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# WHAT IS THE FRASER EAST OVERDOSE RESPONSE PROJECT (FEOR)?



**FEOR is a community-based, participatory action research partnership initiated in January 2018.**

Our goal is to identify practical strategies that are likely to be effective in reducing deaths due to unwitnessed fentanyl poisoning in the Fraser East region.

# WHY FRASER EAST?

When we started...



Higher percentages  
of deaths occurring in private  
residences

2X

In 2017, people in Chilliwack  
were twice as likely to die as  
the result of an OD event (1:15)  
compared to people living in  
the DTES (1:29).



The locations of deaths  
were spread out over larger  
geographical areas

The Fraser East has had some of the highest rates of **fatal overdoses** in BC

# 22 Study Participants

Our study examined the reasons people decide to use drugs alone, the social-relational contexts in which these decisions are made, and implications for overdose prevention.

Sample Size: **22**

Total recruitment: n=22 PWUD (people who use drugs) at risk of OD



## Age

**35**

MEAN AGE  
(range 25–54)

## Ethnicity

Caucasian (60%)

Indigenous (32%)

Other (8%)



## Housing

Over half living in apartment or house

**54%**

HOUSED



## Financial Situation

**41%**

often have "a hard time making ends meet."

# Using ALONE:

**People who use drugs consider "risks" in relation to drug use in complex and nuanced ways, which can be more immediate than, and exceed, unidimensional understandings of "risk" communicated by public health professionals...**

*I used alone to keep it from my kids, right?... I didn't want other people to know. I didn't want my family to know, a lot of my friends didn't know. I didn't want my kids' friends to know...*

*It was a shame factor. To me, addiction is a very shameful thing, so I wanted to keep it hidden. Like my Dad, he could tell right away... I would use by myself because I didn't want anyone to know. Who wants to watch someone tie themselves off and shoot dope in their arm?*

