about this thing called Neuro Linguistic Programming, NLP.

Walking into that classroom was my wake up call, and by the end of the course I thought "Wow this NLP is better shi than the shi that I've been smoking" and that was the start of an amazing journey of recovery, a journey of discovery and of self development, it was incredible.

It was so incredible that by **March** 2006 I had trained and qualified in a whole bunch of stuff that enabled me to open my own successful clinic up in the

Midlands. I specialised in abuse and addictions, something that I have considerable experience and knowledge about.

In **March** 2008 I decided to move to Croydon to continue the journey and train with some of the most amazing and eminent people in the world of therapy and personal development. Plus I also wanted to set up a project of my own down here in London.

It could not have been worse timing, credit crunch, recession, lack of knowledge on fund raising, no contacts, etc, etc you're getting the picture here yeah,,,, it wasn't good...

.....and so.... by **March** 2009 my relationship with my partner had broken down and I ended up without a roof over my head, and with no job. Now under any circumstances that's not good, but with no family and no real close friends in London for support, it was a real challenging experience.

Once I had got over the shock, I picked myself up, dusted myself off and checked into the YMCA hostel in Croydon.

Now I don't know if any of you have ever been to a large Homeless Hostel, but if you have you will know that they are extremely challenging places work in, and even more so to live in. According to statistics over 90% of people who live in hostels have either drug, alcohol, mental health or offending issues. I was in a hostel of 115 adults, do the maths. Certainly not the type of place for someone like me, and many others like me, who needs to avoid drugs at all costs.

I think that I had only been there a week, before I was invited to go on training course to learn all about SMART and how it helps people in recovery.

It didn't take me long to realise that I had two choices here; to get involved with SMART and keep my recovery and my sanity; or get drawn down into a world that I had struggled to escape from once before.

So I went in the initial training course for SMART, down here in London. The training that we had from Fraser was fantastic, thank you Fraser. What the training did was enable those of us who attended, to set up a meeting where

we could help ourselves, a meeting to help each other to maintain our recovery; it enabled us to give each other support when times were tough, and I cannot stress enough how important that is. It was a fantastic opportunity and I am grateful for that.

It wasn't easy setting up the meeting. We had to move location, and days and times on two or three occasions. Maybe this was because we were not part of an official or recognised "recovery group" as such, going through recovery with a prime service provider.

We were made up of half a dozen ex-addicts, some of us really struggling, who just wanted to get the meetings going. All of us had a connection to the South London YMCA's in some way, shape or form, and the YMCA were good, they provided the facilities for our training.

There are a few things that I want to share with you about those experiences and what I learnt in setting up meetings; things that I have picked up over the last 12 months, and these really are my own thoughts and opinions, other meetings may well be different.

One of the first things that I wanted to do when we started out was to compare the differences between other PEER lead groups and SMART. So I went along to a whole bunch of different meetings, AA meetings, NA meetings, CA meetings, Peer Lead User Group Meetings, if there was a meeting I went; and I want you to know what the real defining difference was for me, between SMART and all the other meetings that I attended?

ATTITUDE.

You know when you have a manageable size group that is fun and focuses on positives rather than negatives, the whole group dynamic changes, changes to one of real positivity. Focusing on the positives by using the SMART tools, rather than dwelling on negatives from the past, really works for me. And because of that I think it is really important to stay pretty much on the SMART track without deviating to far. I appreciate that each group is different simply

because of differing personalities and age ranges, but if we all have the same lyrics, and it is just the beat or tempo that is slightly different, then hey, we are all getting the same positive message...

The other really cool thing was that it was our meeting, not anyone else's; it was ours.

Who has got kids here? Well you know better than I, that when you tell a child to do something that it doesn't want to do, it will do the opposite, yes! Well we all have a little bit of a child in us, haven't we?

I went to PEER lead groups that I wasn't really comfortable with, you see I like to get **involved** rather than being **told**.

But we are all different, we are all unique and what works for some may not work for others. Some people may need a ridged structure and discipline, others prefer a less formal approach to things, some need the freedom to develop and express themselves, others need security and direction. We are all different, we are all unique and what SMART does is bring in more choice for more people.

You see here's the thing; life is about choice and choices. As human beings we will always choose the thing that we think is best for us, at that moment in time. If the only choice you have is between your addiction and a support meeting that you do not like or don't enjoy, what are you going to do?

However, if you have more choices to choose from, and one of those choices is better than your addiction, then what are you going to do?

SMART does that, it brings more choice into the world of Recovery and in doing so is going to help so many people who otherwise would not have attended or got involved with user support groups. And user support groups, whatever they're called or whatever they're about are excellent resources for anyone who is facing the real tough challenge of fighting an addiction.

One of my other findings is about support from Service Providers. Having set up a group with limited support from a service provider and another one with a higher level of support from a service provider, my experience would have to

be that service provider support can mean the difference between success and failure. I have to say that in my experience, most people that I have meet in recovery, are not incredibly wealthy, and the costs in setting up a meeting can act as a barrier to someone wishing to set up their own meeting, and that would be a pity.

You see, I am a real believer in empowering people, but there is a fine line between empowering people and setting people up to fail, especially vulnerable people. That is certainly something for service providers to think about.

You know I have heard some incredible stories and of amazing experiences from people who have got involved in SMART above and beyond just attending the meetings. Evidence of how people's confidence and belief in themselves has grown beyond belief, just because they have been involved. I have seen people who have grown in stature and would make incredible recovery workers, just because they have been involved. Now that's amazing. That's what SMART can do. It can allow peers who have had the experience of addictions, to get involved within the sector and even become professionals, because without a doubt the best workers in this sector are those that have been through their own recovery.

And here we are again, in **March**, and at the end of the pilot project. Personally I have had an incredible 12 months, I have experienced and learnt so much, and believe it or not, I would not have changed it for the world. You can't get out of a book or film what I have experienced over the last year, it's been incredible.

You know there's an old Sioux Indian saying, and every now and again, when times have been challenging for me, springs to mind. It goes "...you should never judge a man until you've walked a mile in his moccasins..."

*I have walked a lot of miles this year.*

## **FUTURE**

But what about the ones that haven't? Um...

What about the ones that haven't?

And what of the future?

"I HAVE A DREAM" and it's good to dream. Dreams give us hope, hope gives us a future.

I dream that no matter how bad someone feels, no matter how low that they get, that there is a place for them to go. A place without judgement, a place without prejudice. A place where they can feel supported; a place of safety where they are not alone. A place of strength to draw from.

I dream of a world where we have one community, a community of equals where service providers and those in recovery work together for the common good.

You see here's the thing; Carl from Sheffield, Kev from Manchester, Steve from Orpington and all the other amazing facilitators and co facilitators and people involved with SMART will never know how many lives that they have saved or are likely to save, but I guarantee you something they will save lives.

We will never know whether a person sat in the meeting would have relapsed, but for that meeting, we will never know.

We don't know if that someone would have gone out and killed themselves through their addiction or not; or even worse killed someone else. We will never know, they will never know.

I know this though; I know that when they sleep at night they can sleep knowing that they have made a difference to someone else's life and in doing so have made a difference to their own.

So where does this dream start? It starts right here doesn't it?

There are no reasons why not, only excuses.

There is no reason to wait, only procrastination.

So I invite you all to live the dream, spread the word, **march on** and build a community of equals, full of choice.

**THANK YOU**