Healing The Stigma Of Addiction

West Virginia Workforce Conference

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William Stauffer, LSW CADC
Executive Director, PRO-A

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How We Fit In

The Statewide Recovery Organization

networking and strengthening statewide

PRO-A is the only Pennsylvania statewide non-profit, 501(c)(3) grassroots advocacy organization dedicated to supporting individuals in recovery and educating the public on addiction and recovery.

The mission of **PRO-A** is to mobilize, educate and advocate in order to eliminate the stigma and discrimination toward those affected by alcoholism and other drug addiction to ensure hope, health and justice for individuals, families and those in recovery.

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Pennsylvania Definition of Recovery

In 2009 and 2010, through **the Pennsylvania Drug and Alcohol Coalition** in collaboration with **Pennsylvania Governor's Policy Office**, the **Department of Public Welfare, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services** and **the Department of Health, Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs**, had PRO-A and key stakeholders completed a White Paper including this definition:

Recovery from a Substance Use Condition is:

A highly individualized journey that requires abstinence from all mood and mind-altering substances that may be supported through the use of medication that is appropriately prescribed and taken. This journey is a voluntarily maintained lifestyle that includes the pursuit of spiritual, emotional, mental and physical well-being that is often supported by others.

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Addiction-related Stigma

- Substance Use Conditions are shame-based
- Generated and perpetuated by prejudicial attitudes/beliefs against persons with substance use disorders
- Persons who are substance dependent and people in recovery are shunned and deprived of basic human rights and health care

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Evidence of Stigma

2008 SAMHSA telephone survey:

Marijuana
Alcohol
Prescription Drugs

VS.

Other illicit drugs such as…
Cocaine
Heroin
Methamphetamines

75% believe that recovery from these is possible

Programs to treat are seen as *MORE* favorable

58% believe that a person can fully recover from these

Programs to treat are seen as *LESS* favorable

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Symptoms of Stigma

- Deeply rooted in society
- Isolates individuals and their families
- Encourages people to deny a fatal condition and ignore symptoms
- Blocks appropriate funding for substance use services

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Symptoms of Stigma (cont.)

Societal impacts:

- Incarceration over treatment
- Auto and workplace accidents
- Medical disorders
- Lost productivity in the work place
- Loss of human lives
- Families broken up
- Loss of employment

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Implications of Stigma

- Stigma from *Within*
  (Ex: Golem Effect v Pygmalion Effect)
- Stigma from the *Recovering Community*
- Stigma from *Treatment Providers*
- Stigma from the *Outside*

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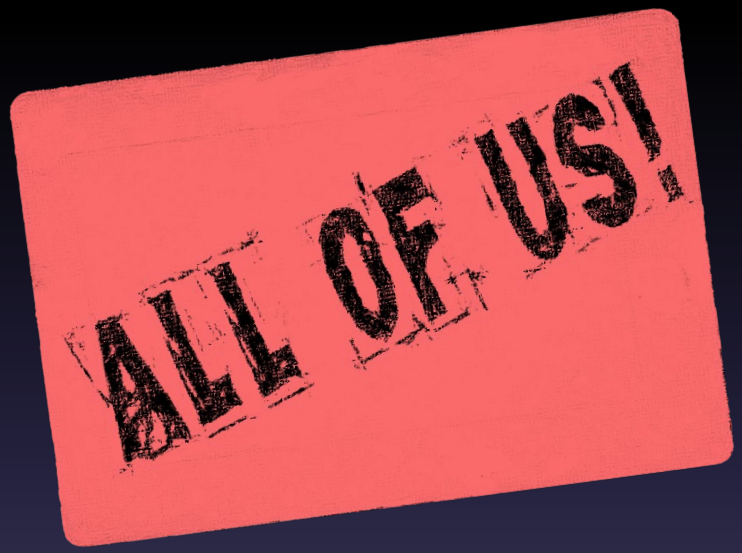
Who among us is likely to stigmatize and discriminate?



Convincing ourselves we would never do bad things to other people decreases our vigilance against such behaviors and INCREASES the likelihood we will do so!

