

Addicted to Living

By Fiona Murray

The recent and tragic death of **One Direction band member**, *Liam Payne* has been widely written about and much of the focus has centred on addiction and the terrible consequences for victims and their families. For parents of teens or young adults with an addiction, it may stir up feelings of utter hopelessness.

Many parents realise very late the extent of their child's drink or drug habits and the scale of the problem. They desperately struggle to comprehend how this has happened to their family on their watch.

Other families are perhaps already trying to deal with the addiction. The individual concerned and/or extended family may have already signed up into a programme or with a counselling group.

Whatever the road, it may seem unbearably long, endless, sometimes utterly hopeless.

I spoke recently to *Colm (real name withheld see below). He told me about his journey of addiction. This will unfortunately reflect what many families are going through or have been through. But it is also a story that also offers some hope for dark times.

Colm comes from a good, normal, supportive and caring family. As a teenager his worst indulgence was smoking cigarettes. In secondary school, he was diagnosed with dyslexia. This hampered his academic progress. He was bullied and began experimenting with cannabis and became involved with a gang of older lads, who dabbled in ecstasy and other drugs.

He lived a double life of sorts, living at home with his family, but also immersed in escapism and embracing a perceived exciting lifestyle of drug fuelled rave parties with his new peer group. He left school at 16 years old. He was seen by his friends as a social animal. The reality was that he was the boy who was camouflaging his struggle with social anxiety.

His parents did not immediately recognise the signs of drug abuse. They were worried about him and had him assessed for ADHD. Colm's difficulties escalated. He needed more highs to get the hit he needed and, he was no longer able to hold down a job. He was charged with drunk driving and his life fell apart. This was a nightmare scenario for his parents and he was unrecognisable from any of his siblings.

The downward spiral continued and Colm was the victim of an attempted kidnapping on him and a very violent attempt at endangering his life. He was also arrested for the sale and supply of drugs. The family home was raided. He was publicly named in the papers as a drug pusher. This broke his parent's hearts. They, in their innocence, tried to sue the papers for defamation and when they found out the truth, they were devastated. Following an argument, he left home.

His parents and siblings tried to get him back on track, at various times in various ways, but all to no avail. He was lost to them at that point. His father drove the streets looking for him. Colm said that at that point he didn't care that he was hurting his nearest and dearest. He was a confirmed addict and he went on to progress to more serious drugs such as crack cocaine and heroin. He ended up serving a prison sentence.

Just over 3 years ago he experienced his darkest hour. Awakening from an accidental overdose with a heroin needle still in his arm, he realised he had hit rock bottom.

With support and following months of detoxing, rehab, and AA meetings Colm began to emerge from his drug fuelled world. Step by step, with professional help and the ongoing encouragement of loved ones, he began to piece together a new life for himself.

This meant changing his friend/contact group entirely. He began working out in the gym and for the first time in many years, he took pride in his appearance. He found the instant gratification that came after his workouts and the satisfaction that subsequently came with this new healthy habit encouraging. All of this led to his achieving a fitter physique and consequently caused a shift in his mind-set.

He continued to achieve new goals and to become the best version of himself. Colm is now embarking on competitive body building contests and has become a much sought-after personal trainer. He returned to college to study his newly found interest, sports nutrition, from which he graduated recently and now Colm is planning to open his own business. His parents and family are immensely proud of him and the personal battles he's overcome.

For parents going through a similar struggle the story of Colm's successful turnaround should inspire hope and for those still in addiction to motivate themselves to reclaim their lives.

"Addiction can happen to anyone, from any socio-economic group, at any time," said Lorraine Cusack, who is based in the North West of Ireland. Lorraine has dealt with numerous families experiencing addictions as well as doing work and research in the area.

"Parents often feel an immense feeling of shame and guilt if their child gets caught up in the world of addiction," said Lorraine.

She is eager to draw awareness to and shine a light on removing the stigma of addiction.

"It is usually not the parents' fault if their child develops an addiction. Judgement does not help. Many parents feel like a failure but often they are simply trying to deal with outside forces and influences that are bringing harm and chaos into family life. It is terribly important to stop the blame game," added Lorraine.

The important thing is for parents to realise they are not alone. There is expert help out there in many forms to fit all needs and supports. These can be face to face or telephone support along with online and community resources.

It is crucial for anyone currently going through addiction in any form to seek help. With the right support, drawing on Colm's story, it is possible for a lost life to be turned around and to begin again.

Fiona Murray

Parentline

**Name changed to ensure confidentiality. My sincere thanks to Colm for his honesty and generosity of self and sharing his personal journey. (He has asked to mention that his contact Instagram page is available on request) and to Lorraine for her contribution to this article.*

Helplines

www.mqi.ie Merchants Quay addiction / Family support services. Tel.: **01 524 0160**

www.rutlandcentre.ie Rutland Centre. **Tel. 01 4946358 (24hr)**

www.drugs.ie National Drugs helpline HSE **Tel. 1800 459 459 (Freephone)**