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Inquiry into the Impact of Illicit Drug use on Families

My name is Chawen — mother of three sons all adults, Son No 1 (44 yrs.) Son 2 (41 yrs) Son 3 (36 yrs.) I am 67 yrs. of age. They have produced between them 8 grandchildren (7 boys 1 girl) aged between 19 yrs & 4 yrs.

My husband, & their father/grandfather died in 1982 of mainly alcoholism & some drug issues, aged 40 yrs.

All my grandchildren are children of broken marriages or relationships — caused by drug & alcohol problems.

One grandson aged 14 yrs., is now into alcohol & cannabis. His temperament has changed dramatically — he was homeless, and involved in criminal activity — for which he has to face serious charges in the Children's Court. Three months ago, he arrived on my doorstep, with no where else to go. Dad had thrown him out, then Chawen (a heroin addict) who he'd lived with for 6 mths. threw him out. He has been with me since, but his behaviour & rebelliousness is so bad, I don't know how much more I can take.

P.T.O

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Son No 1 started drinking and using Cannabis aged 12. By the time he was 23, he was hopelessly addicted to both — hit rock bottom, & signed himself into a rehabilitation centre.

Upon discharge, he attended A.A. & N.A. meetings where he met his partner (a heroin addict) They produced two sons.

The relationship broke up 5 yrs later, when the partner reverted to heroin use.

My son is still sober & has remained so for 20 yrs.

Son No 2. Started drinking and using Cannabis aged 12-14. He was always in trouble with the police — & still is today — even at 41 yrs of age.

He has had numerous relationships, which have produced 4 children.

Son No. 3 Started drinking & drug use about 15. When he was aged about 21 yrs he started a relationship with a girl who was on heroin, speed & Cannabis. He at that time, was taking alcohol & Cannabis. She became pregnant, and a son was produced. The relationship ended, & when the child was 2 yrs old, my son got custody. Over the next 3 yrs. my son lapsed into old ways, & the little boy was being neglected, & I

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eventually get custody of the child myself. I brought him up for 5 yrs., & when he was 10 he wanted to live with his dad. They live close by, & ~~we~~ I see him most weekends.

His mother has since been killed when she veered onto the wrong side of the highway, & went under a semi-trailer. She was high on heroin & speed at the time.

Drugs and alcohol have been the story of my life since my marriage in 1963.

Over the years I've become the primary carer of two grandchildren, and the refuge for wayward sons when relationships ended. Amazingly I am still sober, drug free, not in a mental hospital, & haven't even got a parking fine in 45 yrs. of holding a licence.

In Canberra ~~we~~ have a grandparents support group for grandparents bringing up grandchildren. Most of us are in this position because of illicit drug use.

We are old, tired, and dealing with neglected and/or traumatised children. We get minimal financial support from the government, compared to the support they give foster-carers. We, by our care of these grandchildren are saving the government thousands/millions of dollars.

We usually have savings and/or superannuation. Own our home and a car maybe a holiday house at the coast etc. etc. But all these assets go against us when the

children arrive, as we apply for such things as Legal Aid, Family allowance, Bavers pension, health care cards etc.

I hope that by telling our story, it will highlight the serious damage that illicit drugs are causing families, and the community, and get us the support we so rightly deserve.

Yours faithfully
(Mrs.) Maureen Connelly