



March 2007

Standing Committee on Family and Human Services  
House of Representatives  
Parliament of Australia  
Canberra  
ACT 2600

**Submission No: 132**

Supp to Sub:

AUTHORISED:

9/5/07

*KS*

### **Inquiry into the Impact of Illicit Drug Use on Families**

Australian Drug Treatment & Rehabilitation Programme Incorporated (ADTARP) delivering the **DrugBeat of SA Programs** is pleased to contribute this submission to the inquiry. ADTARP would also like to express our appreciation to the Committee members for undertaking such an inquiry, at a time when Australia is divided on the drug policy.

This organisation has been delivering the DrugBeat of SA Programs since 1998 from **Shay Louise House** situated in Elizabeth, South Australia.

The submission is structured according to the terms of reference of the inquiry and addresses the following area:

#### ***Ways to strengthen families who are coping with member(s) using illicit drugs***

#### **Introduction**

ADTARP Inc is a not-for-profit, non government community based organisation. It has no religious or political affiliations.

#### **Mission**

DrugBeat of SA Programs delivers recovery-based treatment & rehabilitation to those families and individuals who are affected by illicit drugs.

For further information on our services please go to [www.drugbeat.org](http://www.drugbeat.org)

#### **Board of Directors**

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#### **Evidence**

Over a 9 year period, ADTARP has delivered services to over 1700 families and individuals affected by illicit drugs. In that time ADTARP has heard evidence of their frustrations with current drug policies by way of organisation surveys, letters of endorsement or documented verbal statements. This information offered and gathered by this organisation can not be ignored by the inquiry. These families have experienced first hand the breakdown of the family unit when a

family member (s) is addicted to illicit drugs. The evidence is clear that the current drug policy is sending mixed messages to the community about illicit drugs. The community has been led to believe that alcohol & tobacco are more dangerous than illicit drugs. That evidence is clear by the way that current advertising is presented.

## **Recommendations**

The Australian Government can better address the ***ways to strengthen families who are coping with member(s) using illicit drugs by the following:***

More prime time advertising on the damage that illicit drugs cause by television networks

Educate media about reporting the terms "party drugs" and "recreational drugs" there is no such thing. These two types of users are our addicts of tomorrow

Tougher sentences for the possession, possession of utensil, use, cultivation and sale of any illicit drug

Establish drug diversion courts for youth & adults into recovery-based treatment & rehabilitation programs via treatment orders

Deliver recovery-based treatment & rehabilitation programs into the prison system that focus on recovering from their addiction

Introduce compulsory information and education on the harmful effect of illicit drugs in to primary schools & secondary schools to enforce the Governments "Tough on Drugs" policy (There is no such thing as SAFE USE)

Support non-government organisations that deliver recovery-based treatment & rehabilitation services and ensure that funding continues based on performance & outcomes

Establish residential programs for pregnant drug users and single parents with a dependant for the purpose of recovering from their addiction

Introduce compulsory parenting programs to young mothers and provide adequate support before baby bonuses are given

Support grandparents who have legal custody of their grandchildren because of substance abuse via Centrelink payments & parenting programs

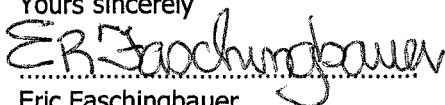
School drug testing of students in secondary schools for early intervention

Establish methadone reduction programs which lead to counselling & rehabilitation not methadone maintenance programs

Close the Kings Cross Injecting Room based on the current credible evidence by the organisation Drug Free Australia Limited and divert clients into treatment

**Please find some supporting letters from families that strengthens the argument that the current drug policies are failing the people of Australia**

Yours sincerely



Eric Faschingbauer  
Chief Executive officer  
ADTARP Inc.

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### **Submission for the inquiry Into the Impact of Illicit Drug Use on Families**

To the members of the Commission,

May I firstly thank you for holding an inquiry into such an ignored, yet desperately vital issue. I know my parents, Paul and Natalie Hidden, have also presented a submission outlining what it is like to have a son who is drug addicted, so I shall be careful not to repeat what you already know. But I also realise that as a 19 year old, the true weight of my words lies in my personal experience so I would like to expand upon what my parents have already contributed by discussing the following points:

- The effects that addiction had on my life
- How my addiction almost destroyed my family
- How harm minimisation policies and the mentality that goes with it trapped me in my addiction
- Recommendations

