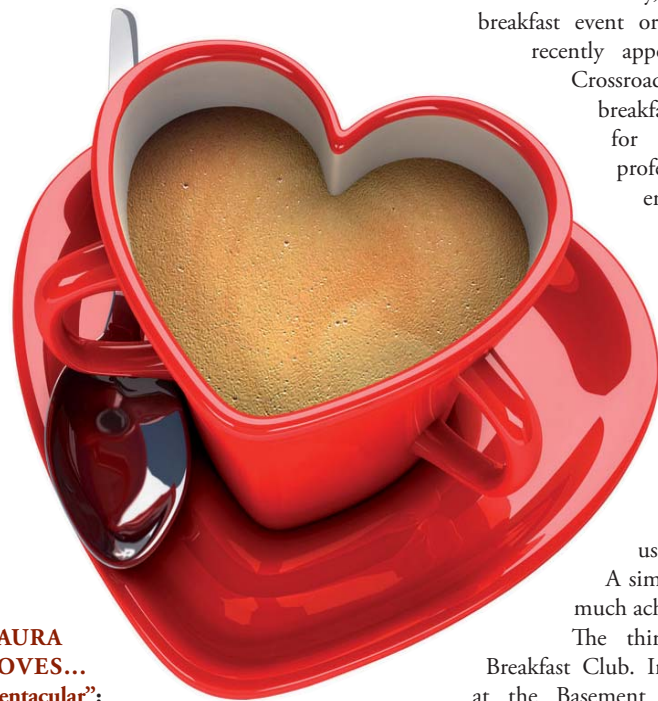


LAURA LOVES, LAURA LOATHES

This issue debuts a regular column from Laura Graham who gives a personal perspective on the news, trends, people and events she encounters as she travels across the country. In favour: jentacular. Out of favour: enforced sterilisation.



LAURA LOVES... "jentacular":

a n y t h i n g pertaining to breakfast. I draw on three examples of how breakfast can be a wonderful celebratory, purposeful and life-changing event.

I had the pleasure of attending the inaugural Gratitude for Giving breakfast awards in London recently. This breakfast event, organised by the Sierra Tucson treatment centre, provided a rare opportunity for peer recognition of people working in the addiction field who go that extra mile in facilitating and supporting recovery across the UK.

Award categories included gratitude, hope, humility, spirit and the first UK 'Pillar of the Community' awards – of which Deirdre Boyd, CEO of the Addiction Recovery Foundation and editor of *Addiction Today* (no, I was not paid to praise her!) was a deserved recipient for her longevity in promoting recovery nationwide. A truly inspiring start to the day.

More recently, I attended a networking breakfast event organised by Sally Williams, recently appointed as UK liaison for Crossroads Antigua. This informal breakfast provided an opportunity for practitioners to develop professional networks to better enable the seamless referral of people into residential treatment and to better support sustained recovery on their return to the community. Those present were able to discover more about what each practitioner provides and how they can work together as a network, to sustain recovery using their shared involvement. A simple breakfast event but with much achieved.

The third example is Uchooseit's Breakfast Club. Inspired by a breakfast club at the Basement Project in Halifax, every Wednesday morning between 8:30 and 12:30, Uchooseit, a peer-led organisation in Ashton, Tameside, provides free breakfast for 150 local people. The food is provided by an organisation based in Smithfield Market – and Breakfast Club is staffed entirely by people in recovery.

It provides volunteering opportunities for people active in addiction with the view that time spent washing up is time not using.

"There is an importance attached to food socially and to eating communally. In addiction, food loses importance as basic needs are not met," Michaela Jones of Uchooseit explained.

Breakfast Club also provides emergency food parcels, boots and bedding to people who need them. It is a forum for engagement with people across the recovery spectrum in a non-threatening, non-coercive environment vital in breaking down barriers, and provides a gentle introduction to the recovery community.

