Interfaith Addiction And Recovery Coalition

Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 2

July 2020

Dear Savannah Faith Leaders, you are receiving this e-newsletter because we have designed it for you. This is our second edition.

We are the non-profit Interfaith Addiction and Recovery Coalition of Savannah, founded in January, 2019. Our purpose is to provide education and support for faith leaders on the subject of addiction and recovery. Faith leaders tell us they feel ill-equipped to help congregation members when they – or their loved ones – struggle with addiction. Our aim is to prepare you to offer the help your congregation members need with educational forums, one-on-one consultation, resources on our FaceBook page and this e-newsletter.

In this issue, we feature:

* An essay by one of our own faith leaders as he experienced addiction around him – in his life and in his profession

* Commentary by a trained therapist who has counseled people and their loved ones struggling with addiction

* The ten characteristics of adult children of alcoholics by a Savannah faith leader who understands this subject intimately

* News of a Virtual Family Program offered by Hazelden Betty Ford and tailored for Savannah's faith leaders.

We invite your feedback, as well as requests for features and more information.

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Rabbi Robert Haas

Congregation Mickve Israel
Savannah, Georgia

I'm Lucky....

Though I Drank

My Fair Share

I consider myself extremely fortunate. I have a wonderful wife and two terrific kids. I love my job, my city and my extended family. I've worked hard and at times struggled, but I've also been very, very lucky. For whatever reason, be it biology, geography, religion, psychology, or climate, drugs and alcohol never affected me in the way they have affected so many, including members of my family.

My parents raised me in a town right smack dab on the Mexican border, called McAllen, Texas, which meant no legal need to wait until age 21 to begin drinking alcohol. Certain drugs were abundantly available throughout high school and later -- especially marijuana -- which I tested in my mid-20's while living abroad. Nearly everyone drank alcohol in high school and certainly at the University of Texas. I admit I drank my fair share until my mid-twenties.

I consider myself lucky though, because I never once felt an addiction to either alcohol or marijuana. I may have enjoyed the results of imbibing, save for the morning after, of course. For me, the draw always remained more social in nature. I wasn't smarter than people who succumbed to addiction. I wasn't wealthier than anyone who felt the lure of a drink or drug. I wasn't a better human being than people who became addicted. In fact, as I've now served as a rabbi for almost twenty years, I've experienced the pain of bearing witness to so many who have suffered from addiction -- people from all walks of life, many of whom having nothing in common with each other.

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

As a faith leader, I usually counsel everyone involved to seek assistance as soon and as often as possible. I don't necessarily believe that God gave every human being the ability to solve every problem in a vacuum. I believe God gave humanity the intelligence and tenacity to solve our problems together, with the aid of friends, family members, and professionals in every field. Rabbi Hilllel once said, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?"

I remember loaning a good friend of mine $500 only a few short years after beginning my rabbinical career. Why wouldn't I give that kind of money to a pillar of the community, to a middle school teacher who taught Sunday School and sat on just about every committee in the Jewish community? Why wouldn't I lend money to one of the nicest guys in the world? Only, a short time later I visited my friend at the rehab center, and only a short time afterward, I officiated at his funeral.

I feel lucky that my life never swerved in the direction of addiction as my friend did -- even though we probably had a very similar upbringing. He was a school teacher and I taught elementary school before becoming a rabbi. I certainly understood that addiction existed in the world, but how had my friend hid it so well, for so long? He attended a committee meeting or volunteered for a non-profit organization almost every night! I saw him several days a week and never spotted a hint of his addiction. How could I have been so blind? I just didn't live with him and spend 24 hours a day with him.

I also didn't live with a family member -- the smartest of our bunch -- a leader in her field, an addict for at least 15 years, someone with similar biology and a similar upbringing. I never knew of her addiction until she hit rock bottom and no longer could hide the truth. Am I somehow inherently better than either my old friend or my family member?

