

ADDICT. PROSTITUTE. SINNER. SAINT.



# BOBBI JO

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

*Gravitas  
Ventures*

A Red Arrow Studios company



DISCUSSION GUIDE

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# Film Synopsis

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Bobbi Jo: Under the Influence is one of the most inspirational stories you will ever hear. For 25 years, Bobbi Jo Reed has rescued thousands of addicts. But before she could help others, Bobbi Jo needed to help herself.

This true life story takes an honest look into the world of alcoholism and addiction and provides keys to long term recovery in Kansas City's most dangerous neighborhood.

After a middle class upbringing, Bobbi Jo turned to drinking and drugs at a young age. Soon, her life spiraled out of control. Addiction led to abuse, prostitution, and homelessness. When she hit rock bottom, Bobbi Jo had a spiritual awakening.

With newfound strength, Bobbi Jo was lifted out of a personal hell. That strength gave her the courage to return to the streets to help others. Using the testimony of her dark past as a "blueprint of hope", Bobbi Jo Reed reflects on her transformation. How she was saved. Why she was chosen. And why more than 8,000 souls now call her, "Mom."

Visit the website [www.thebobbijomovie.com](http://www.thebobbijomovie.com) to learn more about screening the film and to share the film with others in your community and social networks.



# Letter from Bobbi Jo

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This film is a blessing. I am grateful that Brent and Donna Jones found their way to my doorstep. When I am asked to describe what it is like to see my life story up on the big screen, my answer must be, "It is perfect." Because it isn't just my story. It is God's story. He saved me and He is adding to my story every day by showing me the path and nudging me forward.

So much that has happened in my life is hard to explain. It's not a story that can be told quickly, during brief encounters. But it is an important story. It is important for others to understand how if someone like me can be guided out of the darkness and into the light then it is possible for them too.

I feel confident that this film is going to change lives. One thing about people suffering through addiction is that they get to a place where they believe that their life is hopeless and there is no way out. This movie is going to let people see not only hope, but that God can transform their lives in ways they can't even imagine.

I also believe that this film will give encouragement to family members who may feel helpless when dealing with a loved one who has an addiction. They are going to see that there is a way out and that there is still hope for that person. For those not directly impacted by addiction, this movie is going to stir something up in them. It's going to work its way into their spirit and make them want to serve their neighborhoods more. It is easy to love our family members and people in our immediate circles, but God calls us to do so much more than that, to do things we cannot even imagine. God will equip us with every resource to accomplish what He has set forth for us to do.

From birth, we all have a desire in us for MORE. I was blessed to find my purpose for MORE through Healing House. There is so much that we can do as individuals in our communities, in our workplaces, and in our own lives, and I hope this film inspires you to find your purpose for MORE.

If nobody told you today, God loves you and so do I.

*~Bobbi Jo Reed*



# Tips for leading a Community Screening Event

As you plan to bring people together to watch *Bobbi Jo: Under the Influence* it is helpful to be clear about the purpose of your screening, get a sense of who will be there, and intentionally create an open space for discussing difficult topics. Sharing your reason for screening the film is always a good introduction, as your passion for the topic and your intention will inform the tone of the event.

## PREPARE YOURSELF

Watching the full film and reading through the information in this guide will help you plan for a successful screening that is tailored for your audience, anticipate questions that may arise and acknowledge your own responses.



## LANGUAGE AND LABELS

Language is an important part of breaking down misconceptions and stigma about addiction that can impede understanding. Words have enormous power to influence how we see people who struggle with addiction and how they see themselves. In the field of substance use, as with mental health and disability, there is a strong push to use “person-centered language,” that is, using language that acknowledges the person before their condition, behavior or illness. For example, “addict” minimizes a person to that one aspect of their self, disregarding their roles as parent, sibling, musician, spiritual person, etc, and in doing so contributes to stigma.

“Person struggling with addiction” is an example of person centered language. Additionally, the word “addiction,” while an accepted diagnosis in the medical community, can reduce the discussion to one person and one substance, while the broader “substance use disorder” makes room for more than one substance (as is commonly the case), and for the social, economic and illicit activities and behaviors that often accompany addiction.