## **These risks include:**



**risks to their relationships**



**risks to their reputation that could impact their job, housing, or social standing**



**risks related to reported parole violations**

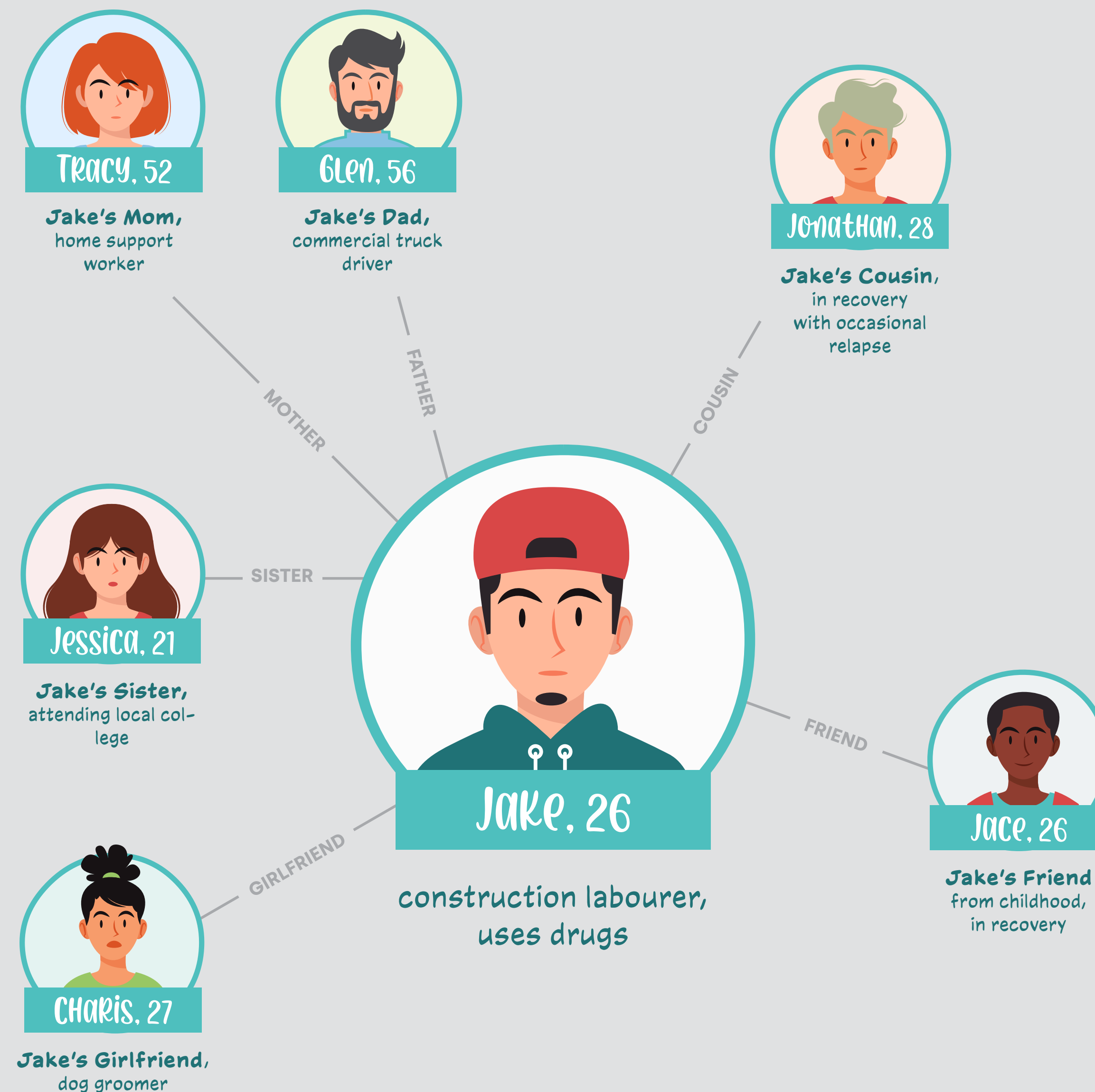


**risks of losing children to apprehension.**

# FAMILY & LOVED ONES

Participants perceived themselves to be assessing a potential risk of overdose alongside the certainty of harming connections to loved ones and much needed supports that would occur if their use were made visible.

In addition, experiences of participants suggest that critical incidents that lead to disconnection from loved ones can heighten overdose-related risks, particularly when individual resilience is worn thin by isolation, stigma, and shame.



