



Associazione

Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

associazione internazionale di fedeli di diritto pontificio - www.apg23.org

Ente Ecclesiastico Civilmente Riconosciuto con D.P.R. n. 596/72
C.F. 00310810221 - P.Iva n. 01433850409

Sede legale: Via Mameli, 1 - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Segreteria: Via Valverde, 10/C - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Tel. 0541/909600 - **Fax** 0541/909601

The Therapeutic Communities in the Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

Since its beginning in the 1970s, the Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII has focused its attention on drug abuse prevention and the rehabilitation of abusers, basing its action on the promotion of all the fundamental dimensions of the human being - physical, psychological, social and spiritual. None of those should be forgotten, undervalued or overlooked.

The first therapeutic community was opened in 1980 (there are now 32 in different countries worldwide: Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Croatia, Italy, and in Russia) and in the past 20 years more than two thousand substance abusers have completed the rehabilitation program. In fact, about 70% have never used drugs again, while 20% relapsed and re-entered a program, either with the Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII or elsewhere. In the year 2008, 335 young men and women entered the rehabilitation program (which lasts between 32 and 40 months); 102 completed the program in the same year.

The members of the Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII share their life directly with the poor and the least and the experience of sharing life directly with young drug-addicts in therapeutic communities, or in different conditions of life, has led us to affirm that the abuse of psychoactive substances is, first of all, a symptom of the distress and disorientation which hits society, especially amongst adolescents.

Society is doing too little to modify the causes of pathologic dependence and this crisis is evident in early adolescence. The society in which we are living is based on "profit", not "gratuitousness", and



Associazione

Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

associazione internazionale di fedeli di diritto pontificio - www.apg23.org

Ente Ecclesiastico Civilmente Riconosciuto con D.P.R. n. 596/72
C.F. 00310810221 - P.Iva n. 01433850409

Sede legale: Via Mameli, 1 - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Segreteria: Via Valverde, 10/C - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Tel. 0541/909600 - **Fax** 0541/909601

the human being is considered as an instrument to be used, as an element to take advantage of or eliminate if not useful. Our society forces our teenagers to look for ever-new emotions and consume them in the same way as products; it eradicates their cultural roots and suffocates their expectations. Individualism and self-advantage are imperative. Economic profit is the aim of life.

Young people react in different ways: some resign themselves and adapt to the situation, trying to save themselves only. Others cover the distress they are living in with drugs. If there is no real interest in life, life can be easily thrown away to avoid suffering. That is why they destroy themselves with substances that disturb personality, like hashish and marijuana, cocaine and heroin.

Another part of youth rebels and creates an alternative way of living based on justice, on gratuitousness, on life-sharing. It is a little sign of hope. They want no compromises with those who chain the truth and create injustice. Today, the real problem is not among adolescents: it is indeed among adults, who do not want to change and face the uncertainty of a future led by people who truly seek justice.

The phenomenon of drug and substance abuse is rapidly spreading all over the world. Those who make use of such substances block their social and self development. Today, young people gather together looking for ever-new emotional highs but afterwards they are left terribly lonely and, once they are alone, they are not able to realise their aspirations anymore. Drugs are nothing but a way to escape from themselves, from a reality which can neither be faced nor accepted. Drug abusers do not accept themselves because they feel they are not accepted. Drugs are a false response to human needs. They destroy creative and moral abilities; they destroy hope.

Our youngsters do not know who they are. This is a natural state of adolescence. Adolescents look for their identity. This phase is successfully overcome when they are able to build valid



Associazione

Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

associazione internazionale di fedeli di diritto pontificio – www.apg23.org

Ente Ecclesiastico Civilmente Riconosciuto con D.P.R. n. 596/72
C.F. 00310810221 - P.Iva n. 01433850409

Sede legale: Via Mameli, 1 - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Segreteria: Via Valverde, 10/C - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Tel. 0541/909600 - **Fax** 0541/909601

relationships and take control of their own life. Social conditioning is too strong to allow young people to find the true answers they are looking for. Therefore, they make use of drugs to 'fill up' the inner emptiness they experience, to overcome the 'absence of meaning' they feel.

The Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII has experienced through the years that the problem of drug abuse can disappear if young people are given the opportunity to experience and realise positive and non-utopian ideals. Therefore, it has always favoured the formation of groups of young people where such ideals can be concretely carried out. We need to create new vital worlds, at a human level, where the concrete experience of interpersonal relationships based on gratuitousness is made possible. We also need to promote such experiences at a wider level.

The prevention of substance abuse and of all other forms of distress implies the transformation of the society we are living in; it demands the courage to carry out such a deep transformation. We should not forget that there cannot be social and community development without a personal commitment to working for our own personal change.

Our experience through the years tells us that people who become dependant on psychoactive substances always show a lack of absolute values for which to live their lives:

- they have no inner points of reference to be able to choose what is good and refuse what is bad.
- they do not have a precise and structured identity and, as a consequence, they are driven towards the social environment which offers them more pleasure, more chance to get away from themselves and more ways to hide their unresolved anxieties.
- they are in a confused state
- they show a lack of equilibrium due to the inability to filter the emotions for which they constantly look and by which they are dominated.



