

Inquiry into the impact of illicit drugs on families

on Family and Human Services

In the brief it states that [families need to be supported so that they can “prevent” members using illicit drugs.] If law enforcement and governments can’t deal with the importation, production, or otherwise procurement of illicit drugs along with their distribution and use, then how could it possibly be contemplated that parents could prevent their children coming into contact or influence of these insidious substances? Perhaps this should be the first question asked before the three terms of reference are addressed! And we should also consider why the market demand is so great for the perceived relief, escape and highs that our young ones crave. Is it due to social pressures and other ills that exist in our time? If so, these are not of their making, yet they and their families are expected to deal with the consequences and this is clearly articulated when we expect parents to “prevent” the event happening! Perhaps the best we can do in our present society is to offer help with the collateral damage of illicit drug availability and market demand created by our society. The individual families, being some of the collateral damage, it is they who will bear much of the consequences for the ills of a society partial to blame rather than reality.

The financial cost to families can obviously be total in that the material resources and time needed to support the rehabilitation of a loved one can be ongoing. The problem can seem so demanding that it eventually becomes the total focus of the parent or family member and lead to not only impoverishment of the family’s resources but also to a diminished state of health and well being.

The social cost to families are underlined by the attitudes of society as in “the parent failed to prevent” the event happening. Parents often bear the blame and consequential guilt as any effected parent will testify and this implied or explicit blaming seems a current human response to problems we as a society find too difficult to solve or that they simply do not directly affect us. The stigma families deal with can be difficult to deal with and have consequences to the detriment of all the family members as well as any hopeful recovery of a loved one.

The personal cost to families is too great to contemplate, but these are costs born and suffered by individual families, in a society where they may have little influence or control over events. Many callers to the help line are often so depleted by the time they desperately reach out for help that they will openly talk of suicide as they can see no other way out of their situation. We are talking here of the parents, not the person using drugs! These are parents emotionally bound by the love of their child and their eternal commitment to their well being. In the epic struggles we often hear of, or personally experience, it is obvious that the expertise to deal with the situations is rarely if ever found in any one family and yet they must come to have an understanding and knowledge of a broad range of disciplines if they are to ever help their loved one. Some of these might include a working knowledge of psychology and practical psychological approaches, mental health and how to access help, the legal system and what you can expect including the prospect of support or punitive treatment. Generally, how to facilitate help for themselves and their loved one.

The impact of harm minimization would be evidenced by detailed statistical analysis of relevant available data and by skilled practitioners in this area of research but what is obvious to any parent or help line operator is that “you can take a horse to

water but you can't make it drink!" In further context of this is the fact that we can't keep drugs from our shores so perhaps the best we can do is attempt to reduce their demand.

Ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member abusing illicit drugs.

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At **Family Drug Help** we have been dedicated to this very task and for a period of nearly eight years. Born out of suffering and necessity and because of the dire needs of families in these situations, **FDH** was established with a network of support groups throughout Melbourne and the metropolitan area as well as regional Victoria. It also operates a help line staffed by volunteers and staff members and through the experience and talents of dedicated individuals has developed and evolved a very specialized training program for the parents and partners of people afflicted by illicit and legalized drug abuse. It is in the strategy and combination of these programs that has helped so many families over the years that we believe if more people could access it and earlier then it could make a very significant impact in assisting families towards becoming empowered in helping their loved ones.

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