There is always HOPE.
Welcome to the summer edition of Family Drug Help’s newsletter. In this edition we are focusing on ‘Hope.’ So often we see family members contact Family Drug Help in despair. The impact of a loved one’s addiction has left them feeling blind-sided, confused and hopeless. This is normal and to be expected.

Through the lived experience of our passionate volunteers and staff, we are able to connect with families because we have been there, and we know there is always hope. It may not manifest in ways we had considered or planned, but tied to hope is the meaning we create in our lives, the positive expectations of better things to come, and the new opportunities that can come from that. HOPE – Have Only Positive Expectations.

There are interesting articles on the place of hope in our lives, and how it sustains the human spirit. We touch on the importance of personal boundaries, and focus on what families can do to reclaim their lives and have a positive impact on their loved ones in their journey through addiction. We also look at the principles of recovery from drugs and alcohol. The poems, articles and reflections resonate with hope.

Christmas, New Year festivities, and the summer period can be a challenging time for many families, so we also explore ways of managing this time. We’ve also included information about the annual Christmas festival, which transforms the city into a magical place and celebrates the spirit of Christmas in true Melbourne style. Enjoy!

From all of us at Family Drug Help, we wish you a safe, and festive summer season.

Rob Campbell, Programme Manager, Family Drug Help.
This is a story of hope and never giving up.

Through the past 13 years there was many times my son tried to get off drugs permanently. In fact, 17. Yes that’s right, 17 official times. He would spend a few days or a week at a rehab and then leave saying this isn’t working. We were desperate and fed up. But so was he. Even so, he never gave up trying to give up. From my observation I would watch him come out of a place and the first weeks were a dream. He seemed happy, clear headed and optimistic. Another week would go by and he would be at the doctor suffering with anxiety. Sure enough he would get the valium script. That was ok, he would take as prescribed. By about week three there would be more medication prescribed and nothing taken as it should be. The anxiety was in full swing and gradually back to full on hard drug use.

As a parent this is excruciating to watch and I know I am powerless to change him. I have learnt that I can’t change anyone but myself. I kept asking myself “what is he getting out of this?” I could see he was getting some sense of peace, some control and a calmness. He would say it’s like a mother’s hug. This was all very temporary and soon he would need it all over again and again. These were the pain killers to ease his pain.

It all came to a head when he finally reached the point of having nothing and no one left. He knew there was no coming home to us. He booked himself into a rehab and something clicked. He completed the program. Even though he used to scoff at the 90 meetings in 90 days. He goes to meetings every day. These days when I see him my heart is bursting with happiness for him. He is walking tall. Even though there were so many times when I wanted to give up there was always a sliver of hope that I couldn’t let go of. After all, he was my son and I love him.

Anonymous
There’s always HOPE........

I found a support group. They were in the same position as me but further along in their recovery process. This gave me HOPE that I would learn to manage my life better and not be so entwined in my son’s life. They understood what I was going through, what it felt like to love someone with a serious addiction. Other people had tried to help me and offer suggestions. But they didn’t really get it. I don’t believe you can truly relate to this unless you have been through it.

As a parent I thought I knew what was best for my son. But, he wouldn’t accept my help. I had to step back. At the group we helped each other see and accept the truth about ourselves and our loved ones. When I look at my son and the things he has done and what he is doing, I don’t want to believe it. But, when I talk to other families who have had family doing similar and now they (family member) are in recovery. I have HOPE that maybe one day this too will be for my son. Anonymous
All or Nothing (is my motto)

All or nothing, that’s me, you know?
I either do it or I don’t
If I can’t take it to the limit
Then chances are I won’t

Wont at all, I mean by that
You either do it or you don’t
If you don’t have complete commitment
Then believe me, “That’s all she wrote”

That’s the way I feel about
Every single thing I do
A job, a hobby or a sport I like
Could be anything, even you!

