

Haleh Brown

Haleh Brown is a passionate community advocate who draws on her family's lived experience with substance use disorder and loss to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and support others navigating similar challenges. A longtime special education teacher in New York City, Haleh has dedicated her career to working with children with learning disabilities, bringing compassion and resilience to everything she does.

Originally from Iran, Haleh emigrated to the United States at the age of 23 during the Islamic Revolution, seeking freedom from religious oppression and bigotry. She went on to raise two sons while enduring a difficult marriage marked by substance use and abuse. Both of her sons, like their father, struggled with substance use challenges.

Determined to help her family, Haleh immersed herself in learning about substance use and recovery. She attended support groups, studied the 12-step program, and completed it multiple times herself. Despite her tireless efforts, her younger son, Nima, tragically passed away in November 2024 at the age of 34 from nitrous oxide poisoning.

Nima was a kind, social, and talented individual who battled with substances for two decades. Though he sought help and entered rehab numerous times, he ultimately fell victim to nitrous oxide—a legal but dangerous substance often sold in large canisters under the guise of restaurant use. These canisters, which contain heavy metals and toxins, can cause severe neurological damage, oxygen deprivation, and blood clots. Because nitrous oxide is difficult to detect in standard drug tests, it is sometimes misleadingly referred to as a “sober drug.”

Haleh now channels her grief into advocacy, using her voice to educate communities about the realities of substance use, the dangers of underregulated substances like nitrous oxide, and the importance of empathy and open dialogue. Her story is a powerful reminder of the courage it takes to live with and support those with substance use disorders—and the urgent need for systemic change.

Today, Haleh continues to support her other son, who is currently in a sober living facility in Westchester and has been clean for over 90 days. Through her advocacy, she honors Nima's memory and works to ensure that others feel less alone in their journey toward healing and hope.