THE SECRET WORLD OF RECOVERY VIEWERS GUIDE

From the Producers
When we needed help as a family struggling with alcoholism fifteen years ago, the stigma, and the lack of openness about the disease, made recovery difficult. Alcoholics and addicts were negatively portrayed in the media, and cultural challenges to recovery seemed insurmountable. We didn’t know recovery was working for millions of families, and that life in recovery would bring us acceptance, compassion and joy we hadn’t expected.
As filmmakers we wanted to show what recovery looks like, what it takes for families to heal. We wanted to normalize the concept of sober living and show that recovery isn’t a punishment, or life without pleasure and laughter. The truth is recovery from alcoholism or addiction is like any hero’s journey with its own set of challenges, setbacks, and soaring triumphs. Join us and meet the people who are changing their lives.

Faces & Voices of Recovery Study Guide:
For decades people with addiction and their loved ones have been exploited in the media as a source of voyeuristic fascination. We have labeled and discriminated against them, denying them access to care and life-saving support while keeping them in the dark about the solution—recovery. Times have changed. More people are offering hope by telling their stories, speaking out to end discriminatory public policies and organizing to build supportive communities. There are also exciting new tools and voices available to address misconceptions. The Secret World of Recovery is one of those important new voices that take a unique, pragmatic approach to addressing one of the world’s leading public health problems—addiction to alcohol and other drugs. The story of real people in The Secret World of Recovery directly engages families, friends and neighbors, as well as policymakers and the media, in a much-needed dialogue. This documentary offers a framework for wider discussions to bring new understanding, create demand for improved policies, and help families and communities to heal. The Viewers’ Guide is designed to encourage dialogue among a wide variety of audiences. Use the questions and topics to spur community discussion, aid in your own recovery, or to help those you love. And get inspired to advocate for the recovery cause.

OVERVIEW
Everyone knows someone—a family member, colleague, or friend—who has been challenged at one point or another by addiction. An unknown and surprising fact is that over 20 million Americans are in long-term recovery from addiction. That means that they have stopped using alcohol and other drugs, and are building new lives free from addiction. Recovery from addiction, however, is more than not using alcohol or other drugs. It is also restoring family life; getting a job or going back to school; finding safe and affordable places to live; receiving social and peer support; creating a sense of belonging—and regaining purpose.
The good news is there are many paths to recovery. Recovery can begin in a doctor’s office, treatment center, church, prison, peer support meeting, or in one’s own home. The journey can be guided by faith, spiritual experience or secular teachings. Recovery happens every day and there are many effective solutions.
At the same time, over 23 million Americans continue to struggle with addiction. In our society, too many end up in the criminal justice system. Of the 9 million people incarcerated at any one moment in the United States, 80% were arrested for crimes relating to their alcohol and drug problems. The vast majority of people in prison with alcohol and drug problems don’t receive care while incarcerated. And for those who do receive care, there’s very little help for them once
they are released. But positive changes are coming. When the Affordable Care Act goes into
effect in January 2014, millions of Americans for the first time will be eligible for addiction care
in the health and criminal justice systems.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1). 20 million Americans are in long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs,
why is the world of recovery so “Secret?” Why doesn’t everyone know about it?
2). With so many people going to jail, why isn’t there more public outcry demanding help for
people to keep them out of the criminal justice system?
3). Media coverage focuses on the horrors of addiction and exploits the “downfall” of celebrities.
Why is the story of the solution and the success of long-term recovery missing from the public
discourse? Should we do something about it?
4). When people are struggling with addiction, why are they so often afraid to ask for help?
5). What would you say to someone you just found out was in recovery?

ISSUE: SAYING GOODBYE TO ADDICTION
It’s been said that recovery is a process and a journey, not an event. The growth and
transformation that happens after people stop using alcohol and other drugs is a lifelong process.
As people move forward in their recovery journey, they experience new opportunities,
achievements, and lessons. Along with these come challenges and setbacks. During these times,
they may need to seek out extra help and support. This often helps to secure their recovery and
prevent relapse. Sustaining recovery requires cultivation, so that individuals don’t fall back into
old ways or active addiction.

Scientists have confirmed what many people in recovery knew all along: addiction is a chronic
condition. This means that, just like with other chronic conditions including heart disease,
hypertension, and diabetes, there is not a cure that will make addiction go away completely.
Addiction is a health condition that can be managed through a process of changing how people
think, behave, and reassemble their lives. Most cannot do it alone, so they seek out others to help
support and cultivate their recovery journey. Recovery doesn’t just automatically happen, it
evolves and changes over time as people grow and mature.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1). Have you ever heard the expressions “hitting bottom” or “denial” when talking about
addiction? Do you think that people need to “hit bottom” before they can get help and recover?
2). Are there places in your community where people can go for help with alcohol and other drug
problems? What about family members? Do people know about these places and what happens
there?
3). What do you say to people who tell you that they believe addiction is a moral weakness and
issue, not a health condition?
4). Why is it important for people seeking, or in, recovery to be able to talk with and work with
people who are also no longer using alcohol or other drugs?
5). Are there other health conditions where people have trouble managing a chronic illness?