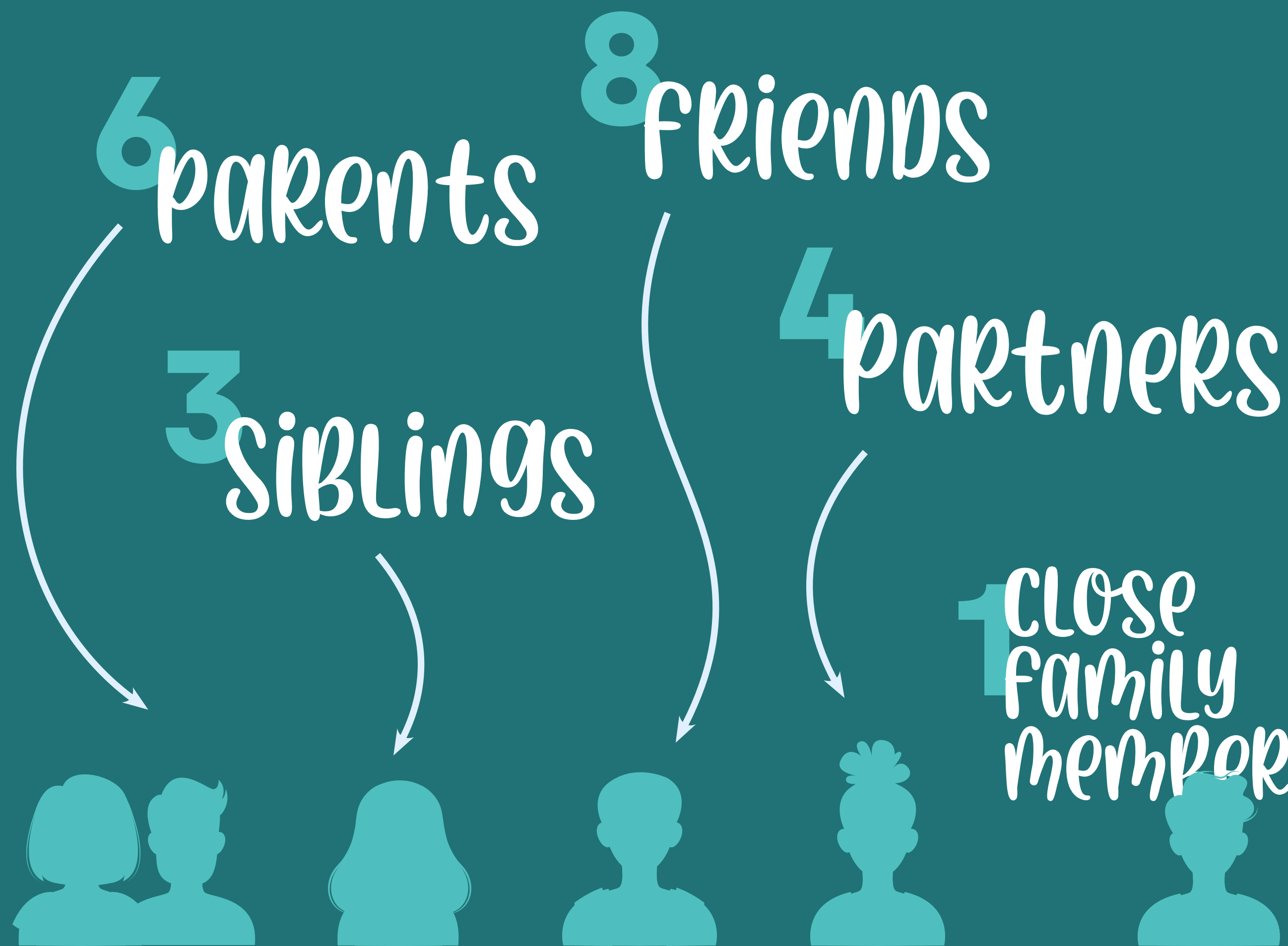
# FAMILY & LOVED ONES

In March 2020, FEOR began a new study grounded in findings from the previous interviews with people at risk of overdose. These findings indicated the importance of relationships with loved ones as mediating and mitigating risks related to using alone.

The team conducted...

# 22 Interviews

with friends and family members







## Helping + Healing

### Significant Relationships

- Family
- Peers
- Community
- Personal God

### Beliefs and Values

- Acceptance
- Personal Philosophies
- Self Reliance

### Positive Experiences

- Helping
- Recovery
- Knowledge

### Professional Supports

- Groups
- Counselling
- System
- Key Ally

SOMETIMES STRESSORS CAN LEAD INTO HEALING



## Stressors

### Experiences

- Close contact with the impacts of substance use
- Negative System Interactions
- Strained Relationships
- Personal Harm (trauma, abuse housing insecurity, relapse)
- Competing Life Stressors

### Feelings and Perceptions

- Feeling Alone
- Feeling Used
- Overwhelming Pain
- Moral Distress
- Shame and Stigma
- Exhaustion
- Denial
- Dissapointed Hopes
- Uncertainty
- Guilt

