

Oasis for teens living with alcoholic parents

by Kathryn Vukovljak on June 15, 2016 in News



Alateen sponsor Lauren, left, with 14-year-old May...

“A little voice in my head tells me to keep coming here,” says May. Photo by Andrew Finch

LIVING with an alcoholic parent can be as damaging for children as it is for the person drinking, says 14-year-old May Davis, not her real name, who says she’s found support and a safe place at the Friday-night Alateen meetings held in the Griffin Centre.

“My mum’s an alcoholic and although she has been sober for six years, I’ll never forget what it was like when she was drinking,” says May.

“She was a bit crazy and she would drink a lot – once she started in the day she didn’t stop and she would be fighting a lot with my dad.”

Alateen supports 12-17-year-old friends and relatives of alcoholics and is part of Al-Anon, sharing its familiar “12 Steps” and traditions to help young people realise they’re not alone.

May says the teens are supported by sponsors, who are adult members of Al-Anon and who monitor the meetings.

Alateen sponsor 33-year-old Lauren Jones, not her real name, says she has been in Al-Anon for five years and has now separated from her alcoholic husband.

“We keep it private out of respect for the friends and relatives, because the drinking is their story, not ours,” she says.

“When we’re at meetings, we leave our personas at the door – we don’t talk about what we do or where we work. What that leaves is our inner stories, experience and strength.”

Lauren says that while she was married, she felt that no one understood what she was going through and that she knew her friends wouldn’t be able to relate.

“It was difficult to deal with, I had never been around such consistent drinking and I felt ashamed and that it was my fault,” she says.

“I can see how important it is that at Alateen there’s no fear of judgement or of anyone finding out what’s going on.”

Lauren says that although her husband had been a drinker before they got married, she hadn’t realised the extent of it.

“I didn’t see how chaotic our lives were and I was in denial for a long time,” she says.

“Alcoholics can be very intelligent, smart, charismatic, educated and hard-working – it’s often very well hidden and that can be confusing for children in that environment.

“My husband was emotionally and physically unavailable to our two young daughters, which was hard to see.”

Lauren says that what helped her was changing her behaviour and reactions to the drinking.

“I’d been forgetting to keep my own behaviour and my own life in check,” she says.

“The program gave me permission to give myself what I needed, as well as coping mechanisms.

“I’m glad to be able to extend this to others as a sponsor, and offer warmth, care and guidance at the start. That’s the cyclical nature of Al-Anon and Alateen and you get the benefit of generations of advice.”

May says that attending the meetings had initially been her mum’s idea, and that they have helped her realise that alcoholism is a disease and that none of it was her fault.

“Alateen helps me with the family day to day, and to understand why they do certain things,” she says.

“If mum is angry I can see it’s not my fault instead of taking it personally. I can see the reasons.

“I have a little sister who was only two when mum stopped drinking and I’m glad she doesn’t remember what it was like.

“I know everyone here won’t judge me for what I talk about, whether it’s problems I’ve been having at school or at home.

“A little voice in my head tells me to keep coming here.”

Alateen meetings are held at the Griffin Centre (Room 11, Level 1), Genge Street, Civic, 5pm-6pm, every Friday. More information from 6249 8866 or email monaro.alanon@gmail.com