

## Food addicts group winning followers

Written by Steve Fuller - Monday, March 04, 2013 at 3:28 pm

ELLSWORTH — Before she went to her first meeting, Kelly had some concerns.

“In the week before I decided to go, it was almost like a last supper,” she said. “What do I want to have for food? If I can’t have this ever again, what am I going to do?”

Not only that, but there was the stigma of going into a church basement and having to introduce yourself to a group of strangers.

Despite those worries, she did go to a Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous (FA, for short) meeting. Though she admits her attendance hasn’t been perfect, she’s gone to meetings since then.

Kelly got introduced to FA almost by accident. She wasn’t looking for information about the group, but noticed someone whose life seemed to be going in the right direction.

“I had a friend who I just saw getting happier and happier with life,” she recalled. “And at the same time, smaller and smaller.”

When the friend explained the principles of FA to her, Kelly was a bit skeptical.

“I thought, ‘That’s good for you,’” she said.

Kelly got past her initial doubts, however, and though she is still new to the group said she has seen benefits from participating.

She said she has more days where she doesn’t struggle with food than days when she does, and has found a freedom to live her life the way she wants to.

Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous was founded 15 years ago by former members of Overeaters Anonymous (a separate and distinct organization still in existence).



FA is based on the Alcoholics Anonymous model. Anne, another member, said much of what applies to alcoholics can apply to anyone with an addiction.

FA, on its website, is described as a group of people “who have experienced difficulties in life as a result of the way we used to eat.”

“It’s about an unhealthy relationship, in some way, with food,” Kelly said.

Anne said the common thread that binds group members is they have had “constant issues with food — regardless of how it presented in terms of weight.”

“You can’t necessarily tell by looking at someone whether they’re a food addict,” she said.

Local groups have formed in recent years — Belfast in 2007, Bangor in 2008, Ellsworth in 2009 and Blue Hill in 2012.

The program’s requirements are specific and a bit daunting to outsiders. Members eat three meals a day, and weigh and measure the food in their meals.

Snacking is not allowed, and members are expected to totally abstain from flour and sugar.

“Anything that man touched, that’s been processed at all, we can’t have,” explained a third woman, another local member. “Anything from the earth, we can have.”

Anne said it was difficult to eliminate flour and sugar from her diet, but only for a few days.

“Once it’s out of the system, the cravings for it stop,” she said.

Members, working with a sponsor, also identify individual binge or trigger foods — foods that may not be a problem for other people, but which are trouble for them.

Despite those requirements, members describe their food plans as “well-balanced” and “nutritionally sound.” The goal is not to starve, either.

“There’s enough food in the food plan that you generally don’t feel hungry until it’s time to eat,” said Anne. “It works.”

For many group members, sticking to the guidelines has paid off. Anne said her blood pressure is lower, her cholesterol levels are down and she has less arthritis pain in her knee.

The unnamed local participant, who will turn 60 in a few months, said she was suffering from a plethora of physical problems prior to becoming involved with FA: a growing heart murmur, acid reflux and moderate rosacea, among others.

“All of that is gone,” she said. She clarified that statement by saying the problems aren’t truly gone, but are instead “dormant” in her body.

“I do not have any of those symptoms now,” she said. “If I pick up flour and sugar, they’ll come back.”

Emotional health can also improve. The soon-to-be-60-year-old said for much of her life, food provided her with a way to avoid facing problems she didn’t want to deal with.

“The minute I felt uncomfortable, I would go to something sweet,” she said.

Through her participation in FA, however, she was eventually able to overcome a lifelong terror of being in dark places and is back to being friends with her sister after a “17-year non-relationship.”

“For me, I have had miracles happen,” she said.

Anne said another benefit of FA is hearing other people share their experiences and realizing those people have faced — and overcome — some of the same obstacles.

“There were things that I thought were unique to me, and then people got up and told my story,” she said. “You can relate to them, and realize, ‘If it worked for them, there’s hope for me.’”

**Editor’s Note:** Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous asks that its members not be publicly identified. This story identifies two members by only their first names, with their permission; a third member interviewed for the story asked that her name not be used at all.

### **When and Where They Meet**

Food Addicts Recovery Anonymous has four different meetings to choose from in Hancock County and in neighboring counties. For general information about Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous, visit the group’s website at [www.foodaddicts.org](http://www.foodaddicts.org).

**Ellsworth:** St. Dunstan’s Episcopal Church (134 State St.), Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m., 479-5750 or 667-3303.

**Blue Hill:** St. Francis by the Sea Episcopal Church (330 Hinckley Ridge Road), Saturdays, 8:30 a.m., 479-5750 326-2024.

**Bangor:** Osprey Room at Acadia Hospital (268 Stillwater Ave.), Sundays, 4 p.m., 942-1738 or 667-3303.

**Belfast:** Room 206 at The Belfast Center (9 Field St.), Mondays, 6:30 p.m., 217-2930 or 338-4142.