

Episode Seven: 'Alcohol and Relationships - #AlcoholAwarenessWeek'

Podcast Transcript

Life with Alcohol and Drugs

Host: Rebecca Bradley (Scottish Families)

Guest Speakers: Daryl McLeister (Scottish Families) and Colin McIntosh (Scottish Families)

Introduction:

For this special episode for Alcohol Awareness Week, we're joined with Daryl McLeister, the Family Support Development Officer for our Inverclyde Family Support Service and Colin McIntosh, the Family Support Development Officer for our East Dunbartonshire Family Support Service. They both also run our Men's Family Support Group!

Interview Begins

Rebecca:

Alcohol Awareness Week takes place in November of each year and this year the theme is Alcohol and relationships, and how alcohol can affect the relationships around us. So we're going to chat for a while about this.

Colin and Daryl, you know all too well how alcohol affects our relationships with the people you are supporting every single day. And I know you've brought some quotes from the people you are supporting which are so important to share – Daryl do you want to read one of yours first?

Daryl:

Thanks Rebecca. Yes, so, I've brought along a quote today, I've brought along a couple of quotes but the one I want to start with today is from a lady who kindly sent in her experience of what it's like I suppose to be a mum and to be a wife to someone that she describes as a functioning alcoholic and really just goes into detail about her experience of that. So I'm going to read that quote for you now.

"My husband is a functioning alcoholic, he holds down his job and can keep up appearances outwith family life. Although not physically abusive, he has been extremely emotionally and mentally abusive, this made me withdraw from life in general as I started to believe it was because of me he was like this, everything was my fault, I was to blame for the way everything is. I was so selfish, I was incredibly nasty, if I wasn't so self-obsessed our relationship, our family life, our financial situation, would be so different as would my husband's drinking. I actually began to hate him.... I don't say this lightly, he made me cry numerous times a day, every day, so much so my 9 year old son would say... I love you mummy don't listen to daddy he always does this when he's drunk too much cider...."

That's the end of the quote and when that lady who I still work with in Inverclyde sent that through to me. It really touched me, you know, I think it's very striking how much the blame was transferred onto her almost. And the ways in which she internalised that, you know, the guilt, the shame, the idea that if she just fixed everything in her life then everything would be absolutely hunky dory. Everything would be okay. And it just struck me as really painful, you know. I think it's that, almost that projection we do when we're in a bad way, we project all of our thoughts onto someone else and I think she's very much the victim of that. Her husband was in fact the one that was being selfish at that point but he was projecting all of his own aches onto her. So it was really striking.

Aside from just how that lady was feeling on an emotional level, it was really striking when she said she

withdrew from life in general and I just thought how said is that? She's not only withdrawn from this relationship that she shares with her husband and the changes she's seeing there. She's not only managing this relationship with her own son but she's just withdrawn from all these other relationships in her whole life. You know, pulling back on them all. Pulling back on work environment, pulling back on friends, pulling back on family. just all the relationships and the web this lady would have in her life just all diminished somewhat because of this core problem she was experiencing deep down within her.

Colin, I know you've had similar experiences with family members and how those relationships around about become affected. I wonder if you've got any thoughts.

Colin:

I think it's kinda scary for myself seeing how many I's there are in the last bit of that statement. I, I, I, I. And it's like if somebody says well how do you mean by mentally abusive, mentally abusive to the point where the person is going this must be my fault because I've been put in this corner, this is happening because I've had people say it's because you're doing this, I'm actually drinking because you're putting me under stress. We all say there's no physical abuse there, but the mental abuse is more harmful to me. This women has withdrawn from the world.

Daryl:

Aye, it's interesting that isn't it, that idea that...even the language the lady has used there 'even though not physically abusive' is almost kinda like 'although it's not the worst one, he has been emotionally abusive' but from my point of view and what you've just said, emotional and mental abuse can have a much longer lasting and complex toll on someone than even physical abuse can have on someone. There is no hierarchy, even as it's spoken, it's not less than, 'it's not as bad as he's been emotionally abusing me and not physically abusing me' but receiving this...this cacophony of relationships in this lady's life has just evaporating.

Colin:

The ironic thing is if you talk in addictions groups, when I was working in addictions, the guys in the group, I'm just saying guys, women and men, will say 'I was never physically abusive to my kids, I never hit my kids or my wife' and that's the 'I didn't do that' and everybody would ask in the group 'how many doors were broken in your house?' every door is broken, there was two or three windows, the microwave was broken. If that's not physical, it's a physical statement of aggression. To me that's physical as hell. That goes along with the mental images...everybody tries to shy away from the physical word because it's the worst. But no...

Daryl:

And I think what this also highlights is you know, the 9 year old son and how he's having to manage that relationship and he's stepping into this role where he's trying to console mum against the dangers and caution her against this relationship. And I think about him. I remember when I was kinda 9, 10, my mum would go out on the very occasional night with her friends and she'd come back in a little bit tipsy and I remember how uncertain and cautious I felt. I remember feeling so sensitive to it, it wasn't...she was my mum but she wasn't quite my mum. There's a real sensitivity at that age and you do detect those slight differences in people. So for a 9 year old to have to step up to that plate and actively console his own mum who's dealing with this...you know, both mum and son are in just such a predicament. It's really having such a big impact on them.