#### **The effects that addiction had on my life**

My parents epitomise the Aussie-battler. Starting with nothing, both have worked incredibly hard and now own their home and can afford all the luxuries of upper-middle class. I grew up in a stable, loving and happy family home. Living just outside of Gawler on a 20acre property, I spent my time riding horses and travelling this beautiful country of ours with my parents. I have always been one of those kids who was full of potential. Going to a public primary school I always excelled and in year seven made the switch to Trinity College, where I continued to stand out in the class. What I'm trying to establish is that I am not the stereotypical drug user (although I personally believe one doesn't exist). Unfortunately in year nine, against the expectations of many, my story turns sour. At a party, similar to others except with more **liberal parents**, I was offered and accepted a cone of marijuana.

Now I'm not going to lead you to believe that my life went from one full of hope to one of overwhelming despair with my first inhalation of cannabis, of course there was more involved and I shall discuss this with my theory of addiction later, but my life definitely did change the path it was on. **My attitude and behaviour changed almost immediately** and within six months, during which I would have smoked a dozen times, my social base had completely transformed and my attitude towards school was one of unimportance. Teachers, obviously noticing the change, suggested I see the

school counsellor. While well intentioned, the Father, operating under the philosophy that **experimentation is normal teen behaviour**, failed to see the significance of my drug use but unable to achieve any results recommended I speak to my doctor about how I was feeling. **Not even asking about my drug use**, the doctor without hesitation prescribed Cypramil, an anti-depressant.

As my grades at school began to slide, my attitude became even more blasé and I frankly became a **hindrance to those who were there to learn**. My parents who were understandably concerned, though at the time **I saw it as meddling** (something others, **both professional and not, were all too keen to support**), and they began to make appointments at places such as Gawler Mental Health Service (GMHS) and Second Storey. GMHS while less accepting of my drug use than Second Storey who followed the approach of my school counsellor believing that it was normal teen behaviour and suggested ways of reducing the risks (i.e. minimising my miseries), did not feel that my drug use, even though I was now smoking at least once a week, was serious enough for intervention.

As my smoking increased I became more delinquent in my behaviour at school and by the end of year nine it was made clear that I would no longer be welcome there the following year. Compelled by law, I recommenced at another school the following year but by the end of term four I had yet again used all my chances and burned all my bridges. Over the course of the same year things at home had also deteriorated further and by about term three my parents asked (euphemism) me to leave home. While I had managed to continue to function, mainly because a friend who was also a chronic user had allowed me to stay at his house, the internal despair and depression that I felt was overwhelming and after a couple of months I decided that I would go to the Addiction Counselling Services (ACS) rehabilitation program that my parents had recommended.

Staying a total of **ten weeks at \$250p.w.**, the notion behind the rehab was to remove a user from their toxic environment with the hope of breaking the drug cycle. Unfortunately this was where the service ended and **I now know to quit drugs a much more comprehensive program addressing both the biological (abstinence) as well as the emotional trauma that underpins it is required**. Because of this absence I relapsed the day I returned home. Thankfully, most remained unaware of this (the manipulative side of addiction) and school under the impression that I was now clean allowed me to return to do year 11. While I managed to keep up the façade for a couple of months, life both at home and school slowly slipped back into chaos and by August I was back out on the streets.

Determined to be self sufficient, off of Centrelink, I rented a van at my local caravan park and for the next three months lived within the confines of 6mx2m. While I had exhibited behaviours that could be diagnosed as a mental illness in the past, such as depression and anxiety and of course violence, it was nothing in comparison to how I ended up. With nothing to do besides smoke marijuana and use other drugs, as by this time I had progressed on to MDMA and methamphetamine – proving the adage that **marijuana is a gateway drug** correct – I quickly deteriorated into social phobia and was verging on agoraphobia. On a usual day the only person I would see would be my best mate, who was of course my dealer, from whom I would generally buy my days supply of pot and from there would proceed to smoke it either at his house or in my van.

With a \$150 a week addiction and yet living off of a limited income, I at first turned to crime to get by, but as with everything else in my life, marijuana had by this stage reduced my intellect to the point where I was unable to succeed as a criminal (thankfully). It was non-essentials like toiletries that went first, and then food, but as my habit increased it became clear that I could no longer afford to rent the van and I moved out in to my car. As I'm sure you can imagine, emotionally I was a wreck, and while it was fine while I was stoned as soon as I sobered up my thoughts pretty quickly turned to suicide. This got to the point where one day I decided to act on these thoughts. Hanging over a cliff at Para Wirra National Park I knew I only had two alternatives; die, as I could no longer go on living the way I was, or go to rehab. Thankfully I decided on the second.

