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Henderson: Recovering Love is about reclaiming lives

Recovering Love, a documentary by Laura Sky explores the pain of addiction and root of recovery.

By **HELEN HENDERSON** Special to the Star

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What kind of mother would let herself become an addict? If she really wanted to, she could stop. Obviously, she cares more about doing drugs and drinking than she does about her kids. No addict could ever be a good parent.

The women in director/producer Laura Sky's latest film, *Recovering Love*, have heard it all — from outside and inside their heads.

They were afraid to seek help, afraid not to seek help. Afraid they'd lose their kids if they admitted they were in trouble. Terrified all the words hurled at them were true.

They are also honest about their addictions and about the long road back.

"Using gave me strength," says Angela, who lost her nursing licence because of her addiction to narcotics. "I felt like a super-duper nurse until . . ."

Until the lows hit when the narcotics wore off. Until she couldn't get along without using. Until she saw herself losing contact with her family, including daughter, Rebecca, and son, Justin.

"Addiction is so cunning. It creeps up on you," says Aline, a substance abuse counsellor, who is herself a recovering alcoholic. "Judges, lawyers, nurses." Doesn't matter who you are, she points out. It can trap anyone.

Like all the women in the film, Aline is recovering from pain as well as addiction. The pain of bad marriages, abuse, systemic discrimination, racism and poverty run through the documentary like a river.

“The root of addiction is unexpressed pain,” says Aline. “The root of recovery is the expression of that pain . . . the owning of it.”

And that’s where the hope comes in. Because the women in *Recovering Love* did find the kind of help they needed to start piecing together again their lives and their families.

They found the type of non-judgmental assistance that started them on the road to reclaiming themselves at the Iris Addiction Recovery Centre for Women in Sudbury and the Jean Tweed Centre in Toronto.

“Reducing stigma and discrimination — in families, among professionals, in the media, in the courts, in the workplace, in public opinion — is crucial if the social and political changes needed to support women and their families are to be put into place,” says Sky.

The idea for *Recovering Love* was born when Sky received an honorary doctorate from Sudbury’s Laurentian University for being “one of Canada’s most distinguished documentary filmmakers.” At the ceremony, she met Diane Massicotte, who had connections to the Iris Addiction Recovery Centre for Women. They decided to work together.

Massicotte, the film’s executive producer, is the real hero of this piece, says Sky. It was she who got the ball rolling, started raising funds. Even knew someone who knew someone who brought the story to Ronnie Hawkins, who headlined a fundraising concert in Sudbury, where the film recently had its world premier.

And so the stories flow — the struggles with guilt and shame, the battles to reclaim children who have been apprehended by authorities, the strength, the perseverance.

“That little boy means everything to me,” says Amanda of son, Tyrell. “He deserves a healthy mother.”

Among the most moving accounts are those of the teenagers who speak about living with their mothers’ substance abuse, about love and strength and hopes and fears.

“People are always scared I’m going to do what my mum did,” says Rebecca, adding she’s determined to prove them wrong.

Recovery information

For more information on recovering from addiction to drugs or alcohol, contact the Jean Tweed Centre in Toronto: (416) 255-7359 or the Iris Addiction Recovery Centre for Women in Sudbury: (705) 674-5090.

Screenings

Recovering Love is available for screenings by women and families dealing with substance use, social service agencies, health care programs, unions and workplaces. For more information, see or call 416-536-6581.

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