MOST OFTEN STRESSORS LEAD INTO CRISIS



## Crisis Points

Broken Relationships

Isolation

Burnout

Giving Up

Withdrawal of Support

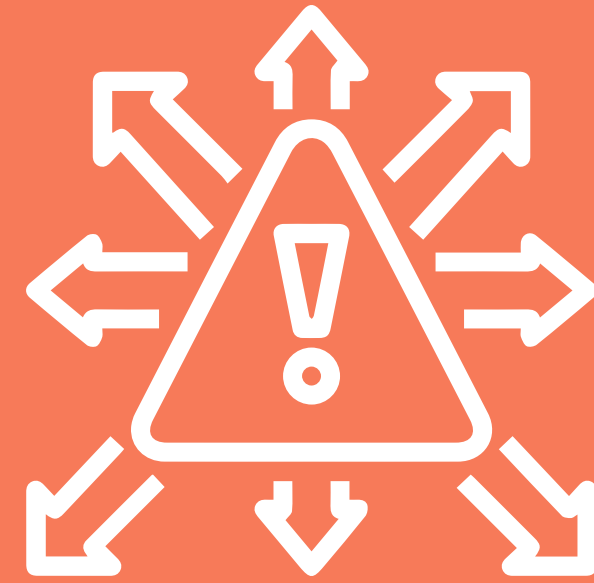
**DEATH**

Sickness

Paralysis

Homelessness

Relapse



**Emerging Themes:**  
Significant Stressors



# SIGNIFICANT STRESSORS

## Feeling Overwhelmed

Many of the stressors were emotional in nature, and feelings of **overwhelming fear and pain** were most pervasive in the data. Feelings of **exhaustion and shutdown**, uncertainty, and **moral distress** were also prominent.

At this point I'm so consumed with my kid, I don't know how to help.

MOTHER SUPPORTING SON

I have a Facebook account full of dead people from overdoses. My son overdosing like 20 times in the course of two years. And it used to be like when somebody would die, it was emotionally traumatizing for me. And because it's happened so much over the last four years, I'd say that-and this is a really shitty thing to say-but it's almost expected.

MOTHER SUPPORTING SON





# SIGNIFICANT STRESSORS

## SHAME & EMBARRASSMENT

Participants described feelings of shame and embarrassment as **inhibiting their desire or ability to seek help.**

As much as I try to be open and forthright and work on not hiding what's going on in our family... there's all this shame and whatever that goes along with it.

MOTHER SUPPORTING SON

[My grief] was sudden and unexpected, and I didn't feel that I could open up about it, because it was drugs, so I couldn't be honest. There's a-it's still a dirty little secret, right?

WOMAN SPEAKING OF LOSS OF HUSBAND





# SIGNIFICANT STRESSORS

## Complexities within social networks

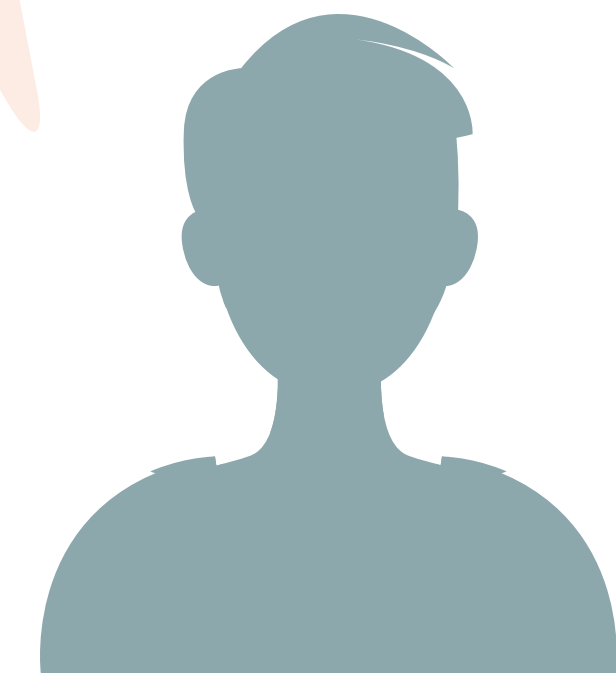
Other family members can be a source of support for family and friends; however, **these relationships can also carry stress and strain**, often having to do with 1) differences in approaches or perceptions of the issues surrounding the situation, or 2) the past drug use of the family and friends that has already caused stress with other family members.

Marriage gets rocky at times. The relationship is super tough between my son and the rest of the family.

**MOTHER SUPPORTING SON**

OK. This is the fucked up part. My family basically turned their back on me.

**MAN SUPPORTING OTHER FAMILY MEMBER**





# SIGNIFICANT STRESSORS

## Reaching the Limit

One of the most significant stressors involved experiences around **living with someone who uses drugs**, both in terms of the burden of decision-making and also related trauma and harms.

I can navigate the disability, I can navigate the mental illness. You can't navigate drug use and the chaos that brings. The distrust and the dishonesty and the theft and the manipulation and the—you can't navigate that.

MOTHER SUPPORTING HER SON  
(CURRENTLY IN SUPPORTIVE LIVING SITUATION)

I had to ask him to leave. I said, "You're not putting our house at risk right now." ... Sometimes I feel bad about that, but I had to think of our family as well.

