

Sojourner House

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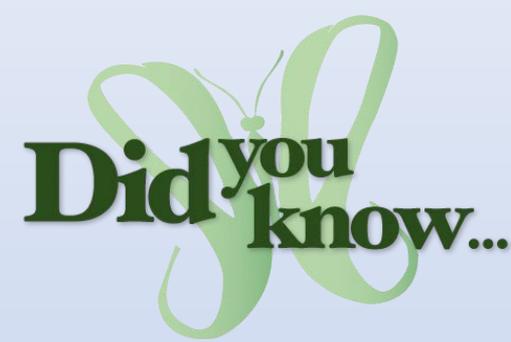
**Empowering Women Through Recovery:
The Journey of Raising Children Affected by Maternal Addiction**



- **Bridging the Gaps Community Health Internship Program** pairs together students from different health and social service disciplines and places them at various community organizations working with underserved populations.
- Students work hands-on with the populations their assigned organization serves.
- **My partner:** Kandace Powell, School of Social Work,
University of Pittsburgh
- **Our organization:** Sojourner House

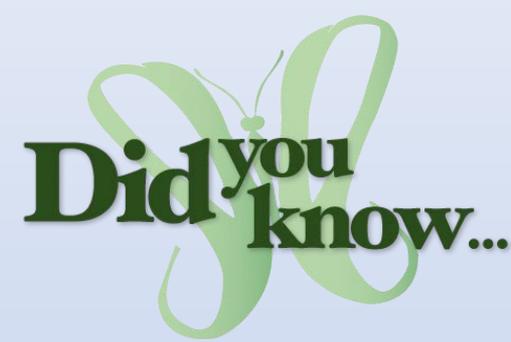


Something you should know....



- Drug abuse differs from drug addiction. Addicts cannot “just stop.”
- **Substance abuse can lead to addiction.**
- **Addiction arises when a drug/alcohol abuser becomes dependent on their substance of choice.** Feeling that they need a drug to function/feel alive.

Something you should know...



- Alcohol and drug dependence causes people to suffer from withdrawal symptoms when they stop using the substance. Their body becomes physiologically and psychologically dependent.
- **Children of addicts and alcoholics are four times more likely than children of non-addicts to become addicted themselves.**
- Women in treatment report alarming histories of abuse, most commonly related to repetitive childhood physical or sexual assault.



- 24-hour drug and alcohol treatment facility for women with children
- Faith-based organization that provides compassionate recovery services for up to six-months
- Aims to help women from all walks of life rebuild their lives with their children
- 14 apartments with a waiting list during periods when the house is full

Mission: “To help women overcome the slavery of addiction and to become free”

Sojourner House History

History:

- Sojourner House was named after the great African American preacher Sojourner Truth.
- Sojourner Truth spoke up for women's rights after successfully fighting for her and her child's freedom from slavery.
- She was a woman of strong faith. Her victories inspired the mission.



How are Women Served During their Stay?

Intense Rehabilitation Treatment:

- Mothers required to participate in daily counseling sessions
- Children receive specialized treatment
- Every mother receives :a counselor, a life-skills worker, and a parent educator.
- Required to attend outside meetings. (i.e.: Narcotics Anonymous)
- Examples of House groups: Relapse Prevention, 12-Step, Parenting, Read to Me Mommy, Spirituality/Meditation



How We Chose Our Project



- Observed women in their daily groups

What we heard: “I know what to do with my child when she is throwing a fit, but how do I cope with it?”

“Is my child like this because I was on methadone?”

- Initiated informal discussions with the women

Their feedback:

- » Desire information on drug addicted babies and babies born into drug environments
- » More concrete information about child development
- » More activities for older kids
- » Laptops for each floor to share

- Brainstormed with supervisors

Our Final Decision: Develop and facilitate weekly empowerment groups and a corresponding pamphlet

So What Did We Actually Do?

Mission/Vision: To equip women with the necessary tools to help their children overcome possible impacts of maternal addiction, and to empower women to break the intergenerational cycle of addiction in order to move the family into wholeness.

