

Recovering addict at BC3 event: Speaker's approach works

College's "Reset Your Brain" initiative draws 250, community appreciation

Feb. 7, 2018



Steve Treu, a licensed therapist with Quantum Revolution Counseling, Cranberry Township, addresses a crowd estimated at 250 inside Butler County Community College's Succop Theater during BC3's kickoff event of "Reset Your Brain: A Revolutionary Approach to Opioid Addiction & Recovery" on Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2018.

(Butler, PA) A 32-year-old recovering heroin addict from Armstrong County said he found hope and inspiration Tuesday night inside Butler County Community College's Succop Theater, where Cranberry Township licensed therapist Steve Treu enlightened 250 visitors drawn to the kickoff event of BC3's "Reset Your Brain: A Revolutionary Approach to Opioid Addiction & Recovery."

BC3's initiative to combat opioid addiction reflects an objective incorporated into the college's new five-year strategic plan, a theme that focuses, in part, on quality of life. The presentation by Treu, a licensed Cranberry Township therapist and author, introduced Cole, 32, to "the scientific side of endorphins."

Treu told the audience that those participating in scientifically studied activities -- exercise, yoga, meditation, relaxation, improved nutrition, music and art groups, pet ownership and spiritual development -- will help the brain to naturally produce endorphins, which are similar in molecular composition to opioids.

"Exercise, meditation, spirituality, those things really help to keep me sober," said Cole, who added that he has had intermittent periods in which he has been drug-free. "They work. I go to the gym almost every day because it seriously does help a lot and it is something to accomplish."

Cole, who partly attributes his use of opioids to injuries he suffered when he was young, and that he was 22 the first time he used heroin, added: "It is definitely positive to be educating people, the general public, which needs more knowledge about what actually goes on, because a lot of people don't believe in the disease concept. Which is a big part, where people put a stigma on addicts because they think it's a choice. That we choose to do the things that we do -- and the things that it causes us to do."

"A disease on the cellular level"

Endorphins within the opioid addict fall asleep, Treu said.

"This is the issue. This is the problem," he said. "The natural opioid inside the brain hibernates. It goes to sleep. And so when somebody is trying to stop using and they have hibernating endorphins, what happens?"

"They try to stop using. And their endorphins are asleep. What feeling do they have? ... Withdrawal. They have such intense pain because they have no natural painkiller in their body, and they are not taking the fake stuff anymore. Now they are in pain like they have never felt before. And then people are telling them, 'Why don't you stop using? Why don't you just quit?'"

"This is why it is a disease. A disease on the cellular level. It has a predictable course of action. A person who doesn't have natural endorphins flowing through their system anymore is going to want to use."



Cheri Readie, founder of Broken Places, Butler, is shown Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2018, outside Butler County Community College's Succop Theater prior to BC3's kickoff event of "Reset Your Brain: A Revolutionary Approach to Opioid Addiction & Recovery."

As part of BC3's "Reset Your Brain" initiative, four classes have been scheduled to educate the public on how endorphin connection is the key to recovery – a curriculum taught by Treu and based on his "Hope is Dope" book, published in 2016.

Four classes set for April

Registration is required for the classes, which will be free and held from 7 to 8:30 on Tuesday evenings.

The first three classes will be held at the United Way of Butler County, 407A W. Jefferson St., Butler. Class 1 is titled "It's All in Your Head"; Class 2, "A Unified Diversity"; and Class 3, "Just Say Yes."

Class 4, "Putting It All Together," will be held at the Butler Art Center, 344 S Main St, Butler.

Cheri Readie was among representatives of 10 community organizations who distributed literature before and after Treu's presentation inside Succop Theater, whose crowd was estimated at 250 by Larry Stock, director of BC3's Cultural Center.