Why was there such as struggle for them and literally none for me? I don't know.

I just know that I feel so lucky.

Rabbi Robert Haas is a member of the Interfaith Addiction and Recovery Coalition Cabinet of Faith Leader Advisors

A SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR SAVANNAH'S

FAITH LEADERS OFFERRED BY HAZELDEN BETTY FORD IN OCTOBER, 2020

Addiction is called a family disease for good reason.

Families are in pain. By the time most families reach out for help, the disease has progressed, and families need help as well as the person who has become addicted to alcohol or drugs.

For decades, Hazelden Betty Ford has offered educational and support programs to help family members learn about the disease of addiction and the effect it has on every family member.

In this era of Covid 19, Hazelden Betty Ford is offering a virtual family program. Our Interfaith Addiction and Recovery Coalition is collaborating with Hazelden Betty Ford to bring a tailored program, expressly for our faith leaders, to **Savannah on October 6.**

Please mark your calendars for this vital, one-day program and more details will follow.

With the help of our faith leader advisors, the program is a new pilot project offered, thanks to Hazelden Betty Ford, to our community. We are most grateful for this.

You will learn a great deal about addiction and you can bring your knowledge back to your faith communities.

This day-long, free program will include:

* **Lively lectures**
* **Educational videos**
* **Discussion and peer feedback**
* **Resources to share with your congregations**

LEARN MORE BY FOLLOWING THIS LINK:

"When life is easy, I usually assume it's God's way and, I'm quite spiritual.

But when I'm in emotional trouble, I assume life's a drag...and that God has gone fishing."

"Winners and Whiners", Port Townsend, Washington,
Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier
From the Alcoholics Anonymous Grapevine Magazine

SCROLL ON TO HEAR FROM OUR MEMBER, DONNA HAMMONTREE

WEATHERING THE EMOTIONAL STORMS OF ADDICTION

By Donna Hammontree LCSW

Drenching rains fall swiftly in Savannah and flood one side of my office parking lot suddenly. On days rain is predicted, I have regularly convinced myself that I can park on the low side of the lot only to find myself aggravated and resentfully wading in ankle-deep water to get in my car. Recently, my sweet daughter gifted me my first ever pair of rain boots to keep in my office. While I cannot control the coming of torrential rains, I do now use my umbrella and my wonderful boots.

Similarly, a person who lives with a substance abuser frequently lives in personal denial and gets trapped in the chaos and trauma of addiction.

As a licensed mental health provider/psychotherapist and an Al-Anon consumer, I have found Al-Anon to be a resource I can gift to my clients who are weathering the emotional storms of living with a family member who abuses alcohol or drugs. Just as the addicted person can attend meetings with others who struggle with substance abuse., Al-Anon offers free support groups for people who live with an alcoholic or drug addict whether the substance abuser is sober or not.

Al-Anon provides non-abusing family members support, guiding principles, and honesty about the disease and its effects that they need to know.
(Call 912-598-9860 for a list of Al-Anon meetings in the greater Savannah area or google Al-Anon Savannah Area for the full schedule) http://al-anon-savannah.freeservers.com/meetings.html

YOU WILL FACE THIS AS A FAMILY MEMBER

Active alcoholics often create chaos and trauma for themselves and for their loved ones.

Families keep the substance abuse and chaos in the home a secret.

Loved ones believe they can help heal the substance abuser and repeatedly find themselves neglected and even abused emotionally, physically, sexually, and economically.

Institutions of faith and society have historically dictated that families stay together.

Many survivors attend religious services to find stamina to continue life as they live it.

A child needs at least one care giver to be present emotionally, not just physically. When the non-addict caregiver is focused on an adult partner with the disease, children are frequently neglected.
Young people learn how to cope in their family of origin. They often act out the family pain in predictable roles, such as hero/saint, peacemaker, scapegoat, rebel, lost child, clown, and martyr.