Well, we’ve only ever got ‘this moment’
This moment to enjoy
Make the most of every minute
For every girl and boy

Don’t stay inside, not feel the sun
Don’t be scared of the falling rain
When nothings ventured nothings lost
But nothing can be gained

If you are scared that you’ll get hurt
Don’t you worry, I’ve been there too
Never let that stop you keep on dreaming
You’ll regret it if you do
12 Days of Christmas

12 cousins yelling
11 baubles breaking
10 cats a leaping
9 aunties dancing
8 mums with migraines
7 kids a screaming
6 dads a strangling
5 swo-o-o-o-len feet
4 drunken selfies
3 children howling
2 uncles farting
And a naked bloke running down the hall
ICE
GET THE FACTS, DEVELOP STRATEGIES & FIND OUT WHERE TO ACCESS HELP & SUPPORT

Register for a free session in your area at:
www.turningpoint.org.au/education/breakthrough

1800 ICE ADVICE: 1800 423 238 | Family Drug Helpline: 1300 660 068
Principles of recovery from drugs and alcohol

- There are many pathways to recovery
- Recovery involves a personal recognition of the need for change and transformation
- Recovery is holistic
- Recovery has cultural dimensions
- Recovery exists on a continuum of improved health and wellness
- Recovery emerges from hope and gratitude
- Recovery involves a process of healing and self redefinition
- Recovery involves addressing discrimination and transcending shame and stigma
- Recovery is supported by peers and allies
- Recovery involves (re)joining and (re)building a life in the community
- Recovery is a reality

The benefits of both families and users seeking treatment

- Linking people into counselling and support services to help them deal with underlying poor coping skills, self esteem and self efficacy is a further step. But such interventions may not be enough in themselves, with the recovery model also requiring health professionals to:
  - instil hope that the individual can recover and be mindful that their relationship can be a critical ‘turning point’ in the patient’s recovery journey
  - act as a ‘bridge’ to groups and individuals who successfully model recovery
  - involve family members in supporting their recovery journey.
The annual Christmas festival transforms the city into a magical place and celebrates the spirit of Christmas in true Melbourne style.

Santa’s Magical Kingdom open from 18th November to 23rd December
Caulfield Race course

Melbourne Zoo shared Christmas party 9th December 6:30pm – 11:30pm
Melbourne Zoo

K-Mart wishing tree appeal 2016 Gifts & donations can be placed under Christmas Wishing tree at any K-mart store from 1st December 1st to 24th December

Christmas Lights Melbourne the Boulevard, Ivanhoe 1st December to 24th December 8:30pm – 11:30pm

Carols by candlelight – Vision Australia Magic of Christmas songs at the Sidney Myer music bowl; Saturday 24th December 8:00pm

Australian Nativity scene – Dandenong 12th December to 13th January 9:45am – 6:00pm 107 Bakers Road, Dandenong North

The Gingerbread Village by Epicure returns from 1 December, delighting all until Christmas Eve. Melbourne Town Hall, 90-130 Swanston Street Melbourne

Head into Queen Victoria Market for your last minute Christmas gifts and all the freshest fare. Dec 23rd 6am - 9pm
As new parents, the hopes and dreams we had for our first child were, I imagine, the same ones almost every parent has for their children. Our son was going to be a happy, intelligent boy, who would do well at school and university and go on to live a wonderful, independent life. It never crossed our minds that our beautiful baby boy would grow up with behavioural problems, suffer from severe anxiety, would self-harm, and eventually become an alcoholic and heroin addict, with little or no prospect of a job, a partner or a happy life, but that is what happened.

Our eldest son was bright and very smart, but he had lots of difficulties and behavioural problems in his early years and went on to be diagnosed with ADHD and Asperger’s Syndrome (as an adult he was advised that this was a mis-diagnosis). He suffered and we, his parents, suffered too. Eventually, with the strain of our son’s difficulties and our own difficulties, the family buckled. Our family became broken and, at the age of 13, he decided he wanted to live with his father, who had moved to NSW. His younger brother and I remained in Melbourne with our extended family.

