

WHITE PAPER: ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Parents of Addicted Loved Ones (PAL) uses an evidence-based, Christian-led program to save and change lives. When families first walk into PAL, they are often completely broken. They fear their loved ones may die if nothing changes. PAL provides critical emotional support and a simple, loving program of action for parents to follow. As parents learn healthier ways to deal with the issues surrounding substance use disorder and begin to set healthy boundaries, their loved ones—no longer enabled in their addiction—often seek recovery. All family members (ages 18 and over) of the individual suffering from substance use disorder are welcome.

The program

Parents of Addicted Loved Ones (PAL) provides hope, through education and support, to parents of addicted loved ones.

It is a support group of parents helping parents, using a structured curriculum created by professionals in the treatment and recovery industry. Weekly meetings offer addiction education and support at no charge for parents and family members who are trying to save an adult son or daughter from addiction. The focus is on educating and supporting the PAL member rather than the individual who is using.

Parents of addicts are often paralyzed by a fear that if they change their behavior, something horrible will happen to their child. As a result, parents get locked into a cycle of enabling that is difficult to break. Parents, through no fault of their own, will bankrupt themselves, endanger

their marriages, and sacrifice their own health in the name of “helping” an addicted loved one. The fear and guilt compounds as their actions continue to prove ineffective.

PAL’s curriculum centers on educating families on all the topics common to their situation—how to respond to guilt and fear, how to discern between healthy helping and enabling,

what are the common behavior patterns of an addict in recovery vs. not in recovery, and many more. For the first time in years, parents are able to find emotional relief, set healthy boundaries, and experience genuine connection with others. Ironically, the parents getting healthy is often what opens the door for the addict to change his or her life as well.



Kim Humphrey, PAL Executive Director, (left) with founder Mike Speakman, LISAC, at a PAL event.




PAL is answering a deep need over the past three years as more than 120 TV and newspaper stories across the country have featured the organization.

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PAL let (my mom) know that she wasn't alone. PAL let her know that it wasn't her fault. More than anything, PAL taught her that acceptance doesn't mean that you are giving up on your child.

- Recovering Addict

The history

The PAL model was created and started by Mike Speakman, an Arizona-based Licensed Substance Abuse Counselor, in 2006. He created the curriculum at the suggestion of some of his recovery clients, who saw the need for something to help their families. The demand was great and the number of meetings grew until it was apparent the program answered a true need in the community. Parents of Addicted Loved Ones formed as a nonprofit in March 2015. 

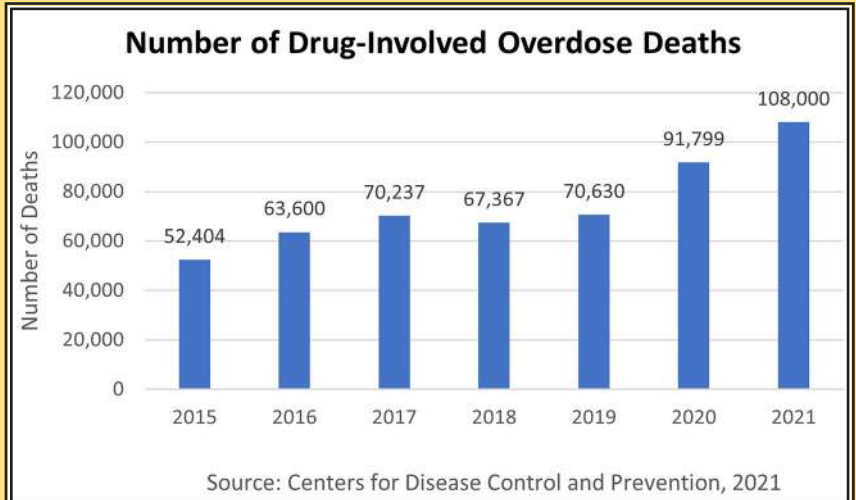
The problem

The United States is in the grip of an unprecedented health crisis, recently declared by the President as a national Public Health Epidemic – the addiction to opioids, both legal pain killers and illegal drugs.

