

Substance Use Counseling Group for Gay and Bi Men

SAN DIEGO — A local counseling center is joining other regional organizations in presenting options for addressing the growing problem of substance abuse in the GLBT communities. First Avenue Counseling Centre at 2333 First Avenue will host this first-of-its-kind group in San Diego. It will offer a harm reduction approach for substance use with people who do not view other intervention methods as viable options.

The idea and development of the group grew out of Stepping Stone's recent launch of a harm reduction ad campaign that raised awareness of crystal methamphetamine as a major health issue with gay and bisexual men. According to Stepping Stone Board Chair Steven Johnson, the campaign has generated new awareness and discussion regarding crystal use in the community.

He noted, "We have been able to create a new dialogue among our community members who use crystal and other drugs without the stigma or shame that permeates discussions about addiction and drug use. Because the need is so great in San Diego, services like the harm reduction group at First Avenue Counseling Centre are a welcome and much-needed addition to our community."

The Transitioning from the Scene: A Group for Gay Men group will work from a harm reduction approach and targets all gay and bisexual males who use alcohol or drugs. Facilitator Tom Wall added that the group targets gay and bisexual males who,

according to recent public health studies, hold the highest incidence of substance abuse within the GLBT community.

Transitioning from the scene offers a safe and supportive therapeutic environment for individuals to start addressing their substance use. "Many people who use alcohol and drugs often seek out treatment when they have reached a life crisis phase," stated Wall. "These individuals may suffer from loss of employment, loss of significant relationships, develop serious health problems such as HIV, lack of sufficient funds to support themselves, may be homeless, and are generally in greater need for resources from the community. Our mission is to intervene before they reach a stage of dependency."

According to Wall, the key to successful intervention is making the first point of communication at any stage. "We are available to help people who have problems with alcohol and/or drugs wherever they are on their path to recovery, whether thinking about quitting or looking for support through tough times. The first and often most difficult step is finding safe and reliable support. With this support, the path to recovery is much less overwhelming."

For more information about Transitioning from the Scene: A Group for Gay Men or information on individual, family, or couples counseling contact Wall at (619) 903-0083 or send an email to sandiegomft@hotmail.com.