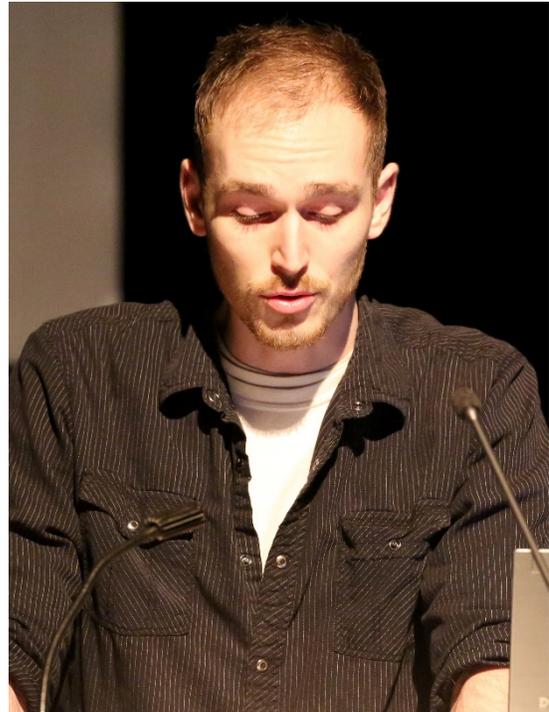
"Being the heart of Butler's education, on a community level, it is wonderful that BC3 is taking part in this," said Readie, who in 2017 founded Broken Places, Butler – for those from "all walks of life" who are struggling and "need a place to come as they are" to find encouragement and love.

Readie herself lost a family member to drug- and alcohol-related issues.

"BC3 is saying, 'This is all of us. This is our community. We want to help to educate the people.' Education is key," Readie said. "Everyone knows we have a problem. What are we going to do about the problem? How do we educate, and how do we get to, even prevention? Eventually this may lead down the path to prevention."

"My worst day clean is better than my best day using"

BC3's "Reset Your Brain" provides an avenue to increase awareness "that there is help out there," said Charlene Eckert, with Hope for Broken Hearts, Mount Chestnut United Presbyterian Church. "And that you don't have to deal with this all by yourself. That is part of the stigma. And silence kills."



Sean Bernick gives his testimonial to a crowd estimated at 250 inside Butler County Community College's Succop Theater during BC3's kickoff event of "Reset Your Brain: A Revolutionary Approach to Opioid Addiction & Recovery" on Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2018.

Said Cole: “A lot of us have lost our self-esteem, our will, and don’t have a reason to live because we have destroyed so much in our lives.”

BC3 will also collaborate with downtown Butler businesses to create opportunities for clients to practice endorphin-producing activities at Yoga on Main, Brushes and Barstools, The Art Center, All About Reclaimed, YMCA, Family Bowlaway, Butler Public Library, Downtown Sounds, Cummings Candy & Coffee, Rainbow Animal Refuge, Focused Fitness and Rapp’s Bicycle.

“Our work on this initiative speaks to BC3’s role as the community’s college,” said Dr. Nick Neupauer, BC3 president. “We are partnering with key groups, organizations and businesses to tackle a large societal issue. I believe the synergies and collaborations created will go a long way in addressing this problem.”

Treu’s hourlong presentation was preceded and buttressed by a five-minute video created by Rho Phi, BC3’s chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, an international academic honor society, in which local recovering opioid addicts testified that “My worst day clean is better than my best day using” and “You have to have an unwavering faith that you are going to succeed.”

Her son is a recovering heroin addict, said Pam McKivigan, who attended “Reset Your Brain” with Seeds of Hope co-director Jim McGuire.

“He is almost five years clean,” McKivigan said. “So any time you can hear someone has a new outlook, and how you can recover from addiction, that is very important to hear about.”

Hope is precisely what Tracy Hack hoped to hear.

“Everyone has come up to me tonight and told me what a fabulous event this was,” said Hack, BC3’s coordinator of Community Leadership Initiatives. “They are filled with hope, and light, and a positive message that we can go out into the community and make a difference and reverse this.”