***You got to encourage people here, not tear them down. They've been torn down all their lives. So now it's time to encourage. That's what I do.***

~Leverta Jackson

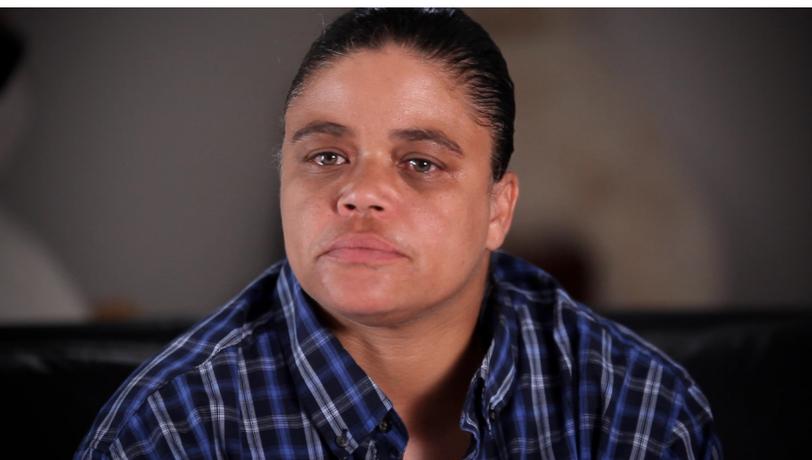
# Acknowledging Emotions

*Bobbi Jo: Under the Influence* is a raw and intimate testimony that is, at times, difficult to watch. This will likely evoke an emotional responses from the audience. As a facilitator, it may be tempting to move past feelings quickly in favor of the more comfortable space of discussing facts, figures and solutions. Yet, creating space for emotions to surface will help people think more clearly and ground the discussion in the lived experience of everyone in the room, or on zoom, whether they are struggling with addiction themselves, supporting a loved one in recovery, or directing a community program or agency.

One strategy for enabling that emotion is to ask for it directly. After the film, you might try leading with, "What is coming up for you?" This will bring some of those feelings to the surface and allow your audience to know that their emotions are welcome. Some questions to ask your audience before diving into the discussion guide might include:

- **What thoughts and emotions came up for you while you watched the film?**
- **What does it mean to belong to a community? What are the consequences of not belonging?**
- **What societal pressures are there that might facilitate addiction, and make recovery difficult?**
- **What keys to recovery did you learn from watching the film?**
- **Why do you think Healing House is a successful recovery community?**
- **What do you think "success" means with regards to recovery from substance use disorder?**

If there is a person in need of immediate or emergency help, refer them to a local treatment facility, or the National Crisis Helpline: [www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline)



*I had people willing to listen to what those last nine months had been. I mean really listen, because I was pouring my heart out when I got here.*

~Scheera Watkins

# The Cast

It may be useful to review the names of the people who are in the film before your discussion.



Bobbi Jo Reed



Steve Hunt



Mama Judi Burkholder



Colleen Hunt



Leverta Jackson



Julie Newlun



Bob Dizmang



Blu Newlun



Luther Eatman



Gabby Cullen



Darryl Eatman



Scheera Watkins

# Being 'Seen'

In one of the first scenes in the film—the first, in fact—Bobbi Jo describes what it felt like at the deepest point of her addiction and homelessness. She recalls, "I didn't think anyone even knew I existed anymore." While this might best sum up many people's experiences of these harsh struggles in life, it all points to a deep reality of the human experience. We are born to be part of community, which thrives on connection and on being seen.

When Bobbi Jo and Mama Judi take in new residents in the Healing House ministry, they tell them, "Welcome home." From an outsider's perspective, and, by all accounts, according to insiders, this is a key ingredient in the ministry's success. They don't simply provide a bed, a hot shower, and a warm meal. They provide a sense of belonging, opportunities to connect, a sense of value, and the feeling of being seen and loved. In very real ways, this need for community and the gift of connection and love colors the rest of the topics we will address throughout this discussion guide.



***I didn't think anybody  
knew I even existed  
anymore.***

~Bobbi Jo Reed

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **In the midst of struggle, when have you felt seen, heard, and/or loved? How did this make you feel? In what ways did it help you through those tough times?**
- **Think about a time when someone you know and love was caught in a difficult or confusing time. Were you able to truly see them ... to help them through that difficult time?**



# A Shared Story



We just discussed the importance of seeing and being seen and how that is foundational to fulfilling our innate longing for community. It is a core value of the work that Bobbi Jo and her team undertake. Closely tied to this-and also integral to Healing House's success-is the reality that Bobbi Jo shares a story with the women and men that move through Healing House. This shared experience bonds them in ways that may transcend other forms of recovery ministry that originates from individuals and communities that do not know what life on the streets is like.

People that are suffering or that have endured long stretches of hardship have a strong internal lie detector. That Bobbi Jo endured and overcame the hardships in her life goes a long way in creating and fueling the authenticity with which she approaches her work and the residents of Healing House. Quite simply put, because she's been through it, she knows what works and what doesn't. Throughout the film, colleagues and current and former residents of Healing House continuously point to Bobbi Jo's past as a key to her present success.

***Her story was like mine.  
She gave me hope.***

~Leverta Jackson

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Have there been times in your life when shared experiences fueled transformation or contributed to a successful endeavor? What were they and how did they contribute to that?**
- **Talk about times in your life-or that you have seen around you-where different experiences or backgrounds got in the way or frustrated efforts to work together. What happened and were the parties able to overcome this?**



# God Uses Broken Vessels



Christian scripture, tradition, and history are full of stories of God using unexpected people to accomplish God's plans. Oftentimes, these are, quite literally, the people we would least expect to play pivotal roles in any divine plan. On top of this, some of us may even question our place in God's story. What is our calling? Are we good enough?

Mark Twain once said, 'The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.' The first several minutes of this film can be difficult to watch as Bobbi Jo recounts moments from her life that could be triggering for some viewers. Having lived such a hard life and endured so much trauma and abuse, viewers could be forgiven for wishing Bobbi Jo a restful rest of her life. But this is the very person that God puts to work in this Kansas City neighborhood to minister to the least, the lost, and the left behind.

***When God gave me this ministry, it was a gift. A gift from God to Bobbi Jo Reed. He preserved my life so he could use me to help you.***

~Bobbi Jo Reed

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Thinking about the Mark Twain quote above, have you found out why you were born? Do you feel called to a particular career or ministry? If not, what are some actions that might help you discern this?
- When have you seen the unexpected? When and where has someone surprised you?



# When Did We See You?

As those who struggle with substance use disorder know, addiction is a violent cycle and a fortified trap. Throughout the film, people talk about addiction as an illness, while people like Officer Jason D. Cooley refer to it as a form of slavery. Regardless of the metaphor, it is enough to show us that people struggling with addiction are shaped by forces that have grown beyond their control. Stories like this have the power to shape and reshape how we see the world. The pandemics of drug addiction and homelessness demand that we see the humanity at the heart of these issues if we are ever going to have sustained success in reaching the individuals experiencing them.



Throughout the film, it is difficult to not recall Jesus' exchange with his disciples: Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Can we see Jesus in people with substance use disorder and people that are experiencing homelessness in all of our communities?

***I thought using drugs was a choice, and it is a choice early on. But it does get to a point when that addiction factor kicks in, it's enslavement.***

~Officer Jason D. Cooley

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **How do you talk about drug addiction in your community? How will this film effect your recovery meetings? How will this film inspire you to begin or improve your recovery ministry?**
- **What about the homeless community around you? What programs are in place to serve this community? How does this film inspire you reach people experiencing homelessness?**



# Belong, Behave, Believe



Theologian Phyllis Tickle drew a distinction between two types of experiences with religious institutions. The first, and perhaps more traditional, description might best be summarized as **"believe, behave, belong"**:

If you believe the right thing,  
And then behave the right way,  
You, finally, fully belong to the community.

On the other hand, a more progressive approach to membership might be summed up as **"belong, behave, believe"**:

You belong unconditionally,  
And this sense of community shapes the way you behave,  
And, finally, the way you behave changes what you believe.

Now these aren't hard and fast definitions that apply to all faith communities. There are shades of each across the spectrum. But when we watch the film, it's hard to deny that Bobbi Jo and Healing House are closer to the "belong, behave, believe" model than any other. In fact, we hear it in so many current and former residents' reflections on their experiences there. Steve Hunt sums it up best when he talks about soaking up faith almost by osmosis. We would never hear something like this if right belief were a prerequisite to admission to Healing House, nor would we likely see such powerful examples of lives transformed.

***This is your home. Not for 30 days. Not while you are in treatment. This is your home.***

~Bobbi Jo Reed

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

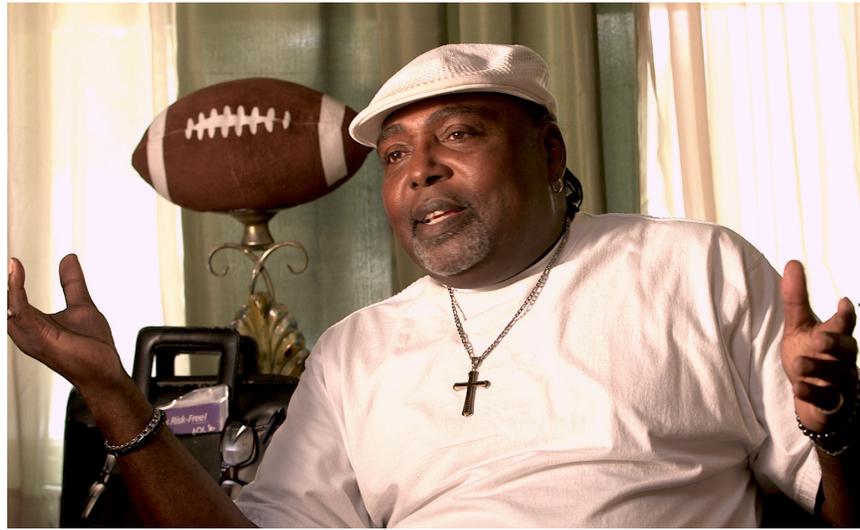
- If the above descriptions resonate with you, what would best describe your faith community? Are there any lessons that you could learn from the opposite model?
- Have you seen other communities struggle with either of these models? Has adhering too closely to one or the other driven folks away, rather than welcome them in?



