

A “NEW LIFE” PROGRAM: WOMEN FOR SOBRIETY

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ABSTRACT

Women for Sobriety (WFS) is both an organization and a self-help program for women alcoholics. It is, in fact, the first national self-help program for women alcoholics.

There are an estimated 7,500,000 women alcoholics in the United States alone. That number of women alcoholics is equal to the total population of Maine, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, New Mexico, and Utah! Surely this large number of women deserve a program that speaks to their specific needs in recovery.

Women for Sobriety (WFS) has been providing services to women alcoholics since July 1976. The WFS “New Life” Program grew out of one woman’s search for sobriety—mine. Now, hundreds of WFS self-help groups are found all across the country and a few abroad.

Based upon a Thirteen Statement Program (affirmations) of positivity that encourages emotional and spiritual growth, the “New Life” Program has been extremely effective in helping women overcome their alcoholism and learn a totally new lifestyle.

The WFS Program is being used not only by women alcoholics in small self-help groups but also in hospitals, clinics, treatment facilities, women’s centers, and wherever alcoholics are being treated.

The activities of WFS are the establishment of self-help groups and the distribution of literature to women who ask for our help.

Unfunded by any agency, WFS derives its operational money from group donations, sale of literature, speaking engagements, workshops, and outside donations.

Until the founding of WFS in 1976, it was assumed that any program for recovery would be just as effective for women as for men. When it became obvious that recovery rates for male alcoholics were higher than for females, it was then declared that women were harder to deal with and they were seen as less cooperative than male alcoholics.

WFS came forth with the belief that women alcoholics require a different kind of program in recovery than the kinds of programs used for male alcoholics. The success of the WFS "New Life" Program has shown this to be true. Although the physiological recovery from alcoholism is the same for both sexes, the psychological (emotional) needs of women are very different from those of male alcoholics.

When I first put the Program together, it was thirteen affirmations that I had jotted down and found to be useful in each morning's period of meditation. It wasn't until a number of years later that I found I was grouping them whenever I gave speeches. So the thirteen Statements (affirmations) are now presented for recovery in levels.

The Program as First Written

1. I have a drinking (life-threatening) problem that once had me. *We now take charge of our life and our disease. We accept the responsibility.*
2. Negative thoughts destroy only myself. *Our first conscious sober act must be to remove negativity from our life.*
3. Happiness is a habit I will develop. *Happiness is created, not waited for.*
4. Problems bother me only to the degree I permit them to. *We now better understand our problems and do not permit problems to overwhelm us.*
5. I am what I think. *I am a capable, competent, caring, compassionate woman.*
6. Life can be ordinary or it can be great. *Greatness is mine by a conscious effort.*
7. Love can change the course of my world. *Caring becomes all important.*
8. The fundamental object of life is emotional and spiritual growth. *Daily I put my life into a proper order, knowing which are the priorities.*
9. The past is gone forever. *No longer will I be victimized by the past. I am a new person.*
10. All love given returns. *I will learn to know that others love me.*
11. Enthusiasm is my daily exercise. *I treasure all moments of my new life.*
12. I am a competent woman and have much to give life. *This is what I am and I shall know it always.*
13. I am responsible for myself and for my actions. *I am in charge of my mind, my thoughts, and my life.* © 1976, 1987, 1993.

When presented in the form of levels for recovery, the Program is thus:

Level I: Accepting alcoholism as a physical disease.

“I have a drinking (life-threatening) problem that once had me.” (#1)

Level II: Discarding negative thoughts, putting guilt behind, and practicing new ways of viewing and solving problems.

“Negative thoughts destroy only myself.” (#2).

“Problems bother me only to the degree I permit them to.” (#4)

“The past is gone forever.” (#9)

Level III: Creating and practicing a new self-image.

“I am what I think.” (#5)

“I am a competent woman and have much to give life.” (#12)

Level IV: Using new attitudes to enforce new behavior patterns.

“Happiness is a habit I will develop.” (#3)

“Life can be ordinary or it can be great.” (#6)

“Enthusiasm is my daily exercise.” (#11)

Level V: Improving relationships as a result of our new feelings about self.

“Love can change the course of my world.” (#7)

“All love given returns.” (#10)

Level VI: Recognizing life's priorities: emotional and spiritual growth, self-responsibility.

“The fundamental object of life is emotional and spiritual growth.” (#8)

“I am responsible for myself and my actions.” (#13)

To make the Program effective, we ask that women arise each morning fifteen minutes earlier than usual and go over the thirteen Statements. We ask, too, that women use this time to tune into themselves—to ask where they are going and how they are caring for their spiritual life.

This time is very important to a recovering person for it is a time of coming to grips with stark reality: Who am I? What am I? What is my life about? Must I make more changes?

The sum of the WFS Program is for women to move toward a state of empowerment, a place in which they are in charge of themselves.

We do not believe that women need to attend meetings forever, because it can sometimes continue the dependency that women need to change. Our program helps women to free themselves from the myriad dependencies women experience in our society, such as dependence upon alcohol, drugs, and other people. To this

end, women in WFS groups do not have a one-on-one sponsor. In WFS, the whole group serves as a sponsor in the early months.

Our program urges meditation every morning. We emphasize nutrition and we also urge women to see their lives in a more dynamic way by asking them to set goals and have plans—a goal a month and plans for a year to five years. More immediately, we ask every woman to have at least one thing planned for each week other than a WFS meeting.

Because we do not have groups everywhere, we urge women who cannot attend a WFS group to join our pen pal program and subscribe to our newsletter. Over the years we have developed a large amount of literature—cassette tapes of meetings, videos of meetings, a number of workbooks, and several diaries. Our most important piece of literature is our small program booklet and all these can be used when no meeting is available.

Perhaps it should be noted that WFS was the first self-help program to start since the founding of AA in 1935. WFS began in 1976 and has been publishing a monthly newsletter ever since that time.

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