MAN SUPPORTING BROTHER





# SIGNIFICANT STRESSORS

## Negative System Interactions

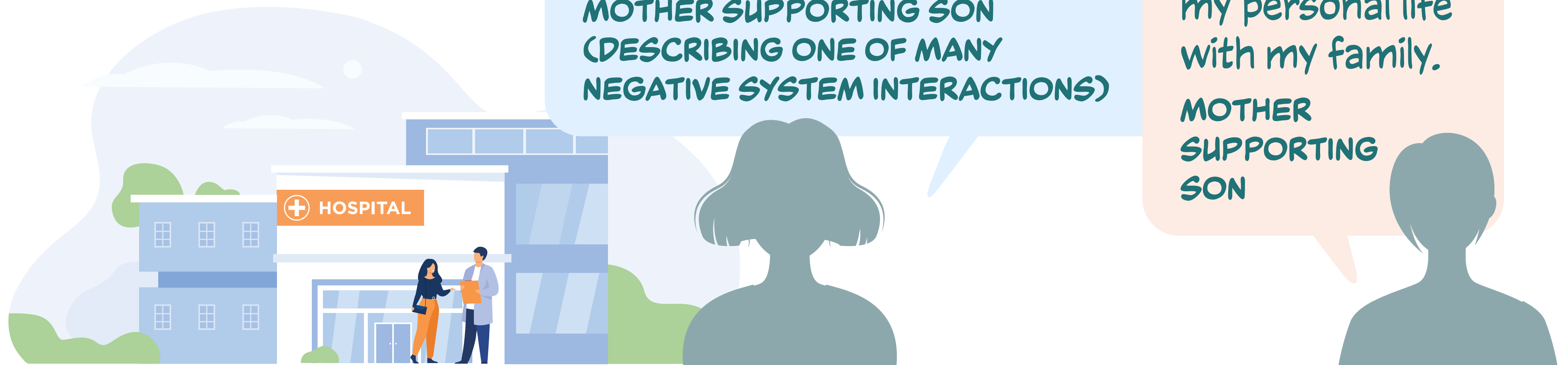
Although the interview tool was designed to unpack strengths and resiliency, some of the densest data concerned negative system interactions.

And I'm thinking how many other parents show up with your kids everyday, "What can I do? What can I do? What can I do?" Like maybe lots of them do but shouldn't you be nicer to them? Shouldn't you be helpful to them? So that was pretty horrific.

**MOTHER SUPPORTING SON  
(DESCRIBING ONE OF MANY  
NEGATIVE SYSTEM INTERACTIONS)**

I have lost faith in the system. So I don't really reach out anymore to access help in my personal life with my family.

