

PULSE

We all play a part in substance abuse treatment — yes, even you

Substance use and abuse is a community issue.

Here, the ethical concept “ubuntu” is fitting. This philosophy is described as the interconnectedness of all of humanity. Desmond Tutu referred to the word when he said, “We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world.”

When it comes to substance use issues, Pillars staff has found this to be true. A parent’s example affects the behavior of his children. An individual’s addiction affects her whole family. The community’s views of addiction determine whether struggling individuals feel comfortable seeking help. And the existence of strong community health and safety net services affects whether that help is available. All of us play a part in the health of the community and the treatment process for those struggling with substance use concerns. Let’s pick these components apart.

First, it’s important for adults to remember that the example they set will (and does) affect children. Parents: How often do you drink in front of your kids? Have you ever offered them some of your prescription pills or allowed them to smoke on your property? Do you show by your own example that it’s OK to ask for help? You have the ability to set them up for success or failure, so it’s important to teach boundaries early and to remember that even well-behaved kids can be led astray. If you see them taking an interest in drugs or alcohol, even just experimenting once or twice, you can do something to ensure it doesn’t turn into more regular use and abuse. At Pillars, in addition to offering treatment, we also speak with parents and individuals who just want to know the steps to take to prevent future substance use.

Next, regardless of your age and



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whether you have children, know that substance use and addiction will affect others in some way. Often-heard phrases such as “it’s my life” or “that’s not my business” suggest a blindness to the fact that every action, every behavior affects something or someone. Perhaps your drug use has led you to become more reclusive, spending less time with family and friends. Or maybe your alcohol use has led you to take more risks at work, on the road and at home. If you are struggling to get sober and remain sober, remember that you don’t have to hit rock bottom to get help.

As a community, our level of respect for individuals seeking recovery — and even our word choice — affects whether our neighbors and friends seek and obtain the help they need. When we talk about people dealing with substance use issues as

criminals or even jokingly say things like “What’s she smoking?”, it discounts the hard work these folks may be doing to get well and may discourage others from bringing their substance use issues into the light.

At Pillars, we treat alcoholism and drug addiction as illnesses that affect the whole family and all aspects of an individual’s life. And we believe that every person who seeks addictions services (or any services at Pillars) has the inherent right to have hopes and dreams as they work toward recovery. Everyone should have the opportunity to succeed.

Now more than ever, we have to work together to drive change and make our community a better place. That will require all of us to remember our individual impact, reach out for help when we need it, be empathic toward one another and ensure the future of organizations like Pillars that serve as a mainstay in an individual’s time of need.

— *Ann C. Schreiner is president and CEO of Pillars*