I missed him terribly and the next six years were harrowing for us all. There were weekly calls, holidays visits and, despite the distance, we remained very close. Over time, I could see the depression and anxiety my eldest son suffered, increase, and I was not surprised to learn his difficulties had become more entrenched. He became involved with other unhappy people, began drinking alcohol, smoking dope, and eventually left school at 16.

At the age of 20, he moved back to live with me in Melbourne and by that time it was obvious that he had a serious alcohol problem. He struggled with severe anxiety and was self-harming, and I soon realised that things were spiralling out of control. I looked constantly for avenues of help, but he was not ready. I was ashamed to tell my friends, workmates and much of my family of the problems we were going through and I lived with the secret and stigma of having an alcoholic son. I then discovered he was also addicted to heroin. Life seemed like a nightmare.

After two years, he returned to live with his father and his life became a series of drug and alcohol binges, court appearances, detox, aggression, and depressive episodes. By the age of 30, he had been an alcoholic/heroin addict for 10-15 years, had several convictions, had not worked for almost 10 years and it seemed that his life would never, ever be what I had hoped and dreamed for him.

Fortunately, over time, I began to realise that there was no shame in being an addict, or the mother of an addict. I became more and more proactive in learning about addiction. I went to support group meetings for families of addicts,
read many books on the subject, and eventually I learned that I was not helping him by constantly trying to prevent him from hurting. Paying his bills, giving him cash, trying to keep him out of jail, none of these things were helping him. I was just prolonging his pain.

When he was 32, his father took out a restraining order against him and he had to move out. He had no job, no money and nowhere to go. He again rang me and asked for my help. I told him that, other than paying for his stay at a long-term rehabilitation facility, I was not able to help him in any way. I had made this offer many times before and he had once before been in a rehab facility, but unfortunately, did not stay and relapsed soon after.

This was another major crisis for him and I suspect he had finally had enough, had suffered long enough, and realised that, if he was ever going change his life for the better, it was now totally up to him to make the right choice. I guess the timing was right! He accepted the offer and entered rehab the following day. My first visit to see him was two weeks later and he was not happy. The rules were strict, he was angry, unwell, in pain and seemed to be faltering. I left him that day, feeling less than hopeful. In the weeks that followed, his mood went up and down and I was sure I would get a call saying that he had pulled out. At about the five-week mark, he broke one of the rules and was given a week’s suspension. I was away at the time and, when told of his suspension, was terrified he would not return to the rehab. But it seemed that this period was a turning point for him. He stayed alone for that week and remained clean and then returned to the rehab. It was during that week alone, he told me, that he realised he could do this. He was resolute, determined not to fail this time.

It was a hard road, he stayed in the rehab for 9 months (he was suspended for a second time at one point) and then spent a further 6 months in a transition house. I was so proud of him, but always in the back of my mind, was the fear that he would relapse and I knew this could happen at any time, but, he remained strong. For over a year he attended NA and AA meetings at least 5 times a week and he still attends meetings once a week. The support he received there kept him going, and the people he met at those meetings, are his new friends. They are all supporting each other, starting life over.

My son is now 35 and has been clean for 20 months, he has his own apartment, a job, and a loving girlfriend. He is finally independent and the smile on his face and the laughter and calmness in his eyes makes me so happy I could burst. It’s been a tough road; a path that anyone can get lost on. But my son has survived, he is now enjoying his life and he is stronger and kinder and gentler, as I am, and we know that there is always hope, no matter how long you’ve been on that path. Anonymous
**The holiday season** is a whirlwind of decorating, shopping, cooking, festivities, and family gatherings. Experiencing holiday anticipation, excitement, fun, joy, and growth helps transform lives. Expectations of family, joy, and peace are at their highest. Unfortunately, for many, the holiday season is a time full of obstacles and traps which often move a person backward in their life’s journey. Stress and anxiety around the holidays fuel depression and addiction struggles. This guide may be helpful.