ISSUE: SOBER LIVING
Once someone stops using alcohol and other drugs, there’s a whole new world to navigate on
their recovery journey. For many, a diverse network of community-based, mutual aid support has
helped them find and maintain recovery.
Many communities have embraced recovery-supporting institutions and programs, like recovery residences, sober living homes and recovery community centers, where alcohol and other drug-free activities that are open to the community are held and recovery support services are delivered. Recovery high schools and collegiate recovery programs are places where young people can continue their education and receive support. Young people in recovery are building new social lives in a culture that often revolves around the use of alcohol and other drugs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1). What difference does it make if someone stops drinking and drugging as a teenager or as an adult?
2). Why do you think neighborhood residents would object to having people who are no longer using alcohol or other drugs living in their neighborhood?
3). How does your high school, community college or college support young people in recovery?
4). Does your community host recovery celebrations/have “First Night” and other alcohol and drug-free events that welcome families?
5). What would you say to friends or family seeking advice about intervention or help. What steps should people take to address the problem?

ISSUE: FAMILY COMPONENT
There is a diverse network of community-based, mutual aid support available to family members, who need help understanding what their child/partner/spouse/parent has been doing to get well and to learn about how to take care of themselves and build new lives. Every family is different. In most cases, relationships will change, as everyone seeks and develops new ways to live. Because approximately one-third of Americans continue to view addiction as a sign of lack of will power or self-control, increasing family members’ understanding of addiction as a chronic health condition from which people can and do recover helps them on their recovery journey.

1). How important is it for family members to get help while a loved one is struggling with addiction or is in recovery?
2). Should parents change how they socialize if a teenager is in recovery?
3). Do you know families who talk about their recovery journey together, and to friends, openly?
4). Do you know employers who are supportive of family members whose children/parents/spouses/partners are struggling with addiction?
5) Are addiction and recovery subjects that people should feel comfortable talking about in the workplace, at school, in church, or around the dinner table at home?

ISSUE: HEALTHY LIVING
For people in or seeking recovery, some health problems develop naturally, because they have the same health and wellness concerns as everyone else. In addition, they may face other health conditions that come up either as a result of their addiction or of low health literacy or self-care like neglecting sleep, nutrition, basic hygiene, and dental needs as well as having HIV or Hepatitis C. Some people don’t or didn’t have a doctor and only went to emergency rooms in a crisis. Healthy eating, physical activity and restful sleep are important parts of overall health. Connecting socially, having supportive people to share experiences with, giving back and belonging to a community play a major role in initiating and sustaining recovery.

1). Why is being of service to others an important component of the recovery journey for many people?
2). Can a person’s attitude about healthy eating and physical activity make a difference for people in recovery?
3). Why do so many people in active addiction end up in emergency rooms?
4). Have you heard it said that people in recovery substitute one addiction for another? What does that mean? Are all addictions bad?
5). Is it possible to have fun in recovery?

ISSUE: AWARENESS AND CELEBRATION

Across the country there’s a growing network of community-based organizations and individuals who are speaking out publicly about recovery, advocating for improved public policies and offering recovery support services. They are offering hope to individuals and families who are still struggling as well as letting elected and appointed officials know that there is a solution to addiction and that resources need to be invested to help people get and stay well.

They are also advocating for the right to effective, respectful, nondiscriminatory care when needed in the health and criminal justice systems. Each September is National Recovery Month, when people in recovery, family members and allies organize and attend walks, rallies and public awareness events across the nation and the world.

Knowing and understanding public attitudes toward people with addiction and people in long-term recovery is important to inform education and awareness campaigns. In public opinion research two-thirds of the public revealed that they believe that a stigma exists toward people in recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Overwhelming majorities said that discrimination against people in recovery is a problem.

Not surprisingly, language matters. In a recent survey of health professionals, researchers found that changing the words used to describe someone struggling with alcoholism or drug addiction may significantly alter the attitudes of health care professionals, even those who specialize in addiction treatment. They found that reducing the use of stigmatizing terms could help diminish the shame, guilt and embarrassment that act as barriers, keeping people from seeking help.

1). Are there people in your community who are public about their or a family members’ recovery from addiction?
2). Can media—social media, news, and entertainment, be tool for social change around perception of sober living and addiction Why don’t more people talk about their addiction and recovery?
3). What can you do in your community to raise awareness about and advocate for recovery?
4). Is your school or office supportive of people who are receiving treatment or in recovery? Do people know where to go for help at work or school?
5). Do you think public attitudes toward people with addiction will change because addiction will be covered like any other health condition under the Affordable Care Act?