Colin:

Yeah, I've had experience myself with a family member whose 9 or 10 year old son, the dad was being really aggressive. And it was just when lockdown had started and instead of seeing the person for 2 or 3 hours a day, they were seeing them for 24 hours a day in the midst of their addiction and it's actually in

your face. And the boy said to the mum after a certain event, he said 'if my dad does that again I'll need to step in.' And this is this 9 year old, I say 9, maybe 10, but he was going to step in and face up to this man to stop his mum being hurt. And that was actually a catalyst to get him thrown out. She had the nerve...I don't know what it would be...the strength to phone up the police and say no I'm in fear and into assisted accommodation and things like that. So that was the catalyst for them moving, this poor boy having to stand up to his dad, physically stand up to him. And that's just through the alcohol, nothing else. Not because his dad is a bad guy or anything. It's just alcohol.

Daryl:

Aye, and how it changes you. Yeah, it's touching isn't it, you know? I just think...this family, I still work with them today and I'm pleased to say there's been some positive changes there. Things have maybe moved onto some degree. Dad has accepted a little bit of help at this point which is great but it's still there isn't it? That feeling of guilt, that feeling of 'did I cause this? Is this my fault? If I had just done something differently, if I'd just of been a bit nicer to him in that moment, if I'd just of reacted to him in a slightly different way would I have changed all of that? Would I have made a difference there?' it just really touches on that massive subject there.

We use words like enabling with the people we're working with and it always feels like a dirty word to me, it always feels like a really bad word like 'you're responsible for this problem'. But you're not, you know. Yeah there's things you can do, behaviours maybe you're doing that would've made things easier or more difficult but you know that's like 1% of the pie, the other 99% is that one person's responsibility for their own behaviour and for the changes they want to see in their own life. That 1% is enough to make you...you chew over it at 3 in the morning every single night when you're lying awake like could I just influence that 1%, could I make a difference here, could I somehow drive this to a successful conclusion but it's almost like a drop in the ocean. Aye, I think it really touches on that issue of who is responsible for that change and do we as family members sometimes put ourselves too much in that position to be responsible for that change to happen in front of us. But how do we do that? How do we influence things in the right direction. Such a massive question.

Colin:

Quite a huge word there Daryl, responsible. Responsible. I mean, I've got one family member whose got 4 kids. 4 grown up kids. And 3 of the kids are successful as you would call it, they've got jobs and they're getting on with the world. They've got families and houses and go on holiday and things and this other boy does not. And the mum goes they're fine that's okay but where did I go wrong with this one? As if there's an ingredient or a menu she had to do with the other 3, but this one she's failed somewhere. There wasn't the right ingredients, she wasn't good enough cook with the ingredients she had and this person has turned out bad and it's so hard to get her away from the fact of 'this is my fault, I am responsible.'

Daryl:

That tapestry of decisions that comes into it, you know. It's so hard to...there is no smoking gun is there? You look back at what caused this, what happened, and you'll never find it and it can often feel like a very footless search which is sad to say. But often there isn't that one single cause and we can't always change it.

Colin:

No, I mean, I've listened to a few YouTube videos that goes back to childhood trauma and I think it's a bit kinda generalisation, the childhood trauma that's what happened and that's how I had the bad start. But a lot of people don't have the childhood traumas, they walk into the alcohol and the addiction and it's no one's fault other after the person's maybe made some wrong choices and got to that point. And it's not about a good upbringing or a bad...whatever you'd call good or bad upbringings. It's just stuff happens and you take the wrong decision once then you do it again and that becomes where you go

with your life. And it's just as hard to get out of that whether it's been trauma, I know we do trauma assisted training and things like that. But for me, I think a lot of people just get into the addiction just because that's what happens where they're working, who they mix with, what sport they take up, whatever else is drink-related, what job they've got, that's kinda drink oriented. It's very easy to get into it. And whose to blame then? Who's responsible for that? I'm responsible for recovery but whose responsible for getting into addiction. It's just choices you make.

Daryl:

I know. Important questions here, I really like the way you put that there Colin, it's just making the wrong decision once and then doing it again. It's almost as simple as that. I think that's a really nice way of putting it.

Colin:

Yeah, but why then...why then do mums and dads, especially you know in my cases it's mostly mums in the books. Why is it the mum takes on the full responsibility for that person's life? Even at 47/48, I've got guys of that age who are still...the mum's still responsible about what they're doing. How does somebody get on with that or how do they get away with that without conclusion that I'm not responsible?

Daryl:

Yeah...if only I had all the answers. I've spoke about that very issue today in some support calls I was on about how do you transfer that responsibility back. When you've got a maybe 30/40 year old son or daughter and you recognise that you're taking more responsibility than you wish you had but you can't transfer it back without there being really severe traumas and dramas and difficulties and speedbumps along the way. And that's that really hard part where the work needs to come in...those regular weekly calls with your worker really help to understand 'well I do need to transfer that responsibility back but how do I do that?' and the answer is usually bit by bit and piece and piece and how do we transfer some of that back almost.

Colin:

Shall I go with my quote?

Daryl:

Yeah if you'd like to take it away Colin that would be great!

Colin:

To put some context...this is a young woman who has a father whose involved....issues with alcohol for a long number of years, for as far back as she can remember. And the family have kinda put up with it but she's got to the point where her daughter's noticing that grandad is acting differently and very aggressive...very loud and things like that she doesn't want to go. So the daughter has taken a bit of a back step from the family and this is a conversation she had with her mum.