Too little time and too much to do. Life is hectic throughout the year, but the merry-go-round of life definitely spins faster during this 6-week holiday stretch. So many extra activities are piled on top of our already full plate. Since most of the extra stuff is fun, sentimental, engaging, exciting, or a show of love to others, we often have a hard time saying ‘no’ to these extra holiday ‘to-do’s.’ Feelings of agitation, stress, frustration, incompetence, failure, and fear of letting others down become a routine detour for most people’s holiday journeys.

**Tip** – Make time to assess your stress and functioning level and your to-do-list. Try not to lump all your chores together as it will overwhelm you. Remember every event is singular. It is ok to say no or to not go full tilt on a task so you have time to spend on some others. It is Ok to build in a rest for yourself as well. You deserve it. During the holidays, when we see others having fun and enjoying what they have, our losses (and hurt) seem accentuated. Or, we feel hypocritical if we are enjoying the holiday when we have someone we love who we know is struggling.

**Tip**, be grateful for the good things you have in your life today. Don’t get caught admiring what is in someone else’s life and ignore the awesomeness in your own life.

The holidays, according to the TV shows, movies, commercials, songs, and cards are supposed to be filled with family love, togetherness, fun, sacrifice, and laughter. But we all come from and live in homes with varying degrees of dysfunction that...
have caused tension, conflict, and sometimes overt abuse, trauma, and wounds. Unfortunately, many families have not healed some of the wounds or developed healthy strategies to relate with each other. So whether it’s memories of holidays gone bad, or present tensions between family members, some are very apprehensive, angry, or even fearful when the weather turns and holiday spirit tries to emerge.

**Tip** – Know who and what your triggers are. If you can, seek a private meeting with people you struggle with and see if forgiveness and a healthy compromise or truce are possible to enjoy forgiveness, and peace regardless of the conflict. If possible, plan ahead of time to develop safe boundaries around unsafe situations.

**Unrealistic Expectations** – The holidays are full of expectations. Whether it is the Christmas lights, the ideal food, the incredible gifts to give and receive, the love and camaraderie we expect, how far our credit cards and belt buckle will stretch. We put pressure on ourselves to attend every occasion. When they don’t, disappointment, frustration, anger, blame, and we feel like a failure.

**Tip** – When going into the holidays, with your family, start writing down all the jobs/events and the level of effort necessary to accomplish them. As you see how the list start to build, you can do some switching to zero-in on realistic expectations.

**Misplaced Dependencies** – The holidays are a time of great reward and unfortunately expectations. Sometimes we start to depend too much on these rewards. In fact, we put too many eggs in that basket. Whether it is the perfect Christmas get together and meal, or the ideal response from a loved one about the gift we gave, When wanting becomes needing or depending on, we are in dangerous territory because when they don’t happen, we feel let down, sad, anxious, empty, and lacking something.

**Tip** – If you are feeling strong negative emotions about something, look a bit deeper and see if you crossed
the line from wanting it to needing or depending on it. Decision-making is the most important skill in life. We make 80,000 per day and decisions determine our life course. But during the holidays, many distractions and emotions start to interfere with a healthy and clear decision-making strategy. Whether it is as simple as the decision to go to sleep at a good time, decline the extra sweet, or bigger decisions about spending, or time management, or the biggest ones about conflict management, forgiveness, compromise, these decisions and their ramifications are magnified during the holiday season. This time of year we get a chance to get some space from work and the hectic distracting world to focus on what’s important in life.

Unfortunately sometimes, during the holidays, these obstacles really hit those struggling with anxiety, addiction depression, suicidality, PTSD, and poor coping skills to turn to the wrong solutions to just ‘make it through’ until the holiday is over. They end up missing the most meaningful moments and also miss opportunities to celebrate the real love they have of family and friends. They bury themselves in immediate gratification to cover up their feelings and often times this comes in the form of alcohol or other substances, and other destructive and avoidance behavior that lasts far longer than the situation they are trying to escape. When distress is frequent, functioning compromised, or loss of control prevalent, help is needed at this time.

This could be a time where coming up to the festive occasions, we have a conversation with our loved one on how they are feeling about it all. They may open up and tell you their fears, expectations. We need to respect what they feel and what they are thinking. By having this conversation you could avoid a meltdown from them or yourself through having unreal expectations.
Book review.