FACING ADDICTION IN MY OWN FAMILY CIRCLE

I have suffered the effects of having a loved one abuse alcohol and hurt my family members. When my pain peaked, I called my dear friend who is an adult child of an alcoholic. She referred me to the Serenity Prayer and to an Al-Anon group, where I met others who shared similar experiences. There was no cross talk at Al-Anon so that I was not given unsolicited advice when my heart was so raw and tender.

At the end of the meeting, participants gave me additional support and they referred me to a small book called Courage to Change. Al-Anon principles and friends helped me cope with the situation while I simultaneously went through diagnosis and treatment for my own critical medical condition. A substance abuser's illness can peak during a family crisis when everyone's coping skills are taxed; the focus is then on the alcoholic rather than on anyone else's needs. I prayed, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

I understood that I did not have to keep my loved ones' disease a secret even though there was pressure to do so. I did not have to accept behaviors that were hurtful to me and everyone else in the family. I could lead our family to focus on those most harmed by our alcoholic's choices and actions. We could still love, but we could also make our own choices about our lives and how we would live without focusing on "saving our alcoholic".

STEPS I TAKE AS A PROFESSIONAL

- **Ask.** I ask if my client or anyone in the family is affected negatively by drug or alcohol abuse. Commonly, this information is provided only if I ask, is frequently minimized, and may not be told to me even if I ask.
- **Conduct** risk assessments involving the addict, other individual family members, and the family as a unit.
- **Educate** the sober adult on how to know when to call emergency services.
- **Engage** in safety planning. Risk assessments and safety planning need to be conducted as often as indicated.
- **Do not tell** anyone to either leave or stay with the alcohol-abusing loved one.
- **Recognize** that I am witnessing pain and suffering that I can neither control nor contain.

- **Refer to** AA, NA, Al-Anon, Alateen and ACOA (Adult Children of Alcoholics). There are meeings of all these groups in the Savannah area. These meetings are not affiliated with any religious group and there are no dues or fees associated with participating.

o Alcoholics Anonymous serves anyone who struggles with addiction to alcohol and seeks to find a life in sobriety.
o Narcotics Anonymous serves people who struggle with addiction to drugs.
o Al-Anon is a mutual support program for people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. By sharing common experiences, families and friends of addicts can bring positive changes to their individual situations, whether or not the addict seeks help or not.
o Alateen, a part of Al-Anon, is a fellowship of young people (mostly teenagers) whose lives have been affected by someone else's alcohol or drug use. By attending Alateen, teenagers meet other teenagers with similar situations. ACOA focuses on adults or all ages who grew up around addiction.
o ACOA serves adults of all ages who grew up in homes where alcoholism or drug addiction was present.
o NOCOA provides a website for children and their caregivers. https://nacoa.org/families/just-4-kids/
o AA Agnostica (www.aaagnostica.org) 12 Steps for agnostics and atheists

- Educate adults, teenagers, and children about alcoholism and the effects. There are some excellent children's books that provide information for youth.