'My mum asked me tonight basically when I was going to stop being like this and go and see my dad. She was acting like I was the one in the wrong and being a bit silly. I had it out with her and said it wasn't something daft and I couldn't pretend it hadn't happened all the madness especially now it's affecting my daughter with the crazy letter she received (she got a letter off her grandad). I said to my mum I would rather our conversation was kept between her and me but I doubt it.'

And that's the context, the story is her daughter has had to back off. But now in the next few sessions we've had she's actually been ostracised by the whole family which includes brothers as well as mum and aunties. So this one person has been affected by the alcohol so indirectly and so far from that she's...aunties, uncles, cousins and all the rest of it no talking to her.

I do understand...I understand the family want to be normal and to be okay, but to the point where you're normalising someone's drink that the person's allowed to be aggressive, caught for drunk driving and these sort of things, and it's still okay for the family to sort of come round about. How do you expect change if you're not going to change your behaviours out the person. But how does that work with the person whose been ostracised because they're the one that's standing up. Would it not be normal on wanting it to change and the way it'll change by asking people...not by enabling but putting boundaries in and she's put the boundary in that she doesn't want her daughter involved in this but how do you accept then.... it's ostracization from the family. How does that work? Have you come across anything like that Daryl?

Daryl:

Yeah absolutely, I'm really struck by that example you've shared there Colin. I think we talk a lot about family units and quite often we use that analogy of that model on top of a baby's crib, those little models that you see spinning around. Almost the daughter is the one that doesn't want to spin the same way everyone else does but the rest of the family wants to stay in exactly the position that they're in and just constantly right that ship. Keep to the status quo and I think that's so difficult. When you feel like you're the only voice of reason saying 'this needs to end' boundaries need to be put in place, you know, I need to do something about this. But when you've got an entire family unit just acting...pulling in the complete opposite direction of what you're pulling in, it just makes it so difficult. I mean that poor lady, to be ostracised by her whole family as a result of that...I think it's just too much. It's a lot for someone to bare. It's her relationships, it's that lady's relationships that are being affected there. She's the one being cut off. Not necessarily the dad that's got the drink problem.

Yeah, this just shows that such a common experience for so many of the family's I work with. A lot of the time, I can think of a mum I worked with who was really desperate to support her son and she had 3 children and one son was using coke at the time, quite, you know, quite significantly, really harmfully. But she wasn't able to then see her other 2 children because they had had enough of his 'shit' as they put it, and decided they were cutting him off. And that suddenly meant that not only was she seeing her 2 other adult children but she wasn't seeing her grandkids either...her 4 or 5 other grandkids underneath that all. And you just think of the tremendous affect of that all. She's had to choose this one relationship over the rest of them because in her view she has to give him support, she can't leave her son on his own and because of that she's been cut off from other really supportive relationships in her life. Ostracization is really painful.

Colin:

I see it from...I was trying to see it from the family's point of view and I get some of it. If they were getting results and the dad was staying off the drink or trying to get help, I would see it. But they're actually just enabling them that when he does come off it for a period of time everything goes back to normal in 2 days. Parties and celebrations and talking about holidays and then as soon as he's heard it's okay, then it's back to the drinking again because then that's just all I'm doing is just drinking and they need to put up with my stuff. And the daughter is realising that this cycle is just going on and on and on. And it's not because the son's are daft or the mum's....it's just trying to keep things normal for the sake of it. The community round about them, the rest of the family and the people who don't know about it.

You're right about the mobile above the wean's bed. There's just one person guiding this mobile and deciding whose affected by it and the people accepting that he's okay just now...he's tapping into there saying it's okay but the one person whose really bugging him is his daughter that's standing up and that's whose ruining the family. She's actually getting said she's ruining the families relationships...and it's so bizarre to see from the outside. And I've spoke to the boys and they get the idea that they're enabling their dad but they don't know what else to do because they're too frightened to step back in case they lose that relationship. They need to keep it as normal as possible because he is trying and it's not happening...and the family do so desperately want things to be okay and that's why people tell

other family member's it's happening and that's why it's kept behind closed curtains...or maybe a generation ago, we're getting more open about it now and more people are starting to talk about it now because us and everyone else is doing these jobs. But it is this keep it hidden, keep it normal.

Daryl:

It's just so much easier isn't it? There isn't a problem, let's just deny it. Let's just as a family unit elect that there's no problem and that person that's trying to tug at that mobile and pull it away and pull it out of kilter they must be the ones in the wrong. We'll put the wall up and let it stay there and we'll just leave things stuck. And you think about the message that's being sent to the rest of the family. if any of them in the future decide this isn't okay, they're going to have exactly the same experience. They're going to be ostracised, they're going to be cut off, it's just painful to hear that isn't it. That message being said to so many people.

Colin:

Yeah, but working with the woman for a good while now and she's got the point where she's making the decision on what she wants to do...it's like what is it you want to do. And she goes I don't want my daughter engaged and I don't see why I should be engaged when it's not helping and actually getting a but worse and yeah I'm a bit ostracised but I'm making the best decision for myself.

Daryl:

Wow.

