

Submission into Inquiry into Impact of Illicit Drug Use on Families

I facilitate a peer support group for family members of problematic drug and alcohol users. I also work as a peer volunteer on a Helpline for Family Drug Help in Victoria

Our group would like the Chairman and Committee to consider the following points:

- Illicit drug use within the family is devastating for not only the user, but for all the family – for each user, common understanding is 10 other peoples' health is affected.
- Problematic drug use within the family is so destructive of normal family functioning.
- Family members can become just as "ill" as the person using.
- Problematic drug use within the family has a direct economic effect on our country – as family, we should all be productive; paying our taxes, and living law abiding lives. Problematic drug use stifles normal family functioning.
- There is NOWHERE NEAR ENOUGH support, resources, education or understanding given to family members – for too long, family has been viewed as part of "THE PROBLEM" and not part of the solution as it should be.
- Once the drug user acknowledges and accepts help for his drug use there is plenty of help available – there is little help available for the family. What help there is, is SO valuable.
- Problematic drug use delays emotional growth in young (and all) people, so that family members further delay giving appropriate responsibilities and setting appropriate boundaries for the user in their family to protect what they view as a "helpless child". Some of these "helpless children" are, in age, mature adults. Appropriate education for family members addresses this and empowers families to take sometimes very tough stances toward their user and thereby promotes emotional growth for all.
- Shame is a huge factor in problematic drug use within a family. How can a family possibly admit to extended family/neighbours just why their beloved son/daughter was both verbally and physically abusive to them last Saturday...??? Shame as a family issue needs to be acknowledged, validated and supported.

Where do we go from here?? Problematic drug use ain't 'gunna go away no time soon. How can our society respond to the needs of family – we talk endlessly about the "tragedy" and "cost" of problematic drug use... how can we support families on what can be a painful journey over several years, and sometimes over the rest of members lives?

We need better support for people leaving prison for drug related offences – our privacy laws mean sometimes released young people are using again even before their families know they have been released.

We more well structured supported accommodation to aim at responsible living for recovering users.

We need more rehabilitation units and a court system that strongly directs drug abusers in this direction.

We need more education and information for parents.

We need more support groups for parents.

Margaret Graham