While initially very reluctant and hugely depressed as I was now void of mind altering substances to alleviate it, within months of starting ADTARP's DrugBeat program I began to notice huge changes. I began to think clearly, my self-esteem improved meaning my social phobia dissipated, and things between my parents became civil. And this was solely because ADTARP provided a program that included biological information as well as individual and family counselling.

See I have learnt that while, yes, **addiction is a biological need for a substance it is also a psychological, well emotional, need for a substance.** Altering the brains psychobiology alters the intensity and type of emotion the user experiences. Now I'm sure all of you have had days when you wish you could escape how it is you are feeling, be it residue anger from an argument or something as intense as grief from bereavement. Actually the later is an excellent example and traps many as the emotional state is protracted causing many to turn to mind-altering drugs to escape. This altered emotional state only lasts as long as the user is under the influence and as soon as they are lucid the grief returns, to which of course the user avoids again by using and hence the process of addiction begins. This is a very simplified and poorly expressed explanation of the emotional component to drug abuse, but in my experience, and all of those that I have met who have achieved abstinence will testify to, **it was crucial that I not only knew the emotion explanation of addiction but had intensive counselling to resolve the underlying emotions before I could find true freedom drugs.**

Thanks to my total transformation I received while I completed my 12month rehabilitation at DrugBeat, I now can safely say that I have the emotion intelligence to never need to resort to drug use again. But more than this, I have my life back. Last year I returned to an adult senior college to complete year 12, which I did successfully with a Tertiary Entrance Ranking of 95.9, and will next year go to Uni, two things that would never have happened if I was still using drugs.

### **How my addiction almost destroyed my family**

When I look at my addiction retrospectively it is the turmoil and despair that it caused to my family that I feel most guilty about. I did a lot of horrible things while I was a drug user, but the worst would have to be physically assaulting my father and making my own mother frightened to be left alone in my presence. The financial, social, and personal costs to my parents were immense. For instance, the cost of the live-in rehabilitation through ACS was a total of \$2500 (as my parents have mentioned,

money well spent as it gave them respite from my behaviour, of course it would have been better if I came home abstinent). Again financially, my father **missed out on several career opportunities** and made suspiciously redundant at one company because he was unable to give the mental energy required because he was too worried where his son was sleeping that night. My drug use also took its toll on my parents socially, they lost many friends through the period of my drug use, mainly because all their 'leisure' time was spent either rescuing me from the chaos and drama that was my life, having heated domestics with me or each other, or despairing over the state of their sons' and their own lives. Their reputation within the community diminished as many saw them as **being responsible for my drug use or as harsh and callous for kicking me out of home**. These truly were miserable times for my parents.

I mentioned that I grew up in a stable and loving family home. This my addiction destroyed. The personal costs of my addiction to my family, mainly the constant distressing situations I forced upon them, such as my psychotic episodes and the constant fighting, seriously threatened to separate my parents. **Their quality of life was seriously diminished.**

The financial, social, and personal costs to my parents could have all been avoided if they were given the right information about addiction and how best to approach a loved one who is addicted. Thankfully, as my parents mentioned in their submission, they finally received this information and the necessary support at ADTARP. While ADTARP's parental program is deserving of all the praise one can conjure and I would suggest that you view their submission earnestly, I realise that accolades are not constructive so I shall stop here.

### **How harm minimisation policies and the mentality that goes with it trapped me in my addiction**

I know this is a potentially sensitive subject, but this issue is far too serious for diplomacy, so I'm going to continue to be frank; **harm minimisation is not only responsible for prolonging my addiction it is culpable for my addiction**. A big claim I know, but it's easily justifiable. As the harm minimisation mentality has infiltrated our national psyche drug use has become not only accepted but expected. At a societal level, we have been conned into believing that:

- **Drug use is normal teen behaviour**
- **Drugs can be taken safely**
- **That drug users have the right to 'choose to use'**
- **That their impacts on the broader community are minimal and manageable**
- **That drugs are not necessarily addictive and if users do become addicted it is because of their own flaws or the flaws of their parents**
- **That drug use does not cause mental illness it only exacerbates an underlying condition**

And so many more, all of which are fallacious. This community delusion along with Controlled Substances Acts designed around harm minimisation has resulted in a generation, my generation, who express astonishment when I tell them I don't do drugs. You should see them when I tell them I don't drink either. Are you beginning to see how this attitude, shaped by the harm minimisation philosophy, contributed to my addiction? If it wasn't for this acceptance there would not be the abundance, the

affluence, of marijuana available and it would definitely not have been obtainable by a child in year nine.