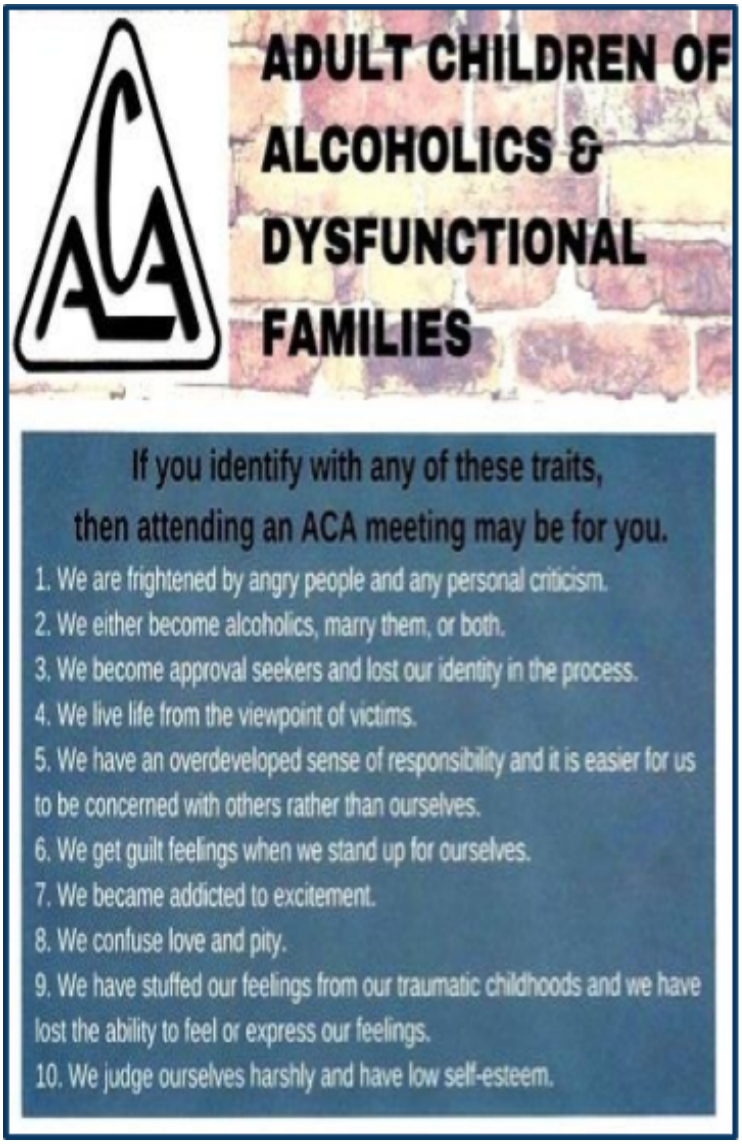
- Accept that the decision to stay together as a family is not my decision. I will walk through the painful process with them, regardless of what they decide.

- Suggest positive coping skills, including using any spirituality the adult, adolescent, or child has been taught.

Donna Hammontree, LCSW, RPT-S, is a member of the Interfaith Addiction and Recovery Coalition team in Savannah

FIND AN ALANON MEETING NEAR YOU BY FOLLOWING THIS LINK:

BE ALERT FOR THE FOLLOWING TEN CHARACTERISTICS. LEARN ABOUT THEM.



Hear Rev. Pacia Vamas, a member of our Interfaith Addiction & Recovery Coalition Faith Leaders cabinet of advisors, describe these characteristics and how they might apply to you or someone you love.

CLICK BELOW TO SEE THE VIDEO

https://www.facebook.com/INTERFAITHADDICTIONANDRECOVERYCOALITION/?__tn__=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARDbv9IvfiLDLR7wt5nU5AZVOIAqQws2zXWy0iPZAj4ESqeEX8IOIilcCmPWtEmpQNhCYFR2nKhrq1Jm

DEATHS OF DESPAIR AS CPVOD-19 MOVES INTO ITS 7TH MONTH... SEE NEXT PAGE

Projected 'Deaths of Depair' During Covid-19 are Sobering

By the middle of July this year, 139000+ Americans lost their lives to Covid- 19.

But there will be as many as **75,000 more** deaths in this Covid era that the Well Being Trust, a nonprofit research foundation based in Oakland, California, calls "deaths of despair" – **deaths caused by drug or alcohol misuse and suicide.**

"If the country continues to ignore the **collateral damage** – especially our nation's mental health – we will not come out of this stronger," says Benjamin F. Miller, PsyD, chief strategy officer for the Well Being Trust.

"If we work to put in place healthy community conditions, good healthcare coverage and inclusive policies, we can improve mental health and well-being."

The organization's in-depth statistical analysis and conclusions can be found at this link:

READ MORE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING HERE: