

MY EXPERIENCE

I know first hand the struggle families are confronted with through drug use in their family. An addict is still a person, who happens to be somebody's son or daughter etc; he could even be your son, just like he happens to be my son. I am a mother with four children who happens to have a son with a drug problem. As a parent I have experienced an enormous lack of support in the community with my sons drug use. Until very recently families had to deal with a loved ones drug use on their own. Families feel isolated, helpless, and frightened. Many people judge a family when a child is using drugs, not taking into the equation the multitude of factors that may be at play.

For 12 years I have watched with fear, pain and confusion as the hopes and dreams I had for my son fade as he struggled with his addiction. I tried being unconditionally supportive, in return experiencing acts of violence, crime (stealing from home), lies, threats from strangers, Christmas being disrupted and attending court. I have also had to experience the emotional and painful loss of a granddaughter as her mum could no longer cope with addiction and deception anymore. The impact my son's addiction has had on the family is indescribable.

My son had no concept of what his addiction was doing to the family and me. He was consumed in his drug use; he couldn't see the ripple in the pond effect on the family. Parents and siblings experience an intense range of emotions and often feel helpless. On many occasions I longed to share the rollercoaster of emotions I was experiencing with somebody outside the family, to relieve the pressure on other family members who too were feeling the strain. As a family you can only discuss so much before you begin going round in circles, causing disharmony and unwanted tension between the remaining family members. I strongly believe if there had been support available earlier to my family we could have handled my sons drug use better.

After many years of dealing with my son's addiction alone and almost giving up hope I eventually found a newly set up service called Family Drug Help. Finally somebody had realised that it's not only the user who suffers, but their families as well. Family Drug Help empowered me to begin again. I learnt to live my own life, no matter whats happening for my son. I had to accept that the one only who could change my son's behaviour was himself. Family Drug Help taught me ways to support my son without needing to change him, or putting too much pressure/stress on myself. I gained a better understanding of drug and alcohol issues. I have learnt to deal with my son and his drug use in a safe and supportive manner with the help of a support group.

I am now the facilitator of a support group in the City of Hume, which has been established for five years. The group offers education, accurate information and support. I assist families to make changes in their lives which in turn has an effect on their loved one's drug use.

I too often hear about the lack of support available to both families and their love one using drugs within the City of Hume. Families are fed up with their loved one having to travel outside the Northern/Hume region to gain support. The support that is available is delayed by long waiting lists.

Recovery from addiction is not just a matter of ceasing the drug of choice; it is about learning a whole new life. Moreover, treatment seems to be very poorly coordinated especially the gap between detoxification and rehabilitation.

Strengthening of community and increasing social ties of the person with a substance abuse problem is considered a vital component to positive treatment outcome. Families are being seen as a rich resource to assist in this process while simultaneously recognising families often need assistance in their own right.

Involving families in Drug and Alcohol treatment. Why would you want to do this when in the past families have been seen as being part of the problem?

Families have always been there for the user, time and time again even when no one else wanted them.

More recently research has demonstrated that by including families in treatment that there is a better chance of creating and maintaining a positive change.

With education and support, families can make changes to their lives and in turn support the person who uses drugs and or alcohol on the long road to recovery. It is not just a matter of stopping substance abuse, but also for people and families to learn how to live without the need for alcohol and other drugs.

It is with this lived experience and knowledge that has empowered me to assist people who use drugs and or alcohol and their families, gain reunification and hopefully recovery. One of my beliefs are that if both the person who uses drugs and or alcohol and their family have a greater understanding of each other increases positive change.