As for prolonging my use, besides the obvious discouragement that I would have received from the start if there wasn't the harm minimisation primed ideology by everyone from professionals to my peers, if the people I did see at places like Second Storey and Gawler Mental Health Service were operating from the objective of abstinence there is no doubt that I would have been subject to effectual intervention and my use would have stopped years before it did.

### **Recommendations**

I'm not going to lay claim to expertise, I know I'm only drawing on the experiences of myself and the others who I have shared rehab with, and for this reason I'm not going to list dozens of recommendations. But I've been incredibly frank with you so I believe I'm entitled to ask of you one thing – that you do something. Not for me, because I'm free and always will be, but for those trapped in the purpose built merry-go-round of semi-intervention then relapse that I described earlier. The potential of these people can only be guessed but if the transformations that I've seen and lived are an indication then it's immense. But beyond this they and their families deserve it.

Actually a second request; please don't be fooled by the specious argument of harm minimisation and legalisation because the only thing worse than doing nothing would be to continue to move towards or to completely adopt the Holland model. Many in Australia are convinced of its merits, after all the statics of Australian's drug use compared with that of the Dutch support this, but far from reducing drug abuse and it's associated conditions harm minimisation, particularly legalisation, only proliferates it by making drug use even more acceptable to the broader community. We need a cultural change in this country, one where drug use is no longer accepted or ignored but where drug use in all its forms is totally discouraged at all levels and those who are using receive the treatment they so desperately need. Only an ideology of abstinence embraced by the whole community will halt the epidemic of drug use that is plaguing our community. Please consider the recommendations of ADTARP and DFA (Drug Free Australia) as I am familiar with them.

If the members of the Committee believe that it would be beneficial, I would be more than willing to travel to Canberra at their request to expand upon my experiences and recommendations.

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**Canberra, ACT 2600**

March 2007

**Submission for the inquiry Into the Impact of Illicit Drug Use on Families**

To the members of the Commission,

At the request of ADTARP (Australian Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Program) Inc. we would like to share with you the experiences we had while our son was drug addicted. To be the parent of a drug addicted child is the most devastating experiences and the effects are far reaching. It effects your beliefs in your ability to parent, your self-esteem, and the whole family dynamics.

Ryan's addiction began at an early age and our first indication was a noticeable change in his behaviour and attitudes at home and at school. This was the beginning of our long road to finding the answers and help we needed. In the early days Ryan was diagnosed with depression and put on antidepressants (at this time we were not aware of his marijuana smoking). As his behaviour worsened he was forced to change schools. By this time he was unmanageable at home, we could not get him out of bed due to him sneaking out at night to smoke pot with his friends, his attitude towards his parents was filled with hatred and contempt, and his chances of continuing on at school was nil.

Now that we knew the degree of his addiction, we approached organisations like Second Storey and Gawler Mental Health Service but unfortunately they were of no help and left us feeling as though Ryan's drug use was a natural rebellion to the restrictions we had put on his life, something that was not helpful. We then thought we had hit the jackpot with ACS (Addiction Counselling Services). They offered a live-in rehabilitation program based on an abstinence located at Pitchie Richie. Part of their pre-service was a visit to their doctor who prescribed Neulactil, an anti-psychotic, which Ryan commenced prior going to rehab. These made him groggy, with the idea being that they would reduce the craving. He stayed on these for the ten week duration of rehab. The rehab was designed around breaking the cycle of drug use, but little was done to help the clients emotionally and that they only substituted Ryan's drug addiction with Neulactil, something they admitted and saw no issue with. Though the cost of the ACS rehab was \$2500 and we had to make sacrifices to afford it, we both see this as money well spent as it gave us a much needed break from Ryan's behaviour. Unfortunately, the day after Ryan returned home he relapsed.



