

Twelve Oaks uses 12 steps to battle addiction

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No one wakes up one morning and says 'Hey, I think I want to be a drug addict.'

That's what Joanne "Jojo" Krause, a recovering alcoholic who serves as the community resource liaison at Twelve Oaks alcohol and drug rehab center in Navarre, said.

"Addicts are not bad people. They're just sick people," she said.

And having witnessed the transformations that occur at Twelve Oaks, she would know.

The facility, which can hold up to 102 patients at any given time, is located on the Santa Rosa Sound. With a full medical facility and detox, Twelve Oaks' staff deals with both the medical and psychological aspects of addiction.

"The core of recovery is the same no matter what the drug is," Diane Vchulek, director of clinical services, said, adding that detox is the first step. "Alcohol is the most dangerous to detox off of, and

it requires a strong medical director to let them safely detox from the drug of choice."

Vchulek said the primary addictions she sees at Twelve Oaks are alcohol and opiates. She said that since pill mills in Florida have shut down, people will move to heroin, an opiate with a high similar to Oxycodone.

Dr. Timothy Gooden, Twelve Oaks' medical director said he usually treats an equal number of alcohol and opiate addictions.

"We get people from all over the country," he said. "A lot of young people from the eastern seaboard and upper New England. They're just enmeshed in a lifestyle that they get involved with because it's socially acceptable in that age range."

He said many of the older opiate users he treats started taking pills because of a legitimate pain issue.

"Opiates cause a feeling of euphoria," he said, adding that the body becomes used to the drug

causing users to increase the dosage.

"The elimination of pill mills in certain parts and the lack of access (to those drugs) has driven a lot of individuals to heroin," he said.

Gooden said he's seen only a handful of methamphetamine users at any given time.

"If they're out there, they're not coming to treatment," he said.

Vchulek also said she rarely sees methamphetamine users admitted to Twelve Oaks, but according to Sgt. Blake Weekley, with the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Unit, meth possession includes a mandatory jail sentence, so unlike other drug arrests, meth abusers don't have the opportunity to enter rehab rather than serve jail time.

Twelve Oaks focuses on the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and includes morning devotionals, meditation, intensive group therapy, AA meetings and activities such as light therapy, art therapy and team building. And

homework. Plenty of homework.

"Patients have workbooks, written assignments, they work on timelines from birth to current ... and they're introduced to step work," Vchulek said.

Krause said counselors have a critical role in properly assessing the patient and incorporating the recovery process.

"One of our counselors engages with them as soon as they get here," she said. "The counselors are trained in rapport building."

Tommy Morris, director of admissions, is also in recovery, and his experience can sometimes put a patient at ease.

"We're the first people they talk to on the phone," he said, adding that he recently spoke to someone involved in an intervention who wasn't sure he wanted to stay at the program. "Knowing I've been there, he calmed down and agreed to admit."

Vchulek said one of the key components to recovering at Twelve Oaks is

learning the tools needed to live a sober lifestyle.

"We show them how to have fun - appropriate, sober fun," she said.

Family support is also important, and the staff works with family members to help them understand the disease and what to expect when the patient returns home.

Krause said many times, family members think once someone leaves rehab, their addiction is fixed, but that's not the case. Recovery is a lifelong process.

Twelve Oaks has a strong alumni group, and members are invited back to share their stories with current patients. Krause said the alumni also relies on social media, especially for those who have lost their driver's licenses and don't have transportation to AA meetings.

"They're having their recovery meetings in this closed room," she said, adding that it's important to share experiences so others don't feel alone. "I was the wife of a commander, and I know other

people are having the same problem. So we opened this room where people can talk freely."

Krause is also working to remove the stigma attached to drug and alcohol addiction.

"We are constantly punishing people for a disease because of the behavior," Krause said. "So if we treated the disease, maybe we wouldn't have so much of the behavior."

Students

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"Whether it's family or people at school, (students) aren't feeling the relationships. It's a lack of relationships," Richards said. "I think drugs are probably the biggest problem in this school. But then you look at other schools and you see kids killing each other. So then it makes it seem like maybe it's not that bad. But at our school they are."

Multiple calls to Navarre High School administrators were not returned.