

Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families

1. The financial, social and personal cost to families who have a member(s) using illicit drugs, including the impact of drug induced psychoses or other mental disorders

My daughter's drug use did not have much of a financial impact on the family as she was working part time whilst doing her studies. The most disturbing impact was the emotional upheaval that we all went through. The secrecy, lies, verbal abuse and unexplained behaviour that occurred when she was angry and the depression that never seemed to go away. It was very hard to talk to other mothers who had daughters the same age. Once the word 'drug' was mentioned it was as if my daughter was a different species of human. Yet these same mothers did not see a problem in their own daughters' binge drinking on weekends.

Different choice of drug, but socially acceptable in today's way of thinking.

2. The impact of harm minimisation programs on families; and

As a mother of a now 21 year old daughter I wish that I had the skills and knowledge that I now have to have approached the situation in a different way. The personal cost as a mother was sad, unable to solve what was happening I was in denial for a long period as to what drug and how often she was taking it. She suffered a lot from depression which started at the age of 15yrs. There were instances of self mutilation, constant threats of suicide. We tried counselling, psychologists and psychiatrist to no avail. It was only at the age of 18 that she talked about taking ecstasy, as she now was old enough to go to night clubs. Like any parent I was shocked and scared for her. This was from a girl who at the age of 16 said she would never touch drugs, they were for losers. I believe now in hindsight there was drug use well before this, but there were other family issues going on and we put her behaviour down to the usual teenage angst that most parents go through. I could not stop my daughter taking drugs, peer group

pressure was more important than parental concerns. I rang places like Parent Line to get some answers but felt from talking to someone there that it was my problem and I had to deal with it. I even rang Lifeline because I was so depressed about what was happening to me! Alas I couldn't get through to them and after numerous attempts I stopped ringing. Eventually my daughter and I talked about what could happen if something went wrong but she assured me it was okay and she had looked up everything on the internet and not to worry. I expressed my concerns about her safety and she made a promise that she would text me to let me know she was safe. At this point in time her father and I had separated and she went to live with him, so our contact was a lot less than when she had been living in the family home.

For the next two years she experimented with drugs, that was her word, 'experiment', and promised she would stop when she turned 21. I think at that stage they were only words to keep me from worrying. I have since learnt that she took heavier drugs but it wasn't until they impacted on her life that she stopped. In all that time, even though she talked about leaving home and/or her father's place, she never did, I believe now it was because she knew that she was safe there and she knew she was loved, and no matter how awful her behaviour was, it was because of her drug taking. At the end of the day, my daughter was the one to make the decision to change. We couldn't stop her taking the drugs but at least she was in a safe environment and today is alive and well and drug free.

3. Ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member(s) using illicit drugs.

Now that I volunteer on the Family Drug Support line, I have learnt so much. I wish that I had these skills and knowledge when dealing with my daughter's drug use. I hear about people trying the 'tough love' approach. "Kick them out and wait till they hit rock bottom, then they will realise they need to do something". Talk to

a mother who has done that. How many nights they don't sleep, scared that their child is at risk maybe even dead. It is immobilising when your child (and they are always your child, no matter how old they are) has no contact with you and you cant talk about what is happening because of the shame and stigma attached to your son/daughter's drug use. You've done what every one has told you to do but you're the one suffering and the fear owns you. Wouldn't it be more beneficial to that person to have some other options? One of those is to accept that your loved one is taking drugs, not something you approve of obviously, and this is where Family Drug Support comes into the picture. We listen (not advise) to what is happening in all this chaos and discuss what options the family can offer even though they are going through their own turmoil. The message that comes across is they want the drug user safe. They realise there are no quick fixes and it's the user who has to make the decision to stop. No parent wants their son/daughter taking drugs, but the reality is, drugs are out there and readily available.

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