<u>Week 1</u> – Exploration	<u>Week 2</u> – External features of babies exposed to drugs/alcohol
What does wholeness and resiliency mean to you?	In 5 years, how would you like your child's life to look?
Established guidelines for the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Looked at pictures of opiate exposed, alcohol exposed, and “healthy” infants.• Women identified similarities and differences.• Identified addicted infants.• Discussed the external features that result from these exposures.
What was your pregnancy like? Did you use while pregnant?	What could hinder your child from being where you envision in 5 years?

Week 3 – Behavioral Features of Children Affected by Maternal Addiction

Week 4 – Coping Strategies for Mom

- Discussed 4 true & false questions regarding children’s behaviors.
- Women answered each question and why they chose that answer.
- Identified answer and corresponding information.

Discussed stressors and stress relief.
What stresses you out?
What do you have control over?
What can you eliminate?
If you can’t eliminate it, what can you do about it?

Discussed importance of environmental factors at length.

Discussed when stress can be a good thing.

Readdressed: In 5 years, how would you like your child's life to look?
What could hinder your child from being where you envision in 5 years?
Addressed: What can you do as a mother to help your child get there?

Discussed the effects too much stress over time on health and the body.
Demonstrated breathing and simple stress relieving exercises.
Wrapped up the past four weeks.

- 60-90 minute groups every Friday
- Each consecutive group was tailored from the previous week’s discussion.

How is All This Sustainable?

- Binder with group outlines, handouts, articles, and flash drive with PowerPoint slides and any other necessary links, resources
- Pre- and post-tests as a means of overall group evaluation
- Pamphlet
 - Culmination of information covered in the groups
 - Physical effects of infants exposed to drugs/alcohol
 - Behavioral problems in children exposed to maternal addiction
 - Coping for mothers
 - Resources
 - Included as part of the intake packet new incoming women



The pamphlet features the Sojourner House logo at the top left, which consists of a house icon with a person and a child inside, followed by the text 'SOJOURNER HOUSE'. Below the logo, the text reads: 'How has my addiction affected my children?' and 'What can I do now?'. A green box contains the message: 'You have the power to help your child succeed.'. At the bottom, there is a photograph of a woman smiling and hugging two children. To the left of the photo, a list of topics is shown: 'Family', 'Recovery', 'Parenting', 'Wholeness', 'New Life', and 'Faith'. A 'Local' logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the photo.

SOJOURNER HOUSE

How has my addiction affected my children?
What can I do now?

You have the power to help your child succeed.

Family
Recovery
Parenting
Wholeness
New Life
Faith

Local



Oral Health

- Short informational session with the women
 - Healthy brushing and flossing habits
 - Creative ways to get their kids brushing
 - Discussed “baby-bottle mouth”
- Distributed the supplies to the women for themselves and their children
 - Included the list of free/affordable dental care





and the Project

Related Topic Areas and Objectives

- Maternal, Infant, and Child Health
 - Abstinence from alcohol and illicit drugs among pregnant women
- Early and Middle Childhood
 - Physical and social-emotional development
- Health Related Quality of Life and Well-being
 - Resilience
 - Coping

Recommendations: Using New Materials

- Hold the group once every 4 months or as often as necessary based on client turnover.
- Tailor each group to the previous week's discussion as much as possible.
- Incorporate the experiences of the individual women as much as possible.
- Include the pamphlet in every intake packet for each incoming client.



What We Learned

We learned more from the women, in the first day, than we could ever hope to teach them over 8 weeks.

- ✓ Recovery is a life-long process.
- ✓ So much more to addiction than the drug of choice



- ✓ It really is important to “meet people where they are.”
- ✓ Strength and resilience of those in recovery

“When you got here I was like ‘Great. Who are these girls? They aren’t addicts, and they are going to listen to all of our crap.’ Then the more you guys stayed, I saw that you genuinely cared about us and our kids. That is great. I’m glad you got to come here and work on your careers. It’s inspiring.”

~Graduate from Sojourner House

A BIG Thank You to...

- The amazing women at Sojourner House
- Sojourner House Staff
 - especially.... Ms. Sharon Jones
Ms. Karen Garland
- Dr. Martha Terry
- BTG cohort and staff