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Factors That Compound Stigma

Culture

Race

Socio-Economic Status

Co-existing Disorders (Multiple)

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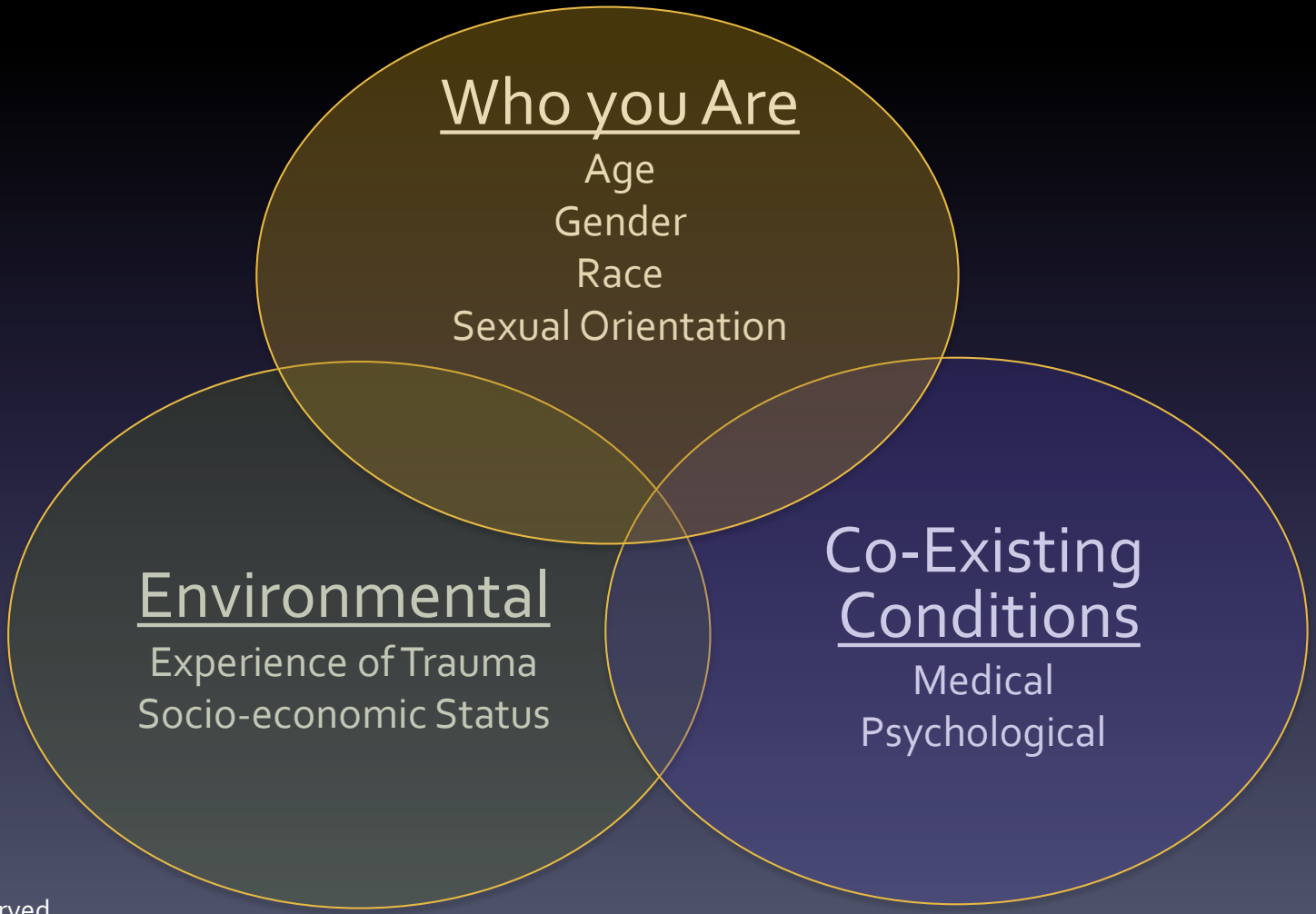
Experience of Stigma Highly Individualized



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Stigma As A Roadblock To Recovery

Myths and stereotypes about addiction

- Moral Issue
- Spiritual Deficit (sin)
- Character Flaw
- Weakness, Lack of Willpower

NIMBY Syndrome

- "Not in my backyard!"

