

WATCh support encouraged

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Editor:

My name is R.J. Koerper and recently I wrote a letter to the community of Glendive both communicating to them the impact that the WATCh treatment program there had on me, as well as thanking them for embracing the facility and their mission. I completed the six month treatment regimen in December of 2006.

I understand that May 1 the citizens of Glendive will have the opportunity to publicly voice their opinions about some proposed changes in the treatment at WATCh that will affect the surrounding community. Specifically the proposed changes are as follows:

1. Increasing capacity to 10 beds.
2. Allowing visitors to drive to the facility rather than being transported from City Hall.
3. Family members being allowed to wear civilian clothing during their last phase.
4. Family members being allowed to leave the facility supervised to attend outside recovery meetings in their last phase and/or to leave the facility to participate in "pay it forward" community projects such as cleanup day, etc.

As an alumnus of the program I wanted to write and offer my support for those proposed changes. The waiting list for a treatment program such as WATCh will only grow longer sadly to say. Montana is one of the few states that recognizes that DUI offenders need treatment rather than just incarceration. The program not only needs to continue but also to grow to be able to treat as many as possible. The other three proposals are based on the assumption that the transition from the program to the society needs to be more gradual so that a more "normal" lifestyle can be resumed. Let me explain.

One of the most difficult issues that I faced when I graduated from the program was that I left a very closed structured system to one that was open and very different. That transition was extremely difficult for me, and I know for many others who had gone through the program. A small example: at WATCh everyone wore the same colors and the same types of clothes, depending on the phase they were in, right up until they left. In the proposed change, family members can wear civilian clothing during their last phase.

It may seem like a small change, but in reality it is significant...it is part of helping the members to more effectively transition back into society, and is preparing them for that. That is huge.

Likewise, to be able to attend recovery meetings such as AA in the area will help to develop a lifestyle outside the facility in continuing their recovery in a setting that is not directly connected with WATCh. For me personally, getting connected to my home group in Billings was the single biggest thing that has helped me maintain my sobriety. The community service opportunity would be very beneficial because it would create a win/win scenario for members of the city and for the WATCh family. Service work is inherent in 12-step recovery programs, the city benefits with clean up and improvement projects, and again the family member is being encouraged to live a more productive lifestyle. I had a terrific opportunity

to "pay it forward" after I graduated. After returning to Billings, I still had 60 hours of community service as part of my sentence.

Through Providence, I was given the opportunity to work with the Montana Rescue Mission and create for them a significant part of their transitional program, the Brotherhood, which helps residents to move back into the society from the mission. A considerable part of what I did for them was based on what I had received when I went through the WATCH program. The principles I learned at WATCH are very transferable into other venues. To be able to pay it forward while still in the program is a great way to provide feedback and encouragement to live more productively upon graduation.

When the citizens of Glendive meet on May 1 to voice their opinions, I hope they will embrace these proposed changes, changes which I believe will make the treatment at WATCH that much more effective, because it will allow for a better transition back into living a productive and healthy normal lifestyle. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

R.J. Koerper, WATCH graduate
Billings, Mont.