# A Woman of Vision

There's a powerful passage of scripture in Proverbs that states, in part, "Where there is no vision, the people perish (29:18, KJV). This is one of those cases where the poetic nature of the King James Version accurately captures the severity of the moment in which we find ourselves. Our society suffers from a lack of vision at every level, from the hyper local to the national, when it comes to addressing crises like addiction and homelessness. People perish as a result.

This film celebrates Bobbi Jo as a woman of vision and shows the power of vision and the positive effects that the execution of that vision can have on our communities. Bobbi Jo didn't just see a run-down house in the ghetto, she saw a home. Others, like Darryl, couldn't see it...at first. Through her determination and hard work, Bobbi Jo was able to make her vision visible to others. And as they caught the vision and pitched in to help make it a reality, they have restored lives and transformed their community.



***We walked around and I'm like, "Dang, this house..." It looked a wreck! I'm like, "What do you see out of this?"***

~Darryl Eatman

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Where do you see a lack of vision in your community? What is one challenge that seems to suffer from a lack of adequate or imaginative responses?**
- **Do you have a vision for how to address the crises that plague your community? What resources does your congregation have that could meet those needs?**



# Perfect Love



There is a bravery to Bobbi Jo that is lacking in many of our leaders today. It is a hard-won bravery to be sure, but there nonetheless. In the pursuit of renovating houses and the rehabilitation of her community, she has stood up to armed gang members and violent drug dealers. And when she has been tempted to call the police, she has instead called on God. Bobbi Jo isn't a perfect person, but she seems to embody perfect love.

Bobbi Jo and this film bring to mind another passage of scripture: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love" (1 John 4:18). In the film, Officer Cooley comments on Bobbi Jo's bravery and her willingness to go to and stay in potentially violent places. How much better would our communities be if more of our leaders followed in Bobbi Jo's footsteps? A painful truth is that many more of us are more able than willing to do so. The film shows that it doesn't take a lot to make a big difference. We must first have the courage and perfect love, to step out in faith, rather than holding back in fear.

***The solution is not guns.  
The solution is not hatred.  
The solution is not division.  
The solution is love.***

~Luther Eatman Jr.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What are you afraid of? How could a more perfect love help you overcome your fears?
- Who is a model of bravery for you? What have you learned from them, and how do they inspire you?



# Resources

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Do you, or someone you know, need to talk?

## **Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

TTY: 1-800-799-4889

Website: [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call is routed to the nearest crisis center in the national network of more than 150 crisis centers.

## **SAMHSA's National Helpline**

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

TTY: 1-800-487-4889

Website: [www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline)

Also known as, the Treatment Referral Routing Service, this Helpline provides 24-hour free and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, and recovery in English and Spanish.

## **Disaster Distress Helpline**

1-800-985-5990

Website: [www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline)

Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common reactions after any natural or human-caused disaster. Call this toll-free number to be connected to the nearest crisis center for information, support, and counseling.

## **Veteran's Crisis Line**

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

TTY: 1-800-799-4889

Website: [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net)

Connects veterans in crisis (and their families and friends) with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential, toll-free hotline, online chat, or text.

## **Drug-Free Workplace**

1-800-WORKPLACE (967-5752)

Website: [www.samhsa.gov/workplace/resources/drug-free-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/workplace/resources/drug-free-helpline)

Assists employers and union representatives with policy development, drug testing, employee assistance, employee education, supervisor training, and program implementation.ABOUT

# Resources

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## **ABOUT TREATMENT:**

- [FindTreatment.GOV](#) - Find a Treatment Facility Near You
- [FindTreatment.GOV](#) - Treatment Options
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) - Step by Step Guide to Finding Treatment

## **ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER:**

- [FindTreatment.GOV](#) - Understanding Addiction
- [National Geographic](#) - The Science of Addiction
- [American Psychiatric Association](#) - What is a Substance Use Disorder?
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) - Addiction Science

## **ADDICTION & HOMELESSNESS:**

- [Addiction Center](#) - The Connection between Homelessness and Addiction
- [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#) - The State of Homelessness: 2020 Edition
- [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#) - Opioid Abuse and Homelessness

## **ADDICTION & PROSTITUTION**

- [The Berkshire Eagle](#) - Addiction Crisis Fuels Human Trafficking
- [Crime Report](#) - The link between Opioid Abuse and Sex Trafficking
- [United Abolitionists](#) - Sex Traffickers use Drug Addiction to Recruit and Control Victims

## **ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH:**

- [FindTreatment.GOV](#) - Understanding Mental Health: Know the Warning Signs