The Body Keeps the Score
by Bessel Van Der Kolk

This book brings an explanation of the ramifications of emotional trauma. Using modern neuroscience to demonstrate how trauma affects our body causing anxiety, rage, and inability to concentrate. It talks about how our mind desperately tries to leave trauma behind, but our bodies keep us trapped in the past with wordless emotions and feelings. It gives hope and understanding of this complex issue called trauma.

I particularly liked the section on Theatre. This is where they bring together a small group of troubled, difficult teenagers and worn out alcoholics. They talk about making it a safe place for them by doing various exercises, including getting them up from slumping on their chairs to walk aimlessly around the room. At this point they are totally out of sync and probably happy with that. The director gradually brings in small changes and prompts them to walk a little different like on their toes or heels or walk backwards. Then start to make eye contact with others but only for a split second.

Next time make it for a second, then turn away, then do it again and hold it. After learning and practicing this in the group they learn to feel safe. It is described in much greater detail, but the process offers a unique way for them to access a full range of emotions and physical sensations that can encourage them to get in touch with their bodies, but also explore alternative ways of engaging in life. Fascinating.

By Glenda
Want to talk to someone who understands what it’s like to have a family member with problematic alcohol and other drug use?

Sometimes you may feel you need to talk to someone who knows what it’s like to love someone who’s misusing drugs/alcohol. Family Drug Help offers a confidential telephone service which provides support to family members in need. We are staffed by trained volunteers, ordinary people who are just like you: mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, partners, sons, daughters and friends. (Monday - Friday 9-5pm)

Call our 24 hour 7 days a week Helpline 1300 660 068

Having a bad day?
Ring the Family Drug Helpline and they can talk you through it.

“The Helpline and the volunteers who have lived through similar circumstances were a Godsend during those early months of not knowing here to turn or what to do.”

You can ring the Helpline on 1300 660 068 for support, information, referrals and above all, to be heard.

Disclaimer: Family Drug Help is a Victorian service providing information and support to the families and friends of people who use drugs. The ideas and views of personal contributions to the Family Drug Help Newsletter are not necessarily those of Family Drug Help, its auspicing agencies or the editorial committee. Any comments should be made via letters to the Editor that can be published or directed to the authors/artists themselves. All articles and artwork in the Family Drug Help Newsletter remain the copyright of the original artist/author and may be reproduced with permission.
the supper club

The supper club is a place you are able to come to gain support and talk openly about a loved one who has passed away as a result of substance use.

The group meets on the second Tuesday of each month at SHARC, 140 Grange Road, from 6pm - 8pm.

A light meal is provided.
To attend the group contact John on 9573 1784
Family Drug Help offers the Action for Recovery Course (ARC) for family members of a person with problematic alcohol or other drug use. ARC provides families with a new set of skills to help improve their relationships. It runs for six consecutive weeks for two hours each week. The cost is $60.00 per person which covers resources and refreshments.

Some comments from recent participants:
I have put boundaries in place and I am no longer covering up for her. I don’t feel so guilty.

It helped to know we weren’t the only ones going through this and our response was quite normal.

I didn’t realise how broken I was. I have learnt to repair myself brick by brick.

For details of forthcoming program dates please go to www.familydrughelp.com.au or call the ARC facilitator on 9573 1761 email: arc@sharc.org.au
Please put me on the Family Drug Help Mailing List □

Preferred newsletter format
email □ post □

Name:

Address:

Suburb:

Postcode: State:

Email:

Please send me a free alcohol booklet
‘Why can’t they just stop?’ □

Please send me a free booklet
Is someone you care about using drugs? □

Please send me a free ‘Myth Busting Alcohol Booklet’ □

Return to: Newsletter, Family Drug Help. 140 Grange Road. Carnegie, VIC, 3163 or email talder@sharc.org.au
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<td><strong>DirectLine 1800 888 236</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Suicide Helpline 1300 651 251</strong></td>
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