The next year was spent in trauma. Life at home was in chaos. There was no reasoning with Ryan and all discussions ended in anger. We used to fight over Ryan's behaviour. We spent our time either rescuing from the trouble he kept creating or trying to make out it wasn't happening. We never felt safe in our own home and feared for the worst every time we left as Ryan had often raided the house for money and alcohol. Things got to breaking point.

Distraught, we approached the Woolshed program and went through the initial interviews with Ryan who was reasonably positive about going. Unfortunately they had no positions available and it was a waiting game in this interim period. Ryan was told if he didn't get dry that this was "OK" as they would put him in Joselyn, a detox clinic, for a week before he went to the woolshed. This was all the addict in Ryan needed to hear and before long he was a heavy user again. This was the end of the Woolshed and all rehabs as far as Ryan was concerned.

In our quest to find help we came across DrugBeat (ADTARP) in Elizabeth. They offered a parental program which you could attend even if child was not. It was amazing. For the first time in three years we realised that we weren't alone and that our son was not evil, and in fact all drug addicts behave in the same way. We learnt skills to deal with Ryan, including how to speak to him so as not to react and inflame the situation and to make it clear that it was his choice and we weren't responsible. We didn't have to tolerate his behaviour and fund his addiction. At week four Ryan was no longer living at home but we were making progress in our relationship. DrugBeat was there for support the whole time, especially for reassurance during crisis times.

By week ten Ryan had been into DrugBeat and started as a client. The changes were subtle at first but as time went on he became more rational but still suffered from depressive times (he was off all medication from day one). We now know the depression was a direct result of his marijuana use and takes at least 12 – 18 to subside completely. It has now been two years since Ryan has been clean but it has really only been the last six months that he hasn't suffered some level of depression, anxiety or paranoia. This has taught us that abstinence based programs will be the only ones to succeed as the mental health problems caused by drugs will never improve with even minimal use of drugs.

DrugBeat have the answers to addiction. By providing services such as parental information and support and parental emotional growth and resolution via programs such as the Personal Development Program, DrugBeat helps you understand the hows and whys of addiction. But it is with the clients that DrugBeat truly shines. By having the knowledge base to know exactly where the clients are at emotionally at every stage and by providing intensive emotional support to help them through this, the staff at DrugBeat have given us back our son. We are so very grateful we stumbled across this place as they had the answers.

15-3-07

To the Standing Committee on Family & Human Services

I wish to express my admiration of the highly commendable work done by Drug Beat SA through the various programmes at Shay Louise House. I am the parent of a daughter who has fully recovered from drug addiction and I believe in the necessity of these programmes to continue to expand & grow into different areas of our community to accommodate the rising demand for rehabilitation of this nature. These programmes have immense benefits for not only the addict, but all of the family members including carers & supporters to be encouraged with positive & powerful education that is life changing. Persons exposed to drug addicts behaviour, experience trauma, financial hardships & disruption to their lives & require assistance on how to cope responsibly during this time of crisis. The courses are conducted by sensitive & experienced staff with a professional approach to promote an outcome for persons to regain control of their lives with normality as much as is possible, with a lifestyle they can maintain by being taught new life skills to change behaviour. This helps the addict as well to be enabled to end illicit drug addiction, thus being restored to become responsible citizens in our community. Many children of families with addiction problems are often exposed to harmful experiences and don't have positive role models, this can in turn lead to a future of repetitive behaviour in their own lives. The services provided by Drug Beat SA.

have a highly proven success rate that cannot be achieved by using harm minimisation programmes - that is merely masking over the problems with a band-aid approach doomed for failure and only prolongs the duration of the addiction + all of the related problems rather than end it completely, which is to be promoted. The results of on going drug addiction show mental disorders + drug induced pschoses to be related by not stopping the addiction. This only continues to have a widespread devastating affect on Society with the increase of crime rate which is a direct result of drug addiction.

I desire to see public awareness of the availability of these programmes so that affected persons may recieve every opportunity for complete recovery to occur to bring back stability + wholeness into our families thus ensuring a healthier community

Yours Sincerely  
Mrs Emilia Seelander.

13<sup>th</sup> March 2007

To the Committee On Family and human Services,

My name is Mary and my son Peter is a drug addict. At first I thought Peter was using Marijuana and it was just a stage he was going through and he would stop. I was in denial. Peter was on speed, injecting into his veins - what a shock! I did not want to believe it as Peter when younger would faint at the sight of a needle. Peter does not live at home he is 35 years old.