**MOTHER  
SUPPORTING  
SON**





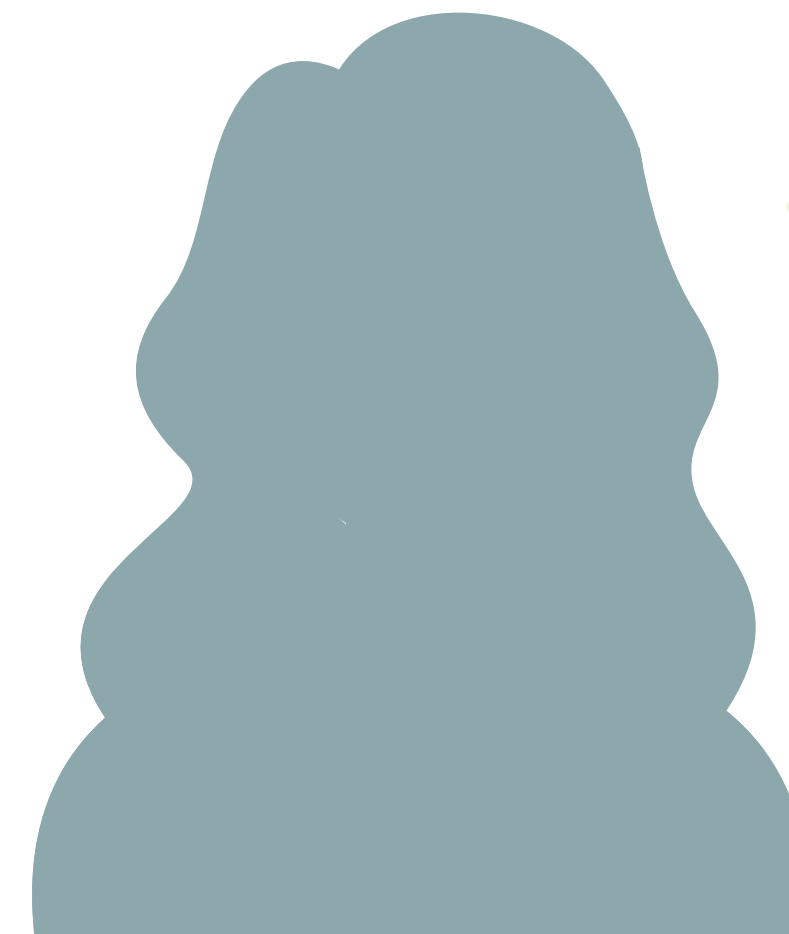
# SIGNIFICANT STRESSORS

I mean, just I guess to leave with a word, like we paid a hell of a price of this. You know, my financial-I paid a hell of a price for this, lost friendships, lost family, lost livelihood, hopes and dreams. And [name] paid the ultimate price.

WOMAN SPEAKING OF DEATH OF HUSBAND

## Trauma & Loss

Participants spoke of many experiences of harm from supporting a loved one, including **trauma, abuse or violence, homelessness, or personal relapse.**







Emerging Themes:  
Alleviating Factors



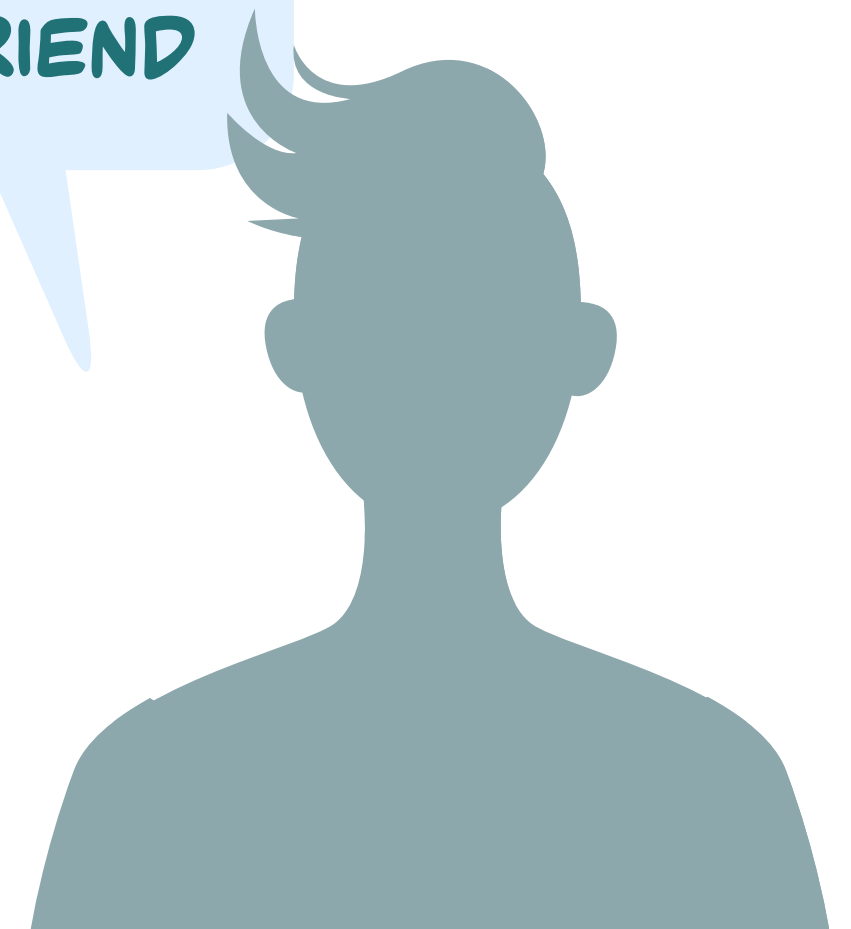
# ALLEVIATING FACTORS

## Community Champions

Given the preponderance of negative system interactions over positive ones, **professional allies who were willing to go above and beyond** their mandates became key supports and vital sources of help to some participants.

