

LOCAL TEMPLATE RELEASE

Media Information – Dry January 2021

#TheHiddenEffects - of alcoholism on family and friends

Al-Anon Family Groups launches a new campaign to highlight the hidden effects of alcoholism on the families and friends

Alcohol abuse and alcoholism within a family affects not only the drinker but also the family members, including the children and friends. Our recent survey shows that 99% of people who attend Al-Anon meetings were emotionally affected by their loved ones' drinking, 66% were affected mentally, 63% were affected financially and 44% were affected physically*. These effects include depression, anxiety, stress, domestic abuse and much more. The impact on the family members are often not fully understood and priority is given to 'curing' the drinker.

Al-Anon Family Groups UK & Eire (Al-Anon), is launching a new campaign **#TheHiddenEffects – of alcoholism on the family and friends** this Dry January 2021, to highlight the mental, emotional, physical and financial effects of living with a problem drinker. The campaign will encourage anyone who is affected to seek support by calling the free and confidential Helpline 0800 0086 811, emailing helpline@al-anonuk.org.uk or by visiting their local meeting.

To inspire anyone affected to seek support, Al-Anon has interviewed four individuals who have shared their **hidden effects** of living with alcoholism and how Al-Anon has helped them. The case studies and podcasts are available at www.al-anonuk.org.uk/hiddeneffects. Throughout January Al-Anon will be sharing stories from individuals on Twitter and Instagram @AlAnonUKandEire and Facebook @AlAnonFamilyGroupsUK.

Jasmine, 36, an Al-Anon member, shares her struggles of growing up with an abusive father who drank too much and a distant mother. She ended up in abusive relationships which affected her emotionally, mentally, and physically.

"I was born out of wedlock, in Mauritius. My father was disowned by his wealthy family when he stayed with my mother. Four years later, they got married and had three more daughters.

"I was responsible for taking my sisters to school as well as cleaning the house. My parents would tell my sisters they loved them, but not me. I was also the only child who was physically abused by my father. My mother never told my father to stop and although she didn't hit me, she forced me wash her menstruating cloth with my bare hands.

“Growing up, I believed I was adopted. This was the only logical explanation I could think of why they treated me so badly despite my constant attempts to please them. It became unbearable so I planned my death, but I was unsuccessful.

“As soon as I turned 18, I started planning to leave home. I decided to become a nurse. We only had one hospital on the island, and I would most likely have to train abroad. I didn't know where I would end up, I just wanted to leave home. My mother hid my acceptance letter from a hospital in London and only told me three weeks before I was due to start training, as she didn't want me to go. I persuaded my father to help me, and he agreed when I told him I'd send him money every month.

“I was 24 when I met my first husband. He was 12 years older than me. An emaciated ex-drug addict with bad teeth and little hair but he agreed to marry me. After we were married, he told me I had to give up my job because he was a Yorkshire man and “Yorkshire men don't allow their women to work”. He also said we had to move from London to Yorkshire because it would be cheaper to live.

“He still couldn't get a job and started drinking, so I went back to work as a nurse. I wasn't allowed any friends. He stayed home and I gave him my salary. I worked for 30 consecutive nights to make enough money to take him to Mauritius. I thought that would make him happy and he would stop drinking. When we got back, I left him the next day but had to come back as I had nowhere else to go. I still stayed with him even when he raped me.

“The realisation that my life wasn't normal came the day I saw the look on my friend's face when I told her that I had to ask my husband for money to buy tampons. The day I left was when he threw something at me as I was leaving for work. I went to stay with a colleague and later went back to collect my things.

“A few years later when I was 37 I met my second husband. We met at work and we got on well. I knew he was a chain smoker, so as a joke I told him I'd marry him if he gave up smoking because I thought he wouldn't be able to. However, he gave up through hypnosis which brought us closer. I decided to move in with him, even though he told me he would be bringing women home when I was away on work trips. I wasn't sure if he was serious or joking.

“When he was made redundant, he decided we would move to Ireland where he was born. I wasn't accepted by his Irish Catholic family, work colleagues or the community as I was a non-Caucasian divorcee. He didn't find work, but I did, so I bought a home, furniture, food and a car. He said he needed to visit his friends, so he used the car each day and I took the bus to work. Even though he spent most of his time on the computer watching porn, I still married him. There were a few people at our wedding. Four months later, I came home from work to a mess and realised that if I had a baby with this man I would have to look after both of them. That wasn't the life I wanted so I left, put the house on the market, and moved back to London.

“At 42, I met my third husband whilst interviewing applicants for a job, which I gave him. We only started to work together when he got promoted. We became friends and soon

enough we were seeing each other. When I first met his mother, she said “how can you be friends with my son when you don’t drink?” I just thought it was a funny remark at the time and laughed it off. There was always alcohol around him and his friends. Unlike my previous husbands he was a happy drunk. He was sociable and had a good sense of humour. He also bought me chocolates, flowers and took me out for dinner which was a nice change.

“I sold my flat, paid off his debts and moved in with him in a room he rented from his friend. We got married and stayed there as we couldn’t afford a place of our own. I soon realised his drinking was the reason he had been in debt. His drinking increased and he left work and moved to France. I couldn’t leave so continued to work, saved up and bought a flat for him to live in. On my days off, I would visit him. On one visit I bumped into a neighbour who asked where I was going. When I told her who I was her expression quickly changed, and she hurried away. I realised my husband was having an affair and that’s when I had my first panic attack. Eventually my husband admitted to the affair and that he wanted to stay with us both. I wasn’t going to put myself through that, so I left and returned to London.

“My father disowned me when I refused to let him come to London and live with me. He kept a diary and when he died, I read it; he wrote that he only had three daughters. My mother visited after my father died and also wanted to move in, but I refused. Although I had never been close to my sisters, I wanted to keep them in my life, however they didn’t make it easy for me and eventually we stopped contact.

“I craved love in my marriages because I didn’t receive any growing up. During each marriage, I believed if I worked hard enough and looked after my husbands, they would stop drinking. The more I tried the worse the drinking got.

“I remember a colleague once told me about Al-Anon. Although I didn’t need it at the time, when I started to get panic attacks and couldn’t afford professional help, I decided to call the helpline and attended a local meeting. I thought Al-Anon could help save my third marriage, but instead it helped me realise that I couldn’t change my husband. I learnt that alcoholism is an illness which affected me since childhood. I have forgiven my parents and learnt to find love within me. Al-Anon has given me emotional and spiritual support. Today I am a spiritual person. I no longer think about ending my life, instead I live by doing things that make me happy.”

Al-Anon Family Groups provide a safe and confidential environment for anybody who is, or has been, affected by someone else’s drinking.

Individuals concerned about someone’s drinking can also call our free Helpline on 0800 0086 811 (10am-10pm, 365 days a year).

For further information please contact Shina Bouchaara (shina@al-anonuk.org.uk) or visit the website, www.al-anonuk.org.uk

Notes to Editors

1. **About Al-Anon Family Groups UK & Eire.** Al-Anon Family Groups offer a programme of recovery in over 130 countries. There are over 750 support groups in the UK and Eire. By

attending Al Anon Family Group meetings, individuals discover that they didn't cause the problem, and cannot control or cure it. They also learn how best to cope with their situation by switching their focus from the alcoholic to themselves.

2. **Anonymity.** All names have been changed. Anonymity is an important principle which safeguards member's identity. Al-Anon's public relations policy requires all members to maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and TV. A pseudonym may be used, or first names only. E.g. Bob or Sheila

* Based on the Al-Anon Family Groups UK & Eire 2020 Membership Survey.