Colin:

But if my dad was getting help then I'll get in touch and I'll be there but I can't get involved in the midst of this madness that's enabling him to get in this way. But I hate the enabling word it's like it's your fault and that's not what it means at all. But yeah, come out of the chaos and sort out yourself so you can cope with how life is going rather than join the chaos. Which is a hard decision to make, it's not easy, it really isn't. Every now and again I'll get a message saying this is hard and I know it's hard but...and I say well do you still feel this is the right thing for you to do and it is for her and for her daughter as well. Her daughter is old enough to make her own decisions with her mum's guidance, so for me...if it feels right and sounds right then maybe it is right for her and she's going along with that. And she's feeling a lot better about it.

Daryl:

It's a really brave thing to do isn't it she sounds like she's come to a place in her life that she's realised that what her own values are telling are is this isn't right and she can't live like that anymore. And to keep acting against those values and pretend that there's nothing wrong would make her feel torn up inside and she's come to a point where she's realised that it's more important to her to live to her true values and it isn't okay and I need to do something about this and I'm not prepared for me or my daughter to be part of it. And it's such a brave thing to do to risk that.

Colin:

The ironic thing is one of the guys came to me to talk about it and he's got his own business and he says I've started drinking at night because I'm sitting worrying about my dad and what's happening and all the rest of it. So he's actually taking that on board and he's stopped now right enough, but he says I'm starting to drink so I can get to sleep cause all I do is lie at night thinking. So he was changing his values that much it was actually affecting him mentally and physically and he's come round to the idea but he's still doing the enabling and he's not doing it as much....and he's not fully committed to it, but he's changing his values to sort himself out and be comfortable with that. How comfortable are you changing your whole value system round about for somebody else...you can have another belief and move on, change your believes, whatever, but to actually change your values on what you think about

yourself. Yeah.

Daryl:

That's really astonishing that, it really is. That idea of someone shifting their values to what the family want them to do almost and maybe even drinking as a result of that to handle that. The word in counselling we talk about incongruence...you're not living by your own values and almost a way of handling that is by drinking so it sounds like that son you've mentioned is feeling that incongruence and has started to drink to cope with that you know. Wow.

Colin:

His relationship with his family has started to deteriorate as well and he saw the likeness to what his dad was doing and that woke him up to it he was like wow I've went too far this way. And he's tried to back off a wee bit but there's still that falling into the trap like as you said earlier...it's easier to pretend everything is normal.

Sunday he can pretend everything is normal, the rest of the time it's just text you're doing and you can remove yourself enough physically that it's okay to do it but this thing is still spinning, this one person affecting all these people, is still spinning about affecting them all.

Daryl:

That's a great example Colin, thanks for bringing that in. I was going to bring in another quote that was shared with me and again...thank you so much to the people who sent these quotes in, I think these are really wonderful. I put out a simple question of how you think alcohol affects your relationships and I was given a really full answer here so I want to share it in full.

To give a bit of context here...a lady...so a mum, a mum to an adult daughter who for some years now has had an alcohol problem and she's found it really difficult to live with and cope with that and she says:

'To witness your beautiful daughter destroy herself both physically and mentally is soul destroying.

'One of the most destructive of emotions is to love and at times hate the person closest to you.

'I ask myself again and again, "Why is alcohol so glamorised, made so much a topic of fun and hilarity on our televisions; made so readily available in our shops and supermarkets; and now so attractively packaged to attract the young. Yes, it makes a great deal of money for alcohol companies and, in taxation, for our government, but what about the cost to human life, health and happiness?'

She also...she summed her thoughts up by giving us a mnemonic for alcohol as well so I want to read out was she said.

She said:

A for Absence of trust
L for Lost relationships
C for Confidence destroyed
O for Opportunities lost
H for Hopelessness
O for Overwhelming despair
L for Loneliness

Colin:

Wow!

Daryl:

Thank you so much for the person who sent that in, again so well thought out and so...it just touches on so many points I think. I think the...I want to come back to the really core issue she talks about at the very beginning on watching her daughter destroy herself and just how difficult that has been. This lady...her daughter has drunk but has also had some mental health difficulties along the way and it's meant some really...some really frightening situations that she's been in so when she said her daughter is destroying herself she doesn't mean metaphorically sometimes she means physically and that's been really challenging for her to watch. And she might...this is a lady who putting a boundary down can sometimes mean her daughter may self-harm or may have quite an extreme reaction to a relatively small boundary. So she's trying her best to just manage things from a day to day basis, how do I put a boundary down by saying no I wouldn't go get your medication from the shop today without that becoming a risk to her daughter. How can she reassure her daughter that she loves her and cares for her deeply but is sometimes not prepared to tolerate her behaviour. That line is sometimes messy...for many of us out there, rejection is just rejection. If someone is displeased by what we feel we just feel rejected and we react in the way we'd react. I think that's been a really challenging for this particular family.

And I think for that quote there – *'One of the most destructive of emotions is to love and at times hate the person closest to you.'*

I think that's just so indicative of where so many families are at. I love my family so deeply and so much, so much so that I sacrifice so many other relationships in my life, so much so that I sacrifice so many opportunities in my life to be with them and spend most of my time with them and looking after them. But I also hate them sometimes. I hate the fact that they don't...they're not motivated to change, I hate the fact that they're not doing the things that's asked for them. I hate that they're not taking on the responsibility they need to have on their own shoulders. I hate the worry I have for them. I hate the constant fear, tension and dread when I'm not with them because I don't know what they're doing and if they're even alive and well. And I just think that's so strong for this family. have you got any thoughts on that Colin? Is that something you've come across?

