

Women in Recovery—HEAR US ROAR!

By Sue Mason

Program Director, Turning Point Recovery Center of Bennington

On any given Monday at 5 pm at the Turning Point Recovery Center in Bennington, the ROAR of at least 16 women can be heard throughout the building—sometimes laughing, sometimes crying but always together in fellowship with their common goal: Recovery.

Little did we know when we developed the ROAR (Resources, Opportunity, and Recovery) project that we would exceed our goal. The initial proposal was to provide a weekly support group for women to address and discuss the unique challenges and barriers to recovery from substance abuse, eating disorders, trauma, etc. With the project being a new idea, we were unsure how it would work and if it would be successful. We quickly found a number of women interested and wanting to actively participate in the group. Our first few meetings held 6-8 women, but by the third or fourth week, we had over 20 women attending regularly!

Though the proposed goals and objectives were important and feasible, we found that the group took on a life of its own and succeeded in strengthening women's bonds and support systems. There have been a number of women involved that have not participated fully in 12 Step programs in the past because of their former trauma issues as well as issues with other women and men. It is heartening to know many of these women are now attending those programs and are more actively engaged in their recovery. Women report weekly how important it has been to be a part of our ROAR group, to see their women friends at meetings, and to feel a sense of safety, friendship, and bonding.

One important aspect of the group has been the community meal which is provided each week. Many of these women have either lost their children to DCF custody, lost their families, their jobs and more importantly, their self-esteem. Many have poor nutrition, and some have eating disorders. To sit together and eat while sharing their feelings has had a profound therapeutic effect. Over time each woman volunteered to cook a meal for the group and this alone has given a boost to their self-

esteem and ability to be in community with other women; seeing them not as threats or enemies but allies in the struggle for recovery.

As newer group participants attend and listen to those that have been actively involved, they are learning what has worked and not worked for others in recovery. We also have women with long-term sobriety who are able to mentor and support the newer women their recovery. They even help each other by sharing guidance and feedback on social skills, presentation and personal care.

Recently a young woman who previously had sporadically attended, came to the group and cried the entire time. She could only get a few words out that "DCF has taken my two children and I don't know if I am going to get them back." It was touching to watch the other women bring her Kleenex, hug her, and bring her some homemade soup. We wonder where this young woman would be without the group.

As I write this, quite a few women have passed through the club on their way to meetings or errands; and the first thing I hear is, "are you going to ROAR?" or "see you later at ROAR" or "can't wait until tonight at women's ROAR." That's enough to let us know this project works, and we will be there too!

In 2007, Turning Point Recovery Center of Bennington received a \$10,000 grant from The Vermont Women's Fund for the ROAR program. For more information about this and other programs from Turning Point, please contact Sue Mason at 802.442.9700 or turningpointclub@comcast.net