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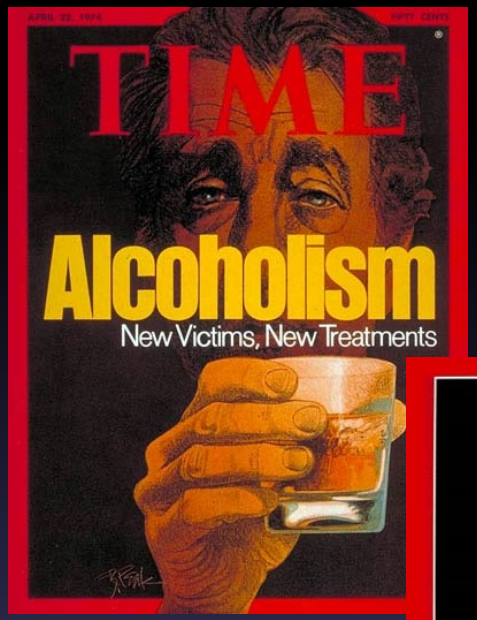
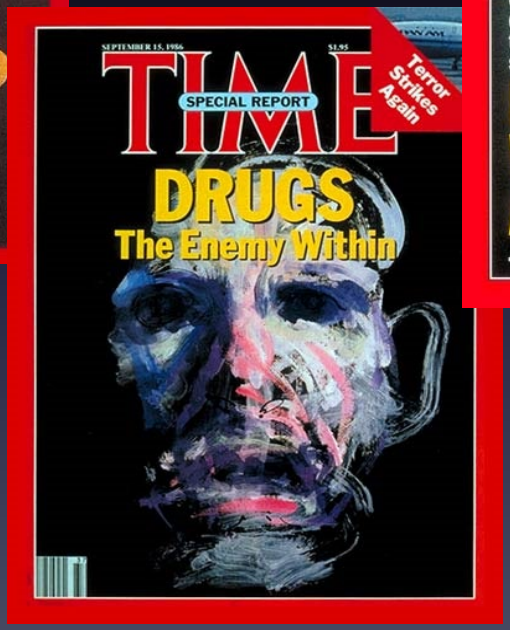
Stigma In The Media



April 1974

Sept. 1986



May 1997

July 2007

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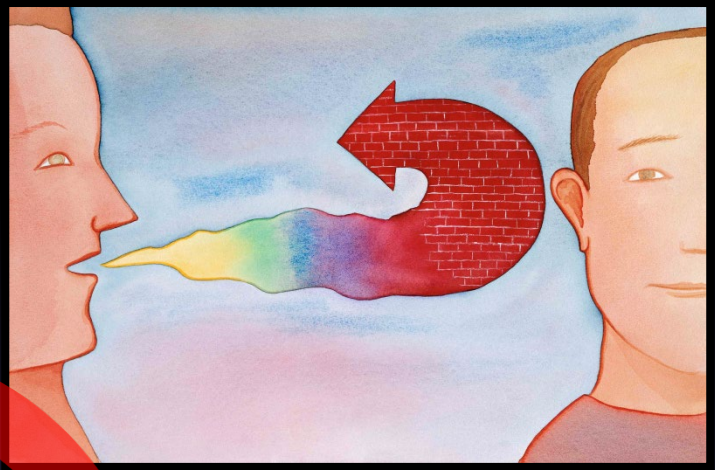
Stigmatizing Language



- Defining people by their disorder
- Referring to oneself *only* as substance dependent person
- Sensationalizing recovery
- Making broad statements about the disorder
- Substance-related terms as metaphors

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Changing Public Perception about who we are

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Strategies For Healing Stigma

What is Advocacy?

- Advocacy means to call or to rally for a specific cause
- Recovery advocacy is the process of exerting influence to advance public policies and programs that help initiate and sustain recovery from substance use disorders
- Advocacy provides families, friends, and neighbors a message of hope about the power and possibility of recovery

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Messaging Intro: Who am I?

"My Name is _____ and I am a person in *long-term recovery* which means to me…"

- Have not used alcohol or other drugs for **x** number years
- Long-term recovery has given me new hope and stability
- I've been able to create a better life for myself, my family, and my community
- I'm speaking out so that others have the opportunity to achieve long-term recovery

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A Family Perspective:

My family and I are in long-term recovery, which means to us…

- (My son/daughter/husband/wife) hasn't used alcohol or other drugs for **x** years
- We've become healthier together, enjoying family life in our home
- Long-term recovery has given me and my family new purpose and hope for the future
- I want to make it possible for others to do the same

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What to say when telling your story

DO NOT:

- Focus on your addiction or what causes addiction
- Say "I am an addict"
- Talk about yourself as a victim of a life situation you found yourself in
- Promote a particular fellowship, program, or pathway of recovery
- Share intimate details – keep your messaging concise!