Colin:

Yeah, without a doubt. I think...the self-harm and stuff, if you'd ask me to do something or tell me you're not going to do something for me. Whether it's a 5 minute walk to the shop and I'm picking you up in the car and not running you, then 'I'll just kill myself' because they've ran out of threats and things they can do because they've done the worse they can with the alcohol and their next step is well I'll just commit suicide. And that threat's there, some people can cope with that because they can get a point where they're not going to do that and live with that but there's some people that can't cope with that and will react to it every single time.

I've got one person whose got a life cycle of looking after this person nearly 24 hours a day. They're so frightened to step away from that chaos that the person will self-harm or suicide and that's scary stuff, to ask someone to come off it no matter how small, looking for a movement to take some of the control back, it's still as scary as hell. And it's a long period of time and it's incremental by that much every time, I'm putting my hand up – a very small amount, okay!

But I get that and how do you get rid of that cycle without taking a risk? Do you have to take a risk then to say for my own sanity, because I've got to the point where I hate this person or I hate the person they've become when they're doing this. Do you have to take that extra jump and do this for your own

sanity and your own life? Does it come to that, how would you go...do you put that in as a boundary, what could you do? What's the smallest thing you could do?

Daryl:

I think that's such a wonderful way of looking at it, what's the smallest thing you could do, those small tiny increments. For a lot of people it can be a very small change, just one little bit at a time. And it may take a long time but you're right, but sometimes we have to take positive risk taking. It's a concept sometimes used in mental health as well, positive risk taking that you might put in someone's risk plan. We don't want people to be wrapped up in cotton wool, we need people to take on some risk and take on some responsibility in their own lives and sometimes we need to be the catalyst for that and we have to ask for that. We have to push for that a little bit. But it doesn't have to be big, it doesn't have to be dramatic, it doesn't have to be you have to change overnight. It can just be small, it can be tiny little steps.

Colin:

What I found was helpful because somebody was really involved with alcohol, like there's no way she would say you need to cut down 'no chance I'm not doing that' but if you can actually get something that's outwith the addiction. I had one woman whose son was drunk every night, aggressive, getting thrown out the house and back in again. Police called. And I said what else really bugs you? 'He leaves his washing lying about.'

Daryl:

Aye

Colin:

Okay, I said how much does that bug you? It really bugs me, I hate him, I want to strangle him when I've picked all his clothes up. Okay, what could we do about that? I could ask him to put it in a black bag even, I'll do his washing as long as he puts it in a black bag. And that was the conversation on the night. Not about alcohol, no about the job, no about girlfriends or anything he was doing just can we sort this out. And he went for it because it was nothing to do with his addiction. And I said later how do you feel, 'I feel as if my life has changed completely! I know he's still doing what he's doing but just for this minute I feel I've got a bit of control back' and then you could maybe move on to something and have the conversation a boundary is in but it's not this horrible overwhelming thing you've asked 'I'm not going to pick you up and take you 5 minutes to the shop, you need to walk yourself.' It's something completely different, not completely different because it's part of the behaviours of laziness and lethargic or whatever else, or not joining in with the engagement. So that sometimes works, it just takes the pressure away. I don't know if you've tried that yourself?

Daryl:

Yeah, I think you've shared an example that comes up quite often. It's amazing how much washing up and clean clothes make a difference in people's lives but it really does. If the elephant in the room is this massive addiction and alcoholism or drug use or whatever it is, it feels like...because the elephant is in the room you need to talk about it sometimes but actually sometimes you don't, you talk about the small things and begin there because that problem is too big to tackle but we can tackle something smaller. We can tackle going down to the shop. We can tackle washing up your clothes, we can tackle cooking some food for one night a week. Those are things within our control. I think it goes back to the kinda serenity prayer idea, finding the things in life that you can control and the things that you can't

and the wisdom to know the difference really. I think it's such a useful tool for family members that are out there.

Colin:

That normalising conversation rather than every conversation being that just like you said. I've got it in my head...it's normalising the conversation that I'll still talk to you about other things rather than I'm just in your face all the time about what's happening about your addiction.

Daryl:

Aye, it's hard that isn't it. I was talking to a family member relatively recently about that how we need to avoid those hour-long conferences we have around the person about talking about it and what they need to do and how they need to move forward. We use CRAFT quite a lot so it's no surprise that CRAFT is going to come up in this conversation today but CRAFT says that actually if we're going to communicate with someone about an issue, let's just do it in 2 or 3 minutes. Let's do it in no more than let's say 5 minutes, we can get our point across in that amount of time. It doesn't need to sort of go on more than that which I think is a really nice thing to stick to.

And you know, just coming back to this lady's quote and talking about the relationships in her life, not only was her sort of primary relationship in her life is with her daughter and it continues to be and one of the things that's really interesting about that is it's cut her off from her other children and her other sons. She's not...her daughter has a really strong reaction when other family members come around so her daughter feels really guilty and ashamed of who she's become and compares herself to her siblings so suddenly this lady is now going well I might not have family around, I might just leave that for a little while and not see them because it just causes too much difficulty and too much drama and you can just again see that knock on effect to these other relationships all about this lady. These sons who have done really well for themselves and have made quite a big success out of their lives and they've got grandkids and they're suddenly holding back and not coming over to see their mum who they can see is in real distress cause mum is saying please don't because it'll be too much upset and too much drama to deal with and I just think it's so challenging that...when you think about alcohol and relationships you think about that primary relationship between you and the alcohol user but...so the other ones around about it that you don't really see or really think of as clearly that just makes such a massive difference.