Yet for every death and for every single individual derailed by drug abuse, there are multiple lives lingering in the shadows, teetering on ruin as collateral damage – families of the addicted.

The toll taken is severe, as families – driven by love and desperation – find their own lives driven to ruin in a path parallel to their addicted loved one. The family fabric is destroyed on many levels:

- **Financial** – The cost to parents of an adult addict can easily drain family bank accounts: supporting adult children with places to live, food, phones; unrelenting theft on behalf of the addict desperate to fund their habit; unsuccessful stays in treatment and recovery centers. Retirement accounts are drained, and parents are often driven to financial ruin.
- **Physical** – Not only does the addict suffer physically, but it is common for family members to experience life-threatening health issues related to stress, including cardiac problems, high blood pressure and cancer.
- **Emotional** – As if the financial and physical impact isn't enough, the destruction includes far reaching emotional issues. Marriages fail. Other children fall through the cracks. Mental illness. All are common



The number of deaths due to drug overdose virtually doubled between 2015 and 2021. Americans are now more likely to die from a drug overdose than a car accident.

symptoms of a family struggling to handle a loved addict without healthy coping skills.

But there is hope.

A study based in Georgia indicates that families have the MOST DIRECT influence over the addicted (*Jaffe, Meyer & Stonebraker, Treatment Parameters and Relapse in an Enthusiastic Sobriety IOP For Adolescents and Young Adults*). The health of the family has a direct impact on the health of the addicted, and ultimately may be the most meaningful path to recovery – not just for the family, but for the addict. 🤝

The facts:

- **The nation's overdose epidemic continues to change and become worse. The epidemic affects every state and now is driven by illicit fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, methamphetamine and cocaine, often in combination or in adulterated forms.** (AMA, 2022)
- **Alcohol and drugs are involved in about 80% of offenses leading to incarceration in the United States.** (National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence (NCAAD), 2015)
- **DEA lab testing reveals that 4 out of every 10 pills with fentanyl contain potentially lethal doses. The DEA is now seizing well over 20 million pills annually.** (DEA counterfeit pills fact sheet 2021)
- **More people are diagnosed with substance use disorder** in the U.S. than from all types of cancer combined.
- **The cost of substance abuse (not including tobacco) is \$520 billion per year**, the result of health care, crime, and lost work productivity. Not included is the price to society that goes beyond financial costs, including the spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C; deaths from overdose; effects on unborn children; unemployment, domestic abuse, divorce and homelessness. (*National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2017*)
- **Addiction burdens communities**, with strains from economic loss, heightened demand for health and mental health services, decreased safety, higher overdose and suicide deaths, and increased law enforcement training and incarceration rates.

How it works

Weekly group meetings – The PAL program is built on weekly meetings, held at no cost to participants, led by trained peer volunteer facilitators who have all experienced the addiction of a loved one. Using a model of parents helping parents, the educational component consists of nine core lessons, plus supplemental lessons and occasional guest speakers. Meetings cover various topics of addiction and recovery with the goal of building the behavioral and communication tools families need when dealing with the stressful situations they face when their adult child suffers from addiction. Individuals can attend until they feel empowered to handle their situation.

Community Education Seminars – PAL hosts seminars to raise awareness about topics including drug addiction, mental health services, suicide prevention, Narcan training and “Dump the Drugs” events.

Support – PAL’s dedicated volunteers also speak about the organization to local service organizations and at state and county conferences, take phone calls from people seeking help, lead training for volunteer facilitators and host a robust website full of resources.

To date, the organization’s growth has been organic, through word-of-mouth or from website searches and media exposure. National coverage has significantly increased website traffic and inquiries about meetings, including the cover story of Money magazine. The organization has been featured in more than 100 broadcast and print news stories across the country in the past two years.

