

Howard Green

JOURN 21

Interview Assignment – Class Profile

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As a recovery coach at the Choices Learning Center, Monroe King sought innovative solutions for serious long-term mental health challenges often misunderstood and underserved by traditional treatment strategies.

“I saw the spectrum of people who had severe symptoms who didn’t seem to be responding to our services.” says King, who led a variety of wellness groups and workshops at the Center.

The Center’s group based approach has proven to keep people healthier and provide a more permanent solution to mental illness than hospitalization. The state funded organization also provides housing subsidies, job finding assistance and recovery services for its clients, many of whom are former psychiatric hospital patients referred for long term care.

Monroe has led a number of men’s groups at the center. He has also taught community building, health and nutrition, employment for success, and even yoga, which he says helps clients control their anger and stress.

This last topic is one on which Monroe can speak from considerable experience. Growing up a biracial child in a tough Oakland neighborhood home didn’t provide a healthy model of conflict resolution. The family was poor, largely due to his father’s substance abuse and financial irresponsibility. His mother was protective, but couldn’t protect him from the domestic violence present in the home.

He attended private schools where he struggled to make friends with his wealthier classmates. “I always felt a little out of place wherever I was,” Monroe recalls. “I wasn’t tough enough to hang with kids from my neighborhood, I wasn’t rich enough for the kids in my school.” At the time, he says, he “embraced hopelessness.”

In high school, Monroe was an excellent student and a talented athlete who dreamed of playing professional basketball. He transferred to public Skyline High School for his senior year and was accepted to Columbia University. However, he struggled to

adjust to the freedom and permissiveness he found in New York, far from the discipline of home. His grades suffered and his athletic performance waned. He wrestled with negative influences, violence and drugs, and feelings of depression and anger so strong he even contemplated suicide.

Monroe eventually returned to the west coast and earned a degree in art from the University of California, Berkeley. Shortly after graduation high school friend Cathy Hunter invited Monroe to teach at the Quaker Friends School in San Francisco's Castro district. His training as an educator taught him how to deal with disciplinary issues; he prefers a one-on-one approach, outside the classroom rather than in front of the other students. To this day, however, discipline remains a challenge.

Today, Monroe coaches youth sports, studies journalism and continues his work in the mental health field. A former psychiatric patient himself, he serves as a shining example of the wellness and recovery approach practiced at the Choices Learning Center.