

“New Year’s lifeline” for children of alcoholics a victory for campaigners – Jonathan Ashworth

The Shadow Health Secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, says the Government’s response to his calls to support the children of alcoholics is a victory for campaigners, but warns it must be backed up by real action.

In response to the Department of Health’s announcement, Mr Ashworth said:

“Since I spoke out in Parliament about my own experiences of growing up with an alcoholic father, I have been inundated with messages from people who suffered the same blight on their childhood, and want to help children facing the same fate today.

“Growing up with an alcoholic parent can not only deprive children of the care and protection needed at home, but often robs them of the childhood they deserved. As I know, it can often mean we grow up having to fend for ourselves, and look after those who should have been looking after us.

“Spending time with those parents over Christmas was always especially hard, because what were such happy days for all our schoolmates always turned into an ordeal for us. For many children of alcoholics this Christmas any spare money would not have been spent on presents or decorations or a special meal, but – as always – on booze.

“So I am glad that the government has chosen this time of year to announce a commitment to a new strategy to help the children of alcoholics. It could literally be a New Year’s lifeline for thousands of children currently experiencing what I and so many others have gone through before.

“It is a victory for the campaigners and charities who have helped thousands of children over many years cope with a parent with a drink problem, especially NACOA, with whom I have worked closely over the past year and who do amazing work helping some of the most vulnerable children.

“It is also a victory for all those other parliamentarians in the All Party Group for Children of Alcoholics, including Liam Byrne and Caroline Flint, who have spoken out so movingly and bravely about their own personal circumstances growing up with an alcoholic parent.

“Over the coming weeks and months, we will all watch closely to ensure the government delivers on this pledge. In particular, after cutting over £40 million from alcohol and drug addiction services last year, we will press them to properly fund the help and support that addicts of all forms need.

“And finally, it is a victory for all those people who have been in touch with me since I spoke out about my own experiences, and were willing to share theirs. Their stories broke my heart a thousand times over, and in each of

them, I recognised an episode of my own.

“But what I shared above all with each one of them was that desperate desire to ensure that no child suffering the same fate today is left as bereft of help, support and hope as we were back then. And if this announcement can be the start of making that happen, we will all feel a great relief.”