Colin:

Yeah. It destroys relationships over a period of time because the people that are on the outside looking in become further and further apart. Even when the person gets better it takes years for that trust and for that communication go back to normal again because the amount of chaos you've caused over that period of time over the addiction. So no just I've been sober for 2 months and everything's okay, it doesn't work like that. I'll maybe talk about it in my next quote later on – it's all about those damaged relationships and how to you rebuild that back to normal again because it's not just as easy as I'll stop drinking now. It's just not.

Daryl:

Aye, you're totally right about that. Absolutely right about that. And it's so muddy and murky. I'm working with a lady whose sister is kinda reducing on alcohol at the moment and she's been given that advice, the classic advice you get from the drug and alcohol service of don't cut down, it's really dangerous. Which is solid advice, good sound advice, but it becomes a license to continue what you're doing and it's really challenging that, that murkiness that you get into, the webs of lies and 'oh I have been cutting down' but not as much as they want me to, I've been working on it a bit more so could you

get me an extra drink...just pulled into this web of tiny little white lies that suddenly just make the ground really muddy, really shifting sands, very difficult.

Colin:

I think doing like cartwheels and being told by the addictions worker you can't stop straight away it's a wahoo it's a run to the pub you know.

Daryl:

It's such difficult advice to hear but you know, it's the right advice, you know please don't take away from this podcast that we're advising anyone to do anything different from that but it's just challenging advice to work with as a family member. Actually for me, sometimes I really wish families could be involved in that, I really wish families...you might have 3 or 4 family members around this person at a meeting and they can all hear this advice and figure out what it means for them.

Colin:

Yeah finding out what's happening with it, yeah it's harm reduction and I've got a care plan and they can make up the care plan in their head and just spew it out at the time. If you're involved with them you get to hear about what's happening...hear about detox and hear about harm reduction. De-mystify it.

Daryl:

Yeah, massive, and so helpful. It's so interesting as well, I work with families and I say how many times has your loved one tried to change before and they're like 'he's been to rehab 3 or 4 times' and I'm like brilliant, making a wee note of it. Then I ask more questions, what rehab did he go to out of curiosity to see what models he's been under, but they're like he was in only 10 days so you mean he's only been in for a detox then? Oh is there a difference? And families often don't even understand that there's a difference between an in-patient detox...from the outside looking in as a medical experience, you're just slowly tapered off on a dose of Librium to get out off your alcohol for 10 days but there's not a lot of counselling happening in there and unless that person's got a plan when they leave that detox...a plan in place to support them where they're going, a plan for long-time change often seems quite slim and family members often don't see it...they don't understand the difference between detoxes and rehabs. It's just that murky world of alcohol and drug rehabilitation...it's quite a hard thing to get a handle on even as someone who has worked in the field for 11 years. I sometimes feel out of my depth asking about that kinda stuff.

Colin:

I think for me the detox for the two weeks, I think it's completely clinical that the rehab's going to be the miracle place and I've seen the both of it...people in a group going yeah that's great he's in rehab that's it all sorted, it'll be done. And it's not, that's just the first step. For that two weeks, one of them was 7 weeks, for the 7 weeks you could see the family member actually changing their whole demeanour, they're calmer, their shoulders aren't so stooped, they're going to Elvis concerts and dancing and all that and things I don't think is necessarily great but they think it is. But then when the person comes out all they did was get sober, there's no one meeting them at the gates, and one woman went to get him and he went to the off-sales before she could get there. There's no joining up with that one, I totally get it. Even at the four month stage I can see them joining up but it is limited, it's only for a limited period of time and I get that but some of them need a hell of a long time. Like the Auchincruive in Ayrshire, 3 years, that is a programme.

Daryl:

That is a programme, three years, that's a commitment for sure.

Colin:

That's a commitment. That's people that's been in a hundred rehabs or they come out of jail and have a few things...so much help that's actually doing them no good. Then they get into this three year programme. It's staged in one year and then two years but there's so much stuff behind that. That's a real programme. I know not everyone can get on it because it is limited on basis, but if you want someone to get better that's the way to do it.

Daryl:

Just a couple of points I wanted to pick up on again from that quote from that lady. She touched on how why alcohol is so glamourised and a topic of fun and hilarity on our tv, so regularly available and so attractively packaged. Do you have any thoughts on that Colin?

Colin:

I think it's horrendous at Christmas how you can get one, buy one get one free case of lager and it's like a bar of chocolate, you get an extra one, you can actually buy it and it's cheaper than price than is normally is to attract more people at the worst time of year for many and you're actually selling them lager that's cheaper that it used to be. And you know of course the people round about you is buying it and you see guys going out with cases and cases of the stuff and it's 'saving up for Christmas and the new year!'

Everywhere.

Daryl:

There's a little gift shop just around the corner from my house which is like my 'oh my god I forgot to buy a birthday present' kinda gift shop that you run to and hope to find something decent and I think 90% of the things in said gift shop is Prosecco-themed. Just Prosecco o'clock and this and that and it's fine if you're into that sort of thing but when you walk into the shop you just leave thinking Prosecco time is alright, that's a decent thing to get into, that feels like the life to live and it's just hard to walk away with that image these days. There's so much alcohol that's advertised to us at all times, it's associated so much with a glamorous lifestyle and it's not, you know. I think this quote from this lady is vodka, you know, it's a half bottle of vodka sneaked into your jacket or into a bag and drank on the fly. There's nothing that glamorous about it in the slightest. There's just that disconnect you know, that massive disconnect between reality and what we see on the TV.