Volunteers are on hand to provide advice on form-filling, benefits, treatment and the like. There are shower facilities and a future expectation of a washing machine. The local police regularly pop in for a cuppa and they report that incidents of shoplifting reduce locally on Wednesday mornings!

An additional benefit of Breakfast Club is that it engages people early in the day, before the effects of using take over. It therefore has the potential to change the course of someone's day and, possibly, the rest of their life. Breakfast, the best meal of the day! (www.Uchooseit.org.uk)

LAURA LOATHES... Project Prevention, the US-based 'charity' which offers financial incentives to people in addiction to not have children. Ever. Not content with sterilising men and women in the US, Project Prevention founder Barbara Harris – Blessed Barbara, as she calls herself on Twitter – intends to open up shop in the UK with a £15,000 anonymous London donation. Since May, her supporters have been busy harassing women in clinics in Glasgow even though the Charities Commission has yet to receive or accept any application from Project Prevention.

Founded in the US in 1997, Project Prevention has made payments to over 3,000 women who, on provision of certified proof of addiction, are given \$300 (about £200) in exchange for long-term contraception, about 10 years, or permanent sterilisation. So far, 1,226 addicted women have been paid to be sterilised by tubal ligation and 35 addicted men have had vasectomies for the paltry value Harris has placed on their potential to parent.

Project Prevention is the result of Harris' failed attempt to make Californian law mandate the compulsory sterilisation of addicted women following any birth of a 'drug-exposed baby'. Rather than accepting this rejection of her submission as a sign of its unpopularity, she set-up Project Prevention which claims its main objective is the "reduction of the number of substance-exposed births to zero".

Her views on the subject are formed from her personal experience of adopting four drug-exposed babies. She has yet to see the contradiction in her mission, when she claims to love them as her own yet Project Prevention would prefer they had not been born.

Critics of Project Prevention have highlighted it as an example of social engineering or eugenics but Harris claims she is providing a public service as she seeks to "reduce the burden of this social problem on taxpayers, trim down the social workers case-loads and alleviate from our clients the burden of having children that will potentially be taken away".

Apart from being devoid of any hope for recovery, Project Prevention's 'ambition' further assumes substance misusers as 'bad' parents generally, creating greater stigma and additional barriers for addicted parents to recovery.

In the US, Project Prevention's 'advertising' techniques include billboards placed largely in poor and minority areas with slogans such as "Don't let a pregnancy get in the way of your crack habit" and uses pictures of babies with accompanying text such as "She has her Daddy's eyes and her Mommy's heroin addiction", exploiting the low self-worth, guilt and self-esteem common in people who use addictively.

Harris has little regard for such matters and has been quoted for her frequent comparisons of addicted women to "dogs on heat having litters of children", showing ignorance about the dangers addiction brings to women around rape, sexual exploitation and the complex nature of sexual activity and substance misuse.

Nor does Project Prevention acknowledge how addiction can cloud judgment so that the permanency of sterilisation undertaken for money whilst desperate can be a cause of great distress in the clearer times of recovery.

Pregnancy and the care of children can be a tremendous driver for recovery and can be a great motivator for seeking treatment.

Project Prevention's position on preventing "damaged babies" takes no account that substance

exposure at birth does not promise permanent problems. It is support which is required for addicted parents and potential parents, and for their children so that their circumstances are positively developmental and hopeful for recovery. We need to redirect this focus away from avoiding births to supporting, rather than devaluing, those who are born.

So what value does Project Prevention have in the UK?

We have free contraception advice and provision adaptable to changes in personal circumstances. This can be provided by addiction treatment services.

Sterilisation here requires a referral from a GP, a waiting list for referral and a further waiting list for the procedure, by which time any opportunity by Harris to exploit the desperation fed by a £200 incentive would have probably diminished.

Two Facebook campaigns are in operation currently, one in support and one against Project Prevention. The former has less than 200 supporters, the latter has almost 500. Project Prevention does not translate well in the UK, nor is it welcome.



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Image: Andranik Makaryan, Gina Sanders

