

Do Your Part in Building the Addiction Workforce

By Kirk Bowden, PhD, MAC, LISAC, NCC, LPC, NAADAC President

We have all read the reports that our profession has a serious shortage of well-trained addiction professionals. The shortages have been attributed to numerous causes, including infrastructures that are inadequately prepared to recruit, retain, and develop the needed numbers of addiction professionals, a rapidly aging workforce, high rates of new counselors leaving the profession, and a low number of well-trained addiction counselors entering the profession. This workforce shortage is further being exacerbated by the increased duties and pressure on the existing workforce. The shortage limits the services that can be provided to current clients and reduces the number of clients that can be treated. Our professional field has a serious workforce crisis. Because the cost of not treating addiction is indisputable, both individually and to the nation, our workforce crisis is a human crisis.

I know our profession has many challenges, including an increasingly complex client population, increasing accountability in client care, a workforce that is over worked and under paid, a pervasive negative stigma associated with our profession and clients, and insufficient support for professional development. In spite of all of the challenges, most of us truly love this profession. We wouldn't want to do anything else with our lives.

While NAADAC continues its national workforce lobbying and recruitment efforts everyday, NAADAC needs your assistance to be successful in these important efforts. We need our profession to grow and the nation needs our profession to grow. I ask each of you as an addiction professional to make an effort to recruit one new person into our profession this year. We, as addiction professionals, need to share our love for the profession with our friends and associates. We need to make them aware of the many outstanding benefits with which our profession provides us.

I love my work as an addiction professional. Prior to entering this profession, I was a Certified Financial Planner and a licensed stockbroker. The

opportunity for financial reward was certainly great; however, I didn't feel personally rewarded. I did not enjoy my work. I was earning a living for myself and my family but I didn't feel that I was making a positive impact on the world. It is important to me to have a career that I feel makes a difference. I decided I need to change my life's direction and find a renewed sense of purpose. I spent two years working days in financial services to support my family and earning a Master's degree in counseling in the evenings.

For me, the sacrifices I made to become an addition counselor were worth the effort. I have now worked as an addiction counselor and counselor educator for more than 25 years and have no regrets. I love my work and I have high job satisfaction. I feel my work has made a positive impact on the lives of people I have served, and I feel that my work has made a positive impact on my own life.

Please join our effort to recruit others into our worthy profession. Share your own story and your own love of the addiction counseling profession. Though the financial rewards may not be significant, the personal, professional, and social rewards are worth the effort.



In addition to serving as NAADAC's President, Kirk Bowden, PhD, MAC, NCC, LPC, serves on the Editorial Advisory Committee for Advances in Addiction & Recovery. While serving in many capacities for NAADAC through the years, Bowden also serves as Chair of the Addiction and Substance Use Disorder Program at Rio Salado College, consultant and subject matter expert for Ottawa University, a past-president of the International Coalition for Addiction Studies Education (INCASE), and as a steering committee member for SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), Partners for Recovery, and the Higher Education Accreditation and Competencies expert panel for SAMHSA/CSAT. Bowden was recognized by the Arizona Association for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors as Advocate of the Year for 2010, and by the American Counseling Association for the Counselor Educator Advocacy Award in 2013, the Fellow Award in 2014, Outstanding Addition/Offender Professional Award in 2015, and most recently the California Association for Alcohol/Drug Educators' Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015.