Well my family and I aren't really in contact so there's none of that really. ... So [name] -he's not my friend nor my family. That's why I say he changed my life where he's gone above and beyond."

**YOUNG WOMAN SUPPORTING FRIEND**





# ALLEVIATING FACTORS

## Lived Experience

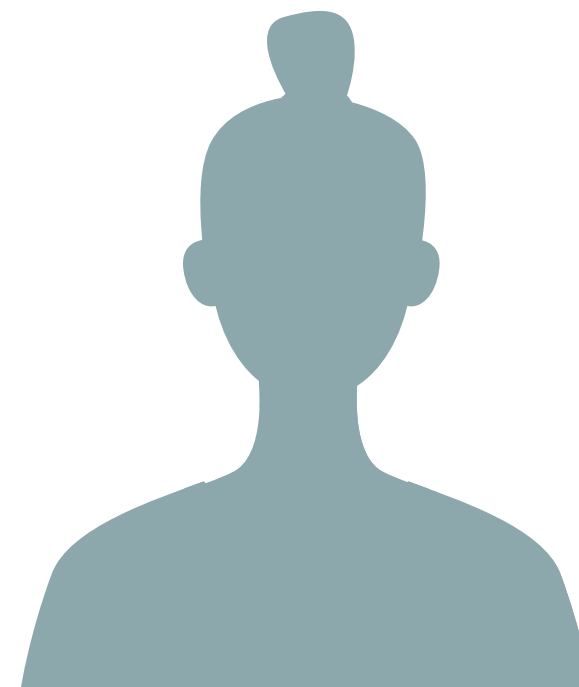
In supportive relationships, what seemed to matter most was **shared experience and understanding** rather than the exact nature of the relationship (friend, cousin, sibling, colleague, etc.).

And if you have a big enough community, a big enough community or relationship, whatever I'm going through at the time, I will always find someone within that big array of people who has experienced the same thing.

**WOMAN SUPPORTING SON**

Like there's a lot of young moms and otherwise where I live, and just connecting with them, a lot of us have the same-have been on the same journey. Yeah, that's good enough support for me. That's good.

