

# Courier-Post

## Helping Them Help Themselves

Christian support group is there for drug addicts ready to make a change

**By Kim Mulford**

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Lucy DuBose is a petite, neatly dressed woman with dark hair, big hoop earrings and a beautiful, dimpled smile that lingers in the room long after it's gone.

She meets clients in her second-floor office at the Fellowship House in South Camden, where visitors sit in a wooden chair very close to her narrow desk. On Tuesday nights, she leads an Addictions Victorious support meeting in the same room where the urban ministry holds church services.

There is little hint in her soft voice that she once abused language nearly as badly as she abused drugs. There is no way you'd guess she started using when she was 13, that she once lost custody of her daughter, was homeless and so addicted to crack, cocaine and heroin that even her drug dealer boyfriend wanted nothing to do with her.

But she will tell you all this and more in a simple, matter-of-fact way, just before she tells you that she finally was released from her addiction 12 years ago, after seven trips to long-term residential rehabs across the country.

"(God) has changed everything about me," said DuBose, a 37-year-old Camden native. "I feel like I've lived two lives. Before, I hate to use this word, but I was really ghetto -- ghetto fabulous. I say that without meaning any harm. I know where I came from. I don't forget where I came from."

Nor does she forget the torment of addiction, nor her attempts to numb the shame and guilt, nor what it's like to go through heroin withdrawal. She will never forget what it's like to have no hope.

That's why DuBose shares her story with her clients, people of all kinds who come in off the streets of Camden, looking for the way out. They ask her, "Can you help me? Will you really help me?"

"If you really want help, you've come to the right place," said DuBose, who is not a professional counselor but who can get her clients into detox, outpatient support programs and Christian residential rehabs. "We never turn anyone away because of lack of funds."

If clients aren't quite ready for rehab, the Addictions Victorious meetings are a good start.

"We believe that Jesus Christ is the way," said DuBose. "We don't believe that the person's problem is the addiction. We believe it's a heart problem. It's a faith problem."

Addictions Victorious is a network of Christian support and recovery groups that began in South Jersey nearly 20 years ago. Entirely run by volunteers, the nonprofit helps congregations start support groups within their own churches. More than 30 groups now meet regularly in the four-state area, said its director, Daniel Gavin.

Gavin calls addictions an epidemic. Drugs, alcohol, sex, sports, work, food -- all of them are potential candidates for misplaced worship.

"It could be anything that robs our devotion to our Maker," said Gavin, 55. "Only God can fill that hole."

The meetings allow addicts to meet with a family of fellow believers. Once an addiction is broken, their lives are transformed.

"It is a life of joy and peace and serenity," said Gavin, who is also a former substance abuser. "You find what you were really meant to be. (God) becomes your friend and you look at life through a whole new lens."

At the Fellowship House meeting, members find support from fellow addicts, reformed addicts and from people who have never been hooked on drugs.

Eleanor Corbitt of Pennsauken comes every week just to offer her love and guidance to people lost in their addictions. The 73-year-old will hug them when they need it, no matter their condition. She listens past the coarse language. She prays for them.

Corbitt has seen lives changed and blessed, even her own.

"Everybody needs love," said Corbitt, whose own son kicked a drug habit years ago. "Everybody needs to feel valued. Everybody needs to feel somebody cares about them."

At 1722 Broadway in South Camden, that's what keeps people coming in the door.

*Kim Mulford writes about spiritual matters in her column Keeping the Faith, which appears on Saturdays in the Courier-Post's Living section.*

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