It started with phone calls, reverse charge calls, asking for money to pay a debt and if he did not pay the debt within 24 hours he would get bashed or he needed money for food and petrol. Peter was panicking, crying I did not want my son to go hungry and get beaten up so I would take him money and food even at midnight my husband and I would go to him. I was so stressed my husband and I would argue constantly. My younger son and wife told me Peter was on drugs and not to give Peter any money or food as I was helping Peter with his addiction. Well I did not like to hear that as I thought I was doing the right thing as a mother and I argued with them and was very "offish" toward them. They did not want Peter at their home or seeing his nephews because of his addiction. That hurt Peter and myself. I sat and spoke to my younger son and wife about how Peter and I were hurting and they explained it was not Peter as a person it was his addiction.

It got to the stage I was too nervous to answer the front door in case it was a Police Officer to say my son had overdosed. I would not answer the telephone due to the threatening phone calls from strangers, there were nights that I would leave it off the hook. My stomach was constantly in a knot. I was scared for my son's life! I did not hear from Peter for a while. I was worried and rang where he was living and she told me Peter was in the Remand Centre. I was shocked at that and went into panic mode. I rang the Remand Centre and they asked if I was on Peter's list I said "what list?" I explained to them I was a novice at this, yes I was on the visiting list so I made an appointment. What an experience I felt so degraded all my jewellery off, including my wedding ring which I gave to my husband before I saw Peter. I could not stop shaking my stomach was in a knot. This was a nightmare. What crime did Peter do to be locked up? The visiting room was so cold I could not even hold Peter's hand. Peter said to me "Mum, thank you for coming I am ashamed to put you through this. Thank you for your support. I love you mum." I said to Peter "If you ask me for money the answer is no. I will not rescue and enable you anymore. I love and care about you very much. You need to take responsibility for your actions and suffer the consequences." DRUGBEAT gave me the courage to look my son in the eyes and say those words.

I felt a failure as a mother. Who could I talk to, I was so ashamed, frustrated and guilty. I went into my shell and could not cope anymore. The radio was on 5AD they mentioned DRUGBEAT and the telephone number. The next minute I had the telephone in my hand and I was making an appointment. For the love of me I do not know how I remembered the telephone number I felt so depressed. My husband and I went to the appointment after the 2<sup>nd</sup> appointment my husband told me he was not going again as he does not have a problem my son does and I should not go either as it is not my problem. I told my husband that I am going and need to go for myself and

my son. I have been attending DRUGBEAT for over 1 year now. I love and care for my son, unfortunately I was giving my son bad support by rescuing and enabling him with his addiction. I did not let him take responsibility for his actions. I let him dump on me and I took it on board. I now give him good support when Peter asks for money I say no without feeling guilty. I told Peter I will not rescue and enable you with your addiction. I love and care about you and gave Peter a DRUGBEAT business card and told him when he was ready to go I would give him 100% support. DRUGBEAT gave me the strength to confront the issues at hand and the positive words to use in a crisis. They also gave me knowledge of the medical harm of substance abuse. It was not just a counselling session it was a learning process which has positively changed my life for the better. The counsellor said to me that one day Peter would say thank you for saying no. I could not understand that until one day visiting Peter he said to me Mum thank you for your support and for saying no to me. There were 2 times I needed to pay off a debt and did get bashed as you seen me very bruised but the other times it was for drugs. I was gob stopped my eyes filled with tears I turned my head so my son could not see my eyes. I told my son how much I love and care for him and he came over and gave me a hug. I will not give up on my son. I will always be there for him.

In some cases by strengthening the drug user it can give hope to the families. By helping society to understand it is an illness. This can be done by making centres like DRUGBEAT and other rehabilitation options more accessible to the addict and their family. A drug abuser can find themselves in court. More often than not a blind eye is turned from the real problem of drug abuse. It is not always in a drug addicts best interest to lock them in jail and throw away the key. I know for myself and other families court enforced rehabilitation rather than the fines and a slap on the wrist would have given the first stepping stone to the road of recovery. I can not stress enough the importance of drug awareness for all age groups and I plead that parliament gives the children of our future some hope.

16 March 2007

Dear Sir,

My husband and I have recently become involved with Shay Louise House due to our daughter's drug use.

As far as we know her first experience with drugs was as a fourteen year old, caught using marijuana. We, like many parents and other people today, assumed this was experimentation, part of the teenage journey to adulthood. The media seems to say:- "Drugs are everywhere; you don't die unless