Colin:

Yeah, it's that one, how do you celebrate without a bottle of champagne, how do you celebrate the birth of a baby, and you drown your sorrows at a funeral and yeah...how happy do you need to be and how sad do you need to be that you need a drink along with it to make it ever murkier? You can't have a celebration without it, that's obvious you know. One lady was saying I'm going on holiday but obviously I'm drinking because it's free, it's a package I'll get the holiday and the drink free. It's not free, it's at the beginning they bring you loads of drinks and you don't need to order them, they just keep bringing you drinks and you don't need to pay for it. Why don't we all go away?

Daryl:

I feel we could probably have an entirely separate podcast on the pros and cons of alcohol advertising and I'm sure we've got a lot of good resources on our website.

Colin:

Yeah that bit at the bottom you know, drink carefully or drink awareness week or something that yeah...on a can of cider!

Daryl:

Yeah, drink absurdly while at the same time drinking carefully, yeah.

Colin:

Opportunities lost and everything...the alcohol there and the absence of trust, they should be on here, that's really good that, that should be on here.

Daryl:

Yeah, absence of trust, lost relationships, confidence destroyed, opportunities lost, hopelessness, overwhelming despair and loneliness. Very striking words.

Colin:

That overwhelming despair and hopelessness. A lot of the people in my group talk about that opportunities lost because the son was good at school and university and my daughter had a fantastic job, she was working abroad, and then all of a sudden she was coming back and she's actually not worthless but she feels worthless and how does she build that back up to what she wants. So their expectations go up to go back to what she was and that expectation gets put onto parents on the addiction and again that's not going to change.

Overwhelming despair is horrendous isn't it.

Daryl:

Yeah that overwhelming despair really stood out to me when I first read it and that's exactly what that lady is feeling and what so many other family members are feeling out there...just overwhelming despair. Just real loss and that feeling that you can't change it, you know I'm too overwhelmed by it to do anything about it and I think that's sadly such a reality for the people we work with and you know, without those positive relationships in your life, without other people round about you to lift you up and give you that hope when you're feeling overwhelmed then you're really going to struggle with that. But that's exactly what's happening, people are cutting themselves off and isolating themselves from what's going on and they're just digging themselves into a hole and there's no one left to throw ropes down and pull them out. So yeah, quite striking that and sadly a reality for so many people.

Colin:

After reading that I'm starting to think of overwhelming despair and I'm starting to go oh my god, it is as bad as this, and it is as bad as that but the reality is people do change and change behaviours and get

something back. Might not be...might not be a prosecco day but it'll be a good day.

Daryl:

Aye!

Colin:

Right, will I go onto my last one?

Daryl:

Please do.

Colin:

This is a gentleman whose daughter is in a hell of a state at the moment, really struggling for help. And I asked him behaviours with alcohol could you give me a wee bit about it and he goes:

'To paraphrase a Raymond Chandler quote: "A person who drinks too much on occasion is still the same person as they were sober. An alcoholic, a real alcoholic, is not the same person at all. You can't predict anything about them for sure except that they will be someone you never met before."

The experience that my daughter is such a stranger to me diminishes me almost as much as alcohol diminishes her.'

So that man is saying he loves and hates his daughter and it's two different people, maybe. I know people talk about the Jekyll and Hyde and it's a great person when they're not drinking but is it great to separate that person and see the person that you love and not ignore the Hyde part but actually look at it like okay, this is the person they are at the moment but I still love this other person that's how I can have that hope and less despair and have a bit of hope for change...does that work do you think, Daryl?

Daryl:

Absolutely, you know, and I just think...I read this quote when you first shared it Colin and at the end that person also said 'the experience that my daughter is such a stranger to me diminishes me almost as much as alcohol diminishes her' just at the end there. Which is just really...that sentence just really pulled me over, I just thought that's astonishing you know, that idea that the person you love and care about, a person that you've nurtured and grown and helped to develop into the person they are today suddenly becoming a stranger before your very eyes, that is people's experiences. I don't know the person standing in front of me and you don't, when you're watching someone walk around as the shell of the person that you used to care and love so much about, it's really disconcerting and really confusing you know, how do you handle that, how do you deal with that, how do you respond to that person, how do you treat them you know? Because they just feel like an absolute stranger, just someone you've never met before.

Colin:

This causes the rollercoaster thing that we talk about, is when the daughter is lucid and cleared because she's got an appointment that she needs to make for money or anything else, then they see the daughter back again and it's like wow, how do I deal with this person that I know within the next two or

three days is going to be this Hyde character again and it's trying to deal with two people rather than just one person and you're parting heads going up and down like that trying to deal with that.

I think it's a really good quote. I get it. He's been to the men's group, we'll talk about in a minute or two, and he opened up about that there...yeah.

Daryl:

Aye, it's...it's just that terror you know? That everyday terror of not knowing whose in front of you. That constant uncertainty...the floor made of sand instead of concrete, you just feel like you're on constant uneven ground. It's so hard. And I think...family members, they want to help the person avoid those pitfalls and they dive in and just want to put the cotton wool around and we just want to protect them because we cannot let them do that to themselves again...we cannot let them become that stranger that we see. So we just sorta jump in and wrap that cotton wool around them and do everything within our power to grab control of the situation and try and protect them from all of those consequences they're bringing upon themselves which is such a normal, understanding, caring, compassionate reaction. But it's also a reaction that we sometimes have to step back from and go, is that the right thing to do? Is that right for me to wrap that cotton wool around me or do I kinda let this be and support this in a different way...a boundary way. I think that's what it got me thinking about certainly that quote, the idea of a stranger.

Colin:

Yeah, they're putting gin boundaries you know and it started off with the cleaning the clothes again in her flat and they kinda upped it bit by bit and it's got to the point where they're getting on with their lives in spite of what their loved one is doing which is CRAFT again. And it's working to a certain extent. There is the kinda rollercoaster but it's not the high...the huge one that happened every day, it's such a more even, they're actually getting more stable themselves, the daughter not at the moment, but there's hope there. She's doing bits and pieces but they've got a lot of control of their life back but I think one of the big things was lowering their expectations for what they were expecting from their loved one. It wasn't that she was going to be okay in six months or if we do this then it'll be okay and it'll be fixed. It's this fixed thing again...rather than fixing it, step back enough so that the person takes responsibility enough so that they try and fix it themselves with help and with love as much as possible. And being there, but being as you're talking about it, not in the chaos of it or every single say thinking of how do I sort this. They're actually meeting up with other families and going on wee trips which is cool.

There's definitely a change but he's still seeing these two people or one person he knows and sees so well being completely different. It's not like a slight change, it's like bizarrely different, different emotions, different behaviours, different communication, different way of looking, different way of sounding or talking. Everything is different.

Daryl:

I think for me sometimes the reality hits that actually that's how we initially see it, that Jekyll and Hyde mode, but as time moves on we come to accept that the person in front of us is the average, you know. They're somewhere in between there, they sit in that grey area. They're not one or the other, they're not the perfect person you thought they were and they're not the monster you saw when they're drunk. They're somewhere in the middle, in this average. And a big part of coping with that comes in accepting that, you know, actually they have changed, there's something different there. But there are still parts of them that are that person that I love very dearly and I'm going to help them to navigate this, so. I think that's the reality we face and we accept that we can move forward a little bit and accept that there are positives to be found in some of those negatives moving forward. Does that sound right?

Colin:

It's accepting that even some of the smallest changes are good and to look forward to that and to enjoy the small changes rather than 'okay, that's a wee change, we'll do a bigger one next' and that's like rushing it. It's taking that time that the person is going through so that you actually enjoy and see the positives so that it's moving forward rather than being stagnant or moving back. Any small change at all is positive.

Daryl:

Yeah, the small change is a big theme of today isn't it? We've talked a lot about that...small change. And keeping our expectations really grounded about what differences we might see in our loved ones from time to time and just celebrating those small changes can be such a useful tool too.

Colin:

Yeah talking about the drinking journey which is kinda played out...it is a journey and it is that person's journey. It's not your journey even though you're helping them along but it's their journey to do at their pace and their expectation and their beliefs on what they can achieve rather than what you think. It's hell of a hard to do it if it's your son or daughter or your partner or whatever else, but it's like right, what is it they're expecting today or tomorrow or next week. What do they expect to achieve?

Daryl:

Aye, I think it's that collaboration isn't it? That analogy of if you imagine the two of you sitting at a desk, if you're sitting at opposite sides of a desk and you're telling your loved one what to do and what you expect from them the power dynamics going to shift and you're going to get a bad reaction, you're not going to be able to empower them or trust them that they can move forward. But if you move your chair around to the other side of the table and sit beside them and say you know what, I don't have all the answers, I don't have the solution here, but I love you and I'm going to sit right here beside you and we're going to figure this one out together. Let's draw up a plan just now and we'll do it side by side rather than face to face, that's such a helpful way of moving forward with anyone.

Colin:

Yeah, that's cool. I like that analogy.

Daryl:

If you've been affected by any of the issues we've talked about today and you live in Inverclyde you can contact me directly daryl@sfad.org.uk. My details are all on the website, so you can get a hold of me there, so if you are in the Inverclyde area please feel free to reach out. Support can look like a whole load of different things, sometimes it's just a 10 minute conversation, once a month for some people and that's enough and for others it can be a lot more intense and maybe several hours a week is required and we're really flexible so just reach out.

I'd also like to plug our men's group as well. So Colin and I run a men's group and it's on the first and third Thursday of every Thursday between 5 and half 6 and that's I suppose just a space for men to socialise a little bit and explore difficulties and explore solutions together. So that's us, so thank you.

Colin:

11/11/2021

For myself in East Dunbartonshire my contact is colin@sfad.org.uk, quite similar to Daryl in that we offer one to ones, there's groups, because of Covid we're running 3 meetings a week in zoom where we do mindfulness and we do a writing group that you can join in. We also do Pilates, yoga and tai chi over a period of time so there's something for everybody – even me! So there's that and we've got a support meeting every week in the Baptist Church. You get in touch with me first and we can maybe do something about a referral and getting you started. But more than welcome.

Thank you.

Interview Ends

Exit:

Thank you for listening, if you're worried about somebody else's alcohol or drug use you can contact Scottish Families on 08080 10 10 11 or by email at helpline@sfad.org.uk. We also have webchat and further information on our website www.sfad.org.uk.