

New lifeline for families dealing with drug and alcohol use

BY MARY O'CONNOR

A new support group aims to give a lifeline to local families dealing with the impact of drug and alcohol use.

The organisation, which has no political or religious affiliations, will hold its first meeting at the Pastoral Centre, Newtownsmith on Thursday November 19 at 7.30pm.

It aims to provide a confidential, safe and encouraging place where people can come together to find ways to cope with the drug or alcohol use of someone close to them.

The G1 Family Focus Support Group is being set up by Cecily Fogherty and Margaret Murphy both of whom have been affected by drug/alcohol use and will speak about the benefits they experienced through peer support and family support groups.

The group is supported by the Western Region Drugs Task Force (WRDTF), in line with the recommendations of the national and regional drug strategy. Partners, family members and friends who

support someone with drug or alcohol issues can often sacrifice their own needs and wellbeing to focus all their energy on the person they think needs help most. In many cases family members do not realise that they need help, too.

Family support provides an opportunity for those living with, or affected by, the drug or alcohol use of someone close to them to meet others in similar situations and receive support.

Drug and alcohol misuse can severely disrupt a family's sense of wellbeing in many ways. It can create feelings of shame and isolation. Families search in vain for reasons for substance use problems.

Other family members may feel ignored or neglected because of the pattern of addiction.

Many problems can start to occur as a result of trying to cope alone, eg feelings of fear, anger, and anxiety, stress, drug debts and financial problems, isolation, family breakdown, domestic violence and bereavement.

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Often, they, very different. Often, they are not sure what they can do and try to cope in many ways. Family support groups help put the family first rather than the substance use and allows people to make decisions that are right for their own situations. Urging people to take an "honest" look at their drinking, Ms McDonagh says more than 1.5 million are drinking harmfully in this country. People are drinking four times more alcohol now than when they were 40 years ago. "This is having a direct impact on their health. There have been changes in people's drinking patterns too often, relatives find coping with alcohol or drug use in the family

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becoming a bigger issue. There is a definite change in women's drinking patterns, too, she states. Four out of 10 Irish women are drinking at a level that is damaging to their health. Women account for a quarter of all alcohol related hospital discharges. The major concern here, she says, is the fact that women are impacted more by harmful drinking. Having one drink a day raises your breast cancer risk by nine per cent while three to four drinks a day will increase it by 41 per cent. There is a risk of other health conditions too, according to Ms McDonagh, as well as an impact on fertility and pregnancy concerns. In the last 20 years there

has been an increase in the number of younger women drinking and women of higher social classes are drinking more also. She believes women do not realise they are drinking as much as they are. "They can still be functioning at a reasonable level, they may be still working and raising their children."

Drinking alcohol has become much more normalised, she says. "This has become particularly evident in the last 10 to 15 years. There is a culture where it is acceptable to go for a couple of glasses of wine after work. If you go into a shop or supermarket you can buy alcohol half of the

alcohol consumed is done in the home. And there is no closing time at home. People are less likely to know how much alcohol they are consuming there, also."

Orla Walshe, a project development worker with the WRDTF, says the known safe drinking limit for women is 11 standard drinks a week. That equals one and a half bottles of wine. "There is a lot of confusion over how many glasses are in a bottle of wine - realistically you are taking about seven small glasses."

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