**WOMAN SUPPORTING EX-PARTNER**





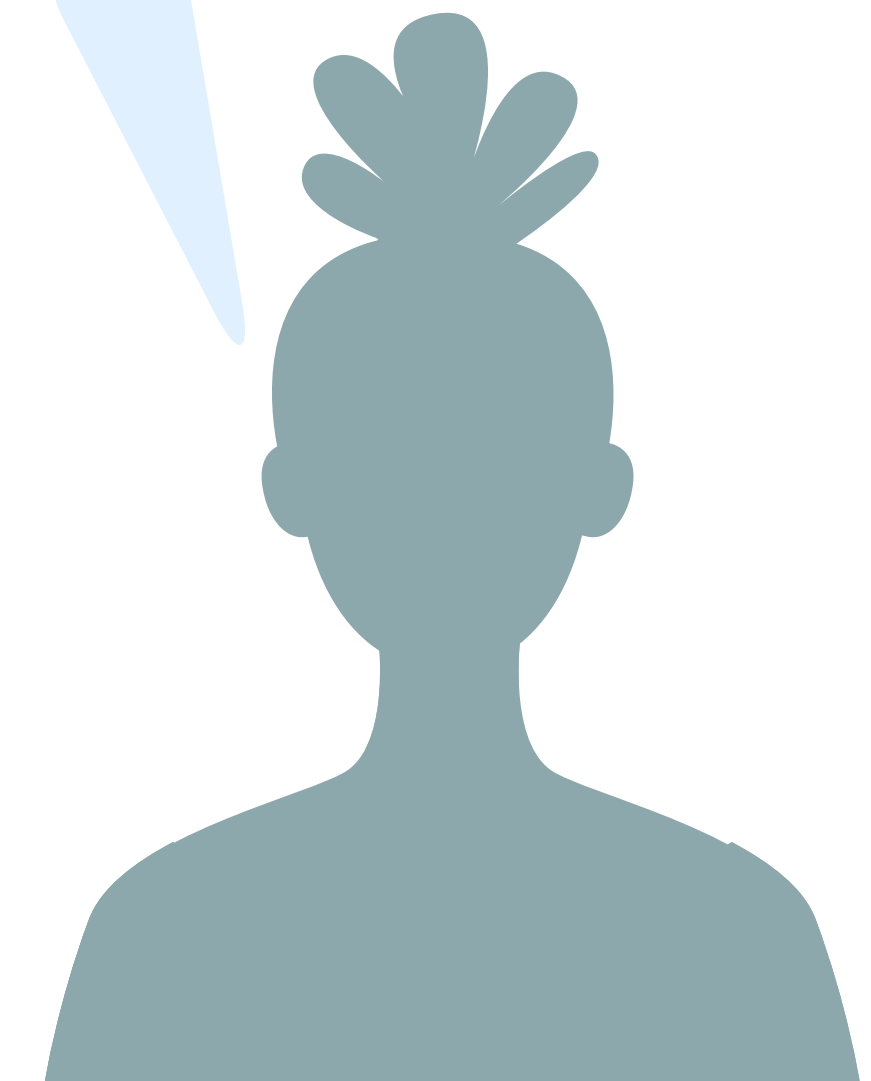
# ALLEVIATING FACTORS

## Compassion & Helping Others

Helping others emerged as a significant positive force for substance-affected individuals, particularly if they had lived experience with substance use themselves.

Like, I just don't carry it around like this shameful bag of shit on my back anymore. Now it's a toolbox, right? A bright, shiny toolbox.

**WOMAN SUPPORTING EX-PARTNER**





# ALLEVIATING FACTORS

## Setting Boundaries

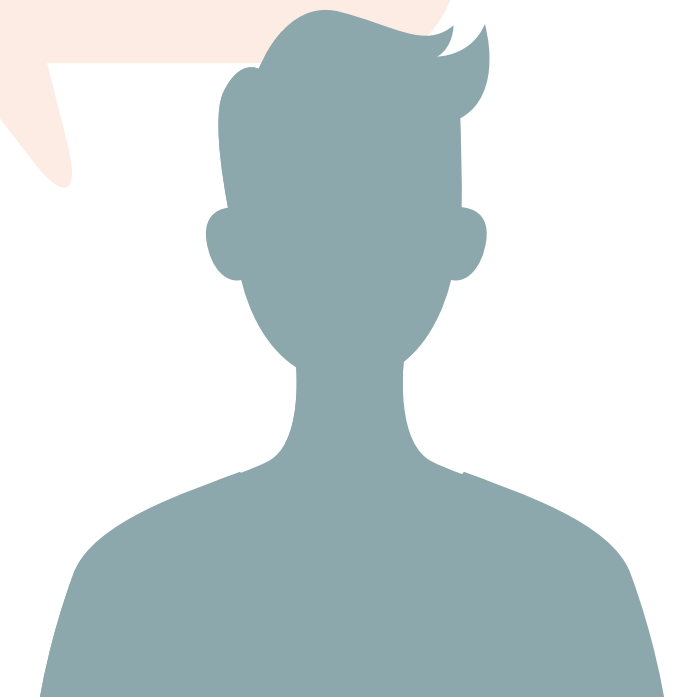
Beliefs around the **limits and the potential of personal agency** seems to be an indicator of positive coping.

I have learned that it's not my job to fix them.

WOMAN SUPPORTING SURROGATE SON

But being able to have hope in something outside of ourselves means that we can look in the mirror and say, oh shit, I'm not ultimately 100% responsible.

MAN SUPPORTING BROTHER



# Themes Driving Next Steps:

1. Illicit substance use and its surrounding environment are highly complex, presenting no clear road map for successfully navigating a fraught and emotionally wrenching situation.
2. For multivariate reasons, caregivers and loved ones are often simultaneously dealing with a lack of support from from their own family or friends as well as professional systems.
3. caregivers and loved ones indicate the need for more support than they are currently receiving.

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