That growth is continuing to increase at an astounding rate. There are currently a total of 189 groups, plus five virtual meetings, and the organization is now represented in 37 states.

Expanding beyond the borders of the United States has begun as a virtual meeting takes place in the UK and we have other requests from Australia and Canada.

We do all this, and maintain our conviction that the services of PAL will be provided to all participants at no cost. 🌍



PAL media coverage extends from the Washington Post to the Juneau Empire to the cover story on Money magazine and to TV stations all over the country.



“We had indeed been loving our son to death, loving him without boundaries.”

- PAL Parent

WHAT MAKES PAL DIFFERENT?

What sets PAL apart from other organizations that work with families of addicts/alcoholics is that we use evidence-based practices and incorporate a two-part meeting structure:

- 1. Educational component** – Rather than leaving the family to educate themselves outside of meetings, every PAL meeting has an educational component featuring a proven curriculum which addresses the effects of substance use disorder on families/individuals, and informs families of healthy responses to their loved one’s behavior.
- 2. Peer-to-peer support** – Rather than leaving a family to seek suggestions before or after meetings, PAL encourages cross-talk and suggestions to take place during the meeting. Our experience has shown this approach greatly improves the likelihood of family members being willing to change their behavior and thus improve their lives.

We believe that both elements of PAL meetings are critical to effecting change in a family’s situation over time, and our program evaluation confirms this to be true.



The proof

Evidence-based training: An independent evaluation conducted by Northern Arizona University professors Dr. Cindy Scott-Janicik, EdD and Kristen Alamiz, MEd, MSW, LCSW, found that PAL is remarkably successful in helping families find a healthy means to deal with adult addiction.

“The PAL curriculum is strongly rooted in a clinical practice that emphasizes an understanding of adult development and family dynamics. In addition, the strengths-based perspective used in the PAL curriculum speaks to Family Systems Perspectives and some of the most widely applied Motivational Theory therapies used in addiction treatment today.”

From the reports: Findings from the review further suggest that part of PAL’s success lies in the program’s ability to move beyond the philosophy of traditional programs that advocate an abrupt, seemingly callous end of enabling and co-dependency. Instead, PAL focuses on helping parents set firm boundaries, with love; an approach that is often more in-line with parents’ emotional limitations. The curriculum also provides parents the option of a pathway that allows the addict to move back into the family structure once the destructive behavior ends.”

Researchers also found that “the complementary nature of PAL places the program in a unique position to serve as a referral resource for governmental agencies (e.g., police department, fire departments) struggling to help community members parent adult addicts.”

Key report findings include:

- The PAL curriculum is strongly rooted in a clinical practice that emphasizes an understanding of adult development and family dynamics.
- Helped improve the participants’ mental and physical health.
- Provided participants with practical strategies to stop enabling their loved one’s addiction and to set firm boundaries.
- Provided participants with strategies for supporting their loved one’s recovery.

The report published July 2021 used pre- and post-tests to measure the impact of the PAL curriculum not only on members, but on their addicted loved ones. The results have some exciting implications, indicating that PAL members:

- Were less likely to engage in enabling and co-dependency behaviors.
- Felt more hopeful about their future.
- Expressed an improvement in their sense of well-being and that they felt happier.
- Their addicted loved one was less likely to misuse substances.



PAL has gained a reputation as content experts in the area of addiction and its impact on the family. Kim Humphrey, Executive Director, moderates a panel on “Trends, Treatment and Tools: Confronting Arizona’s Opioid Epidemic.”



NAU researcher Dr. Cindy Scott-Janicik reports on the findings of the remarkable effectiveness of PAL, using a combined evidence-based curriculum and peer-to-peer support.

The final point indicates that families who participate in the PAL program could impact not only their own health, but that of their loved one as well. The latest report (Jan. 2023) confirms the accuracy of earlier studies. 🌍



YOU ARE NOT ALONE

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