DO!
Focus on your *RECOVERY!*

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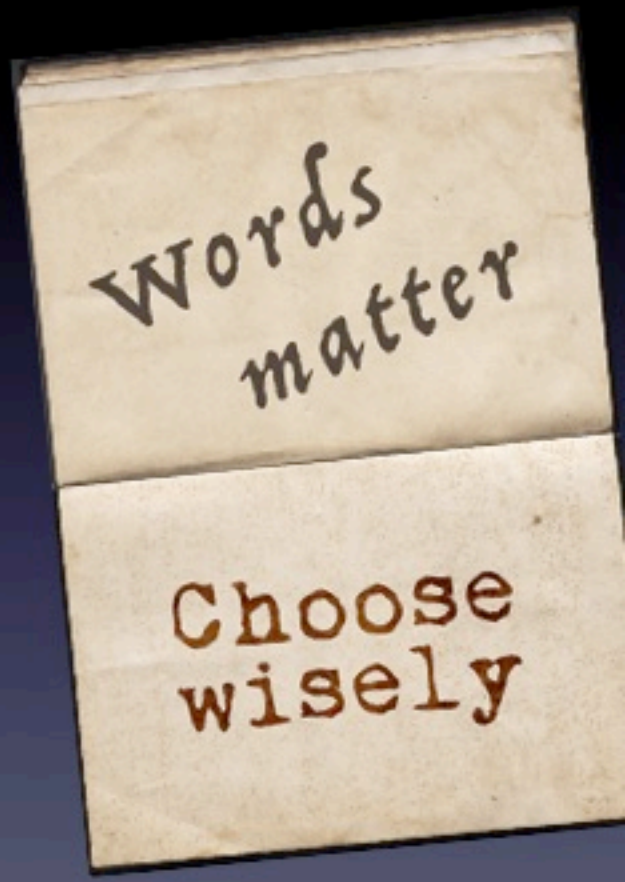
"Loaded" words that have negative connotations

- ABUSE
- ADDICT
- "CLEAN"
- "DIRTY"
- JUNKIE
- USER

There are many more!

We need to get away from language that depicts us as victims, that seems to blame the individual and begin to use language that emphasizes recovery, empowerment, and relate addiction as a medical condition that people can talk about without blame, shame, or stigma.



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Stay focused and "on message"

Stay focused on what you want to communicate –

- Keep your message to 2 or 3 main points
- Don't get distracted from what you want to say
- If you get off track "pivot" back to your main points
- Keep it short – say what you are going to say, say it and tell them what you said….

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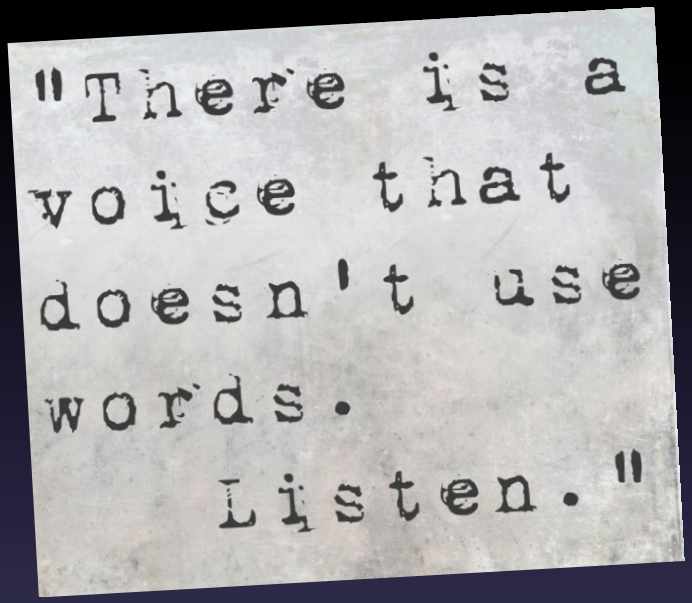
Strategies For Healing Stigma *(cont.)*



Education and Advocacy

- Educate yourself and your family about addiction and recovery
- Engage persons in recovery and their families to eliminate discrimination across all of our social and governmental institutions

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Strategies For Healing Stigma *(cont.)*

Methods:

- Speak up about stigma
- Respond to stigmatizing material in the media
- Talk openly about recovery
- Educate elected officials
- Support organizations that fight stigma

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Strategies For Healing Stigma *(cont.)*

Educating the Public:

"*Those people*" are really OUR people*!*

Stigma Awareness and Prevention Campaign

- **Identify a Specific Problem**
- **Identify Potential Issues**
- **Assess Community Readiness**
- **Identify Potential Partners**
- **Identify Potential Solutions**

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Strategies For Healing Stigma *(cont.)*

Using the Media:

