

## IMPACT ON LOVED ONES

### Overview

Face It TOGETHER (FIT) knows that having a caring, empowered, and healthy loved one (LO) on the journey alongside the person with the disease (PWD) has been undervalued in the addiction wellness process. When LO's build strength, they increase their capacity to tolerate what they can't change and change what they can. Since early 2015, FIT recognized the importance of addressing the urgent needs of the individuals who loved and supported the PWD that our coaches were already working with. With FIT data supporting both the need for quality programming and the positive outcomes of our interim efforts, in early 2017 FIT developed a high-quality, high-performing program for LO Addiction Management Coaching. An initial step was to conduct a qualitative focus group with FIT LO clients. The key evaluation questions were: How well does our coaching work? How have our peer coaches helped? How can we improve to help others?

### Methodology

Current and past LO clients were asked to participate. First contact was made by their LO coach and then by the evaluator. Seven people agreed, but only five could attend once a date was selected. The focus group was held at a local affiliate office the evening of July 26, 2017. Participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent and the proceedings were recorded. Recording was coded so results could be presented thematically. Of the five participants, all were female; four were parents of a person with the disease (PWD); two were spouses; all the PWDs they were supporting were in various stages of continuing to struggle with their disease.

### Results

#### Empowerment

"I didn't think there was an issue...and so I came into [FIT] and said this is what my [spouse] does, is this a problem? [My coach] helped me understand how this disease works."

"I can talk about it now without crying. I know when my [child] has pushed too many buttons. And, I know how to have a heart-to-heart talk with myself so I don't go over that edge again. I feel better about myself and what I've learned so my [child] can no longer abuse me."

"I feel stronger in my thoughts. That what I have lived with was not right...I am stronger that way."

"FIT taught me about the disease, what it does, how it impacts people. It wasn't what my family was drinking, it was how it made them feel – to feel better from their anxiety or whatever is bothering them. I want to be the compassionate loved one...I'm not ready to give up."

"I'm overwhelmed. I'm naïve to what I need to do. And, they are manipulative, where I am still getting pushed to the ground. [My coach] would empower me by telling me what to say."

## Results Continued

### Peer Connection

“There is so much more to addiction when you live it than there is in reading about it, learning about it. Hearing the story of someone living it, someone I could relate to ... they were like me, is helpful.”

“[My coach] is wonderful ... there are a lot of similarities. I almost feel like she could be my sister sometimes. Which is wonderful, because there is so much there. I think this is what we all need. We are just looking for answers and the only way you are going to get them is to talk to people.”

### Caring, Yet Firm, Relationships

“I got a lot of what I wanted to hear about love and compassion, rather than letting them hit rock bottom. I really feel like I am getting stronger because of that. I really appreciate that there are people that have gone through the same things I have and have the same beliefs about treating my family with compassion.”

“FIT is way different than anything else out there – more caring – I believe you have better answers and directions on how to help the people we love.”

“I am a push over and I needed to learn about boundaries. I need someone to walk alongside me to do that because I cannot do it alone. [My coach] was right about the boundaries. I need to get ready, get prepared to set up boundaries and it is people like you that help me do that, even though it can be ugly...be hard. We need compassion. Need someone here to tell me it is going to be ok.”

### Overcoming Stigma and Shame

“You are in denial, you are embarrassed and you want to hide this so other people don't know how 'bad' your children are or how 'bad' of a parent you are. You think it is going to get better, that it just isn't that bad...because you don't know what normal is...Then who do you go to, where do you get the help? We need the help now to cope until the person we love wants to get their own help.”

“There are a lot of people in this world that need help, but just don't know they do – like me. They just can't relate to it, and they just continue to try to make things seem normal for their family, while they are dealing internally with all of these crazy things that are going on. They just don't understand, or fathom that it can be an addiction issue. Those are the people that we need to reach.”