



Group offers support to family members of drug, alcohol addicts

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by Rachel Nichols

special to the View

In 2007, licensed abuse counselor Mike Speakman established the first Parents of Addicted Loved Ones support group to address the growing number of families with children addicted to drugs or alcohol.

"Kids are starting to use drugs and alcohol younger and younger, and the parents just don't have much education about it," Speakman said. "They just don't seem to know how to deal with it."

Currently, the support group has expanded to seven different locations around the Valley. The group is free of charge and is open to both parents and spouses of family members who abuse or are addicted to drugs or alcohol.

The focus of each meeting is one of eight educational topics, such as how to help an addicted loved one in a healthy way and how to identify enabling behavior.

"When a person comes to the group they get educated about addiction and recovery. At the same time, they're getting support and encouragement from people who are going through the same problems," Speakman said.

There is no requirement to go to every meeting or learn all the educational topics.

Meetings also include a time for prayer, although the group is open to any denomination or religion.

"It's a really relaxed atmosphere of everyone going at their own pace," he said. "They just give support and encouragement to one another as they make positive changes."

Joyce Page started attending the original PALS group at Calvary Addiction Recovery Center three years ago when her son was addicted to opiates. Even though her son had opted out of treatment at the time, Page found that she still needed support for herself.

"The hardest part is walking through the door for the first time and believing that your problems are so horrific, so awful that nobody else has the same problems that you do," Page said. "The shame involved in even saying those things out loud, and the things you can't say to your friends because they're just clueless about how to respond."

Page said she was overwhelmed at first, but she soon discovered that one of the best things about PALS was the support and encouragement from other parents dealing with addiction within their families.

"Last night we had a brand new mom just finding out that her son was an addict, just kind of figuring it all out. And then another mom, who's a year down the process, was able to say this is how I handled things, I understand what you're going through parent to parent," she said. "It was all very powerful."

Not only can PALS benefit parents and spouses, it can also be a step toward helping a loved one with his or her addiction.

"The whole idea is that as parents or spouses make some changes in how they are interacting with their loved one, it helps them get closer and closer to admitting their problem and getting treatment," Speakman said.

As of March 13, Page's son has been sober for two years. She is now a facilitating leader of the PALS group at Scottsdale Bible Church.

"My goal is to give a parent hope," Page said. "There is a possibility of hope on the other side."

Rachel Nichols is a journalism student at Colorado State University. She is doing a summer internship at the West Valley View.

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