- Social media
- Submit articles for publication
- Letters to editorial boards
- Promote interviews and talk shows with individuals in recovery
- Convene a policy panel
- Create opportunities to share your message

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Know Your Legislative Rights

- ✓ *Americans with Disabilities Act, [Revised 1990]*
- ✓ *The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA)*
- ✓ *Affordable Care Act of 2010 (ACA)*

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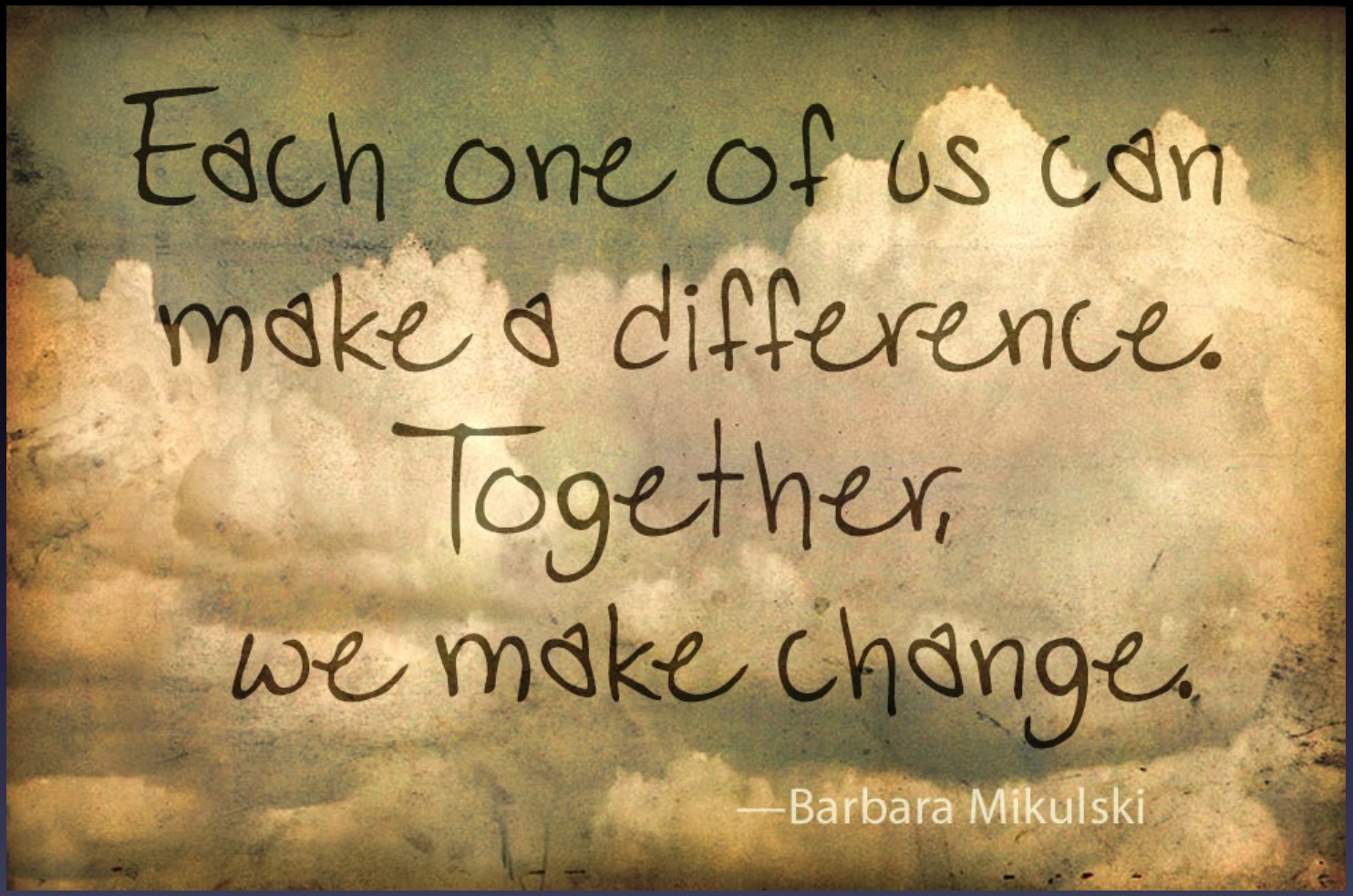

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And finally…

a moment of happy!

Don’t forget to fill out your evaluations!

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PRO·A
Pennsylvania Recovery Organizations Alliance

Let's go change the world, TOGETHER!

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William Stauffer
Executive Director
Billstauffer@PRO-A.org

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