Associazione

Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

associazione internazionale di fedeli di diritto pontificio - www.apg23.org

Ente Ecclesiastico Civilmente Riconosciuto con D.P.R. n. 596/72
C.F. 00310810221 - P.Iva n. 01433850409

Sede legale: Via Mameli, 1 - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Segreteria: Via Valverde, 10/C - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Tel. 0541/909600 - **Fax** 0541/909601

Psychological, spiritual, vital and personal problems are at the base of substance dependence. Such problems are further worsened by both the inability to reach the desired degree of self-affirmation and the consequent non self-acceptance, with respect to the social context in which they live. They show an inability to handle and solve the conflicts (and consequent tensions) of family relationships.

Other characteristics of substance abusers are:

- they don't easily accept that hard work is needed to reach one's goals: "I want it all and I want it now"; they have no patience to take the necessary time;
- they are very often 'encapsulated' inside themselves, inside their egocentrism.

Their refusal to go through the suffering needed in order to overcome difficulties and face reality and their exclusive search for pleasure and emotion block their inner development and prevent them from developing a mature and 'other' centric personality.

Through our experience we can affirm that, besides all the above mentioned factors, there can also be found an element of 'profound suffering' which somehow causes deviance and social adaptation related problems. According to us, this element consists of the missing answers to the fundamental questions which can be found in each person, even though they sometimes remain at an unconscious level. Such questions relate to the meaning of our existence, the meaning of life, death and suffering; the meaning of everything which refers to our ultimate destiny.

They are not questions of drug abusers' concern only; they are of concern to every person, and they have always been of fundamental importance to all human beings, now more than ever. Adequate responses can only be found through a personal opening to a reality which goes beyond our being, through a personal opening to the search for Absoluteness.



Associazione

Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

associazione internazionale di fedeli di diritto pontificio - www.apg23.org

Ente Ecclesiastico Civilmente Riconosciuto con D.P.R. n. 596/72
C.F. 00310810221 - P.Iva n. 01433850409

Sede legale: Via Mameli, 1 - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Segreteria: Via Valverde, 10/C - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Tel. 0541/909600 - Fax 0541/909601

We believe some concrete elements to be of fundamental importance in the path to the rehabilitation of drug abusers:

- **the need for prayer** (a fact universally present among all people);
- **the need to feel welcomed**, accepted and even forgiven by reality, which is perceived as the ultimate goal of human existence;
- **the need for redemption**, that is, purification;
- **the need for deep, introspective work** which does not stop at the most superficial psychological dynamics;
- **the need for motivations** which derive from the relationship with the 'Totally Other'.

The rehabilitation method of the Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII consists of various and different activities. Here is a brief description:

- **Rehabilitation and therapeutic activities**, based on personal and group sessions with the operator. Importance is given to a critical review of one's life, starting from the first memories of childhood, in order to acquire self-knowledge. All this is supported and discussed with an operator. Prayer occupies a place of fundamental importance.
- **Family rehabilitation**. In parallel with the rehabilitation of substance abusers, we carry out monthly meetings with their families, trying to help families solve their own problems and be better able to welcome their son or daughter back into the family.
- **Work activities**. These are important activities which help our young people to acquire a sense of responsibility, to mature and learn how to face difficulties.
- **Recreational, cultural and sport activities**. These activities are many and various and include: reading newspapers and books, watching selected TV programs, football and volleyball tournaments etc. Also, those who previously interrupted their studies are given



Associazione

Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

associazione internazionale di fedeli di diritto pontificio - www.apg23.org

Ente Ecclesiastico Civilmente Riconosciuto con D.P.R. n. 596/72
C.F. 00310810221 - P.Iva n. 01433850409

Sede legale: Via Mameli, 1 - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Segreteria: Via Valverde, 10/C - 47900 Rimini (RN)
Tel. 0541/909600 - Fax 0541/909601

the chance to continue. Great importance is given to developing and stimulating creativity and the abilities of each person.

The rehabilitation method of the Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII finds its characteristics in the life shared with the least. The operator lives with the young people who follow the program; he does the same things they do, he works together with them, he shares everyday difficulties and the joy of every little achievement. The therapeutic community is (and it cannot be otherwise) an experience of life which we propose and that no technician could ever produce or transmit.

Experience tells us that the therapeutic community lives, works and obtains results only if the group of operators is united and lives in harmony. The main concern is therefore the inner formation of the operators:

- education in self-criticism and the ability to correct each other;
- the ability to listen truly to the other person;
- education in sharing responsibility (with a clear distinction being made between each person's responsibility);
- giving constant attention to the spiritual aspect, both personal and of the group, being aware of the fact that inner work always starts from the true welcoming of the person, especially those who are poor, refused and without means.

The operator shall transmit a 'way of being', rather than things to do or rules to be respected (**what is inside us shouts louder than what we say...**). The recovering addict perceives clearly if the operators are only workers or officers or if they truly love and care for him/her. What the operators say assumes a meaning only if it is supported and proved by their life.