



Worried About A Loved One's Alcohol Or Drug Use?

by Ty Bechel

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Amare NFP and the Metro-East Recovery Council (MERC) are partnering on a new Family Support Network to assist family members and friends in need of support or resources due to a loved one's alcohol or drug use. The network, launched on September 15th, will provide a phone line manned by volunteers with lived experience.

According to Donna, a volunteer for the project, "It is important for family and friends calling in to the Family Support Network to be able to talk with someone who has been in their shoes. Our volunteers have experience in navigating all of the stress, worry, and emotion involved when a loved one is misusing alcohol or drugs, and we are ready to listen."

The Partnership to End Addiction estimates that "23.5 million Americans are addicted to at least one substance, equaling one in every ten people over the age of twelve." The families and friends of these individuals often experience serious emotional, physical, and financial stress as a result of their focus on trying to help their loved one recover.

"Individuals who have someone they care about who misuses alcohol and drugs often focus so much on the behavior and problems of their loved one that they forget to care about themselves. It feels like everything centers around the addiction, and the needs of the rest of the family become secondary", Donna added.

"Craig, also a Network volunteer, added that. "Family members and friends can also educate themselves on misuse of alcohol and drugs. That will improve their understanding of their loved one's situation and the way they relate to that loved one. This can help to facilitate their loved one's recovery, while at the same time bringing hope and peace for themselves."

Amare, a not-for-profit certified Recovery Community Organization (RCO), has provided recovery supports for individuals and family members for over six years. Amare's mission is to "educate, empower, and provide compassionate recovery support services for those suffering from drug and alcohol addiction and their families to strive toward the overall wellness and stability of our community." The Metro-East Recovery Council (MERC) is a coalition of committed community members from the Metro-East area. MERC is part of an initiative funded through the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Substance Use, Prevention, and Recovery and is focused on providing support for individuals and families in seeking or maintaining recovery.

Dave, from Amare, explains how the idea for the Family Support Network came about. "We have wanted to provide this kind of support system for family members and friends of individuals who are addicted to alcohol and drugs for a few years. When the Covid shutdowns started happening back in the spring, we worried about how people who misuse substances and their loved ones were handling this additional stress and loss of

resources. We met with the folks from the Metro-East Recovery Council and tried to focus on what we could do to help. After putting additional programs in place dedicated to supporting those who misuse alcohol and drugs, we realized a gap still existed for family and friend support. We hope the phone line helps to fill this gap.”

Individuals calling the dedicated phone line will be connected to a trained volunteer, who will offer not only understanding and support, but also a variety of resources. Craig added that, “We are able to mail a packet including: information on recovery and mental health support groups, educational information regarding addiction, local resources, and other important self-care tips for families and friends.”

Dave added that, “We just want to be there for people in our communities. We are not counselors, so we cannot offer professional services. What we will offer is support, empathy, and resources. We want people to know that there is someone in your community who cares and is willing to listen.”

The Family Support Network can be accessed by calling 314-669-1184. While Amare and MERC are primarily focused on serving Madison and St. Clair County residents, the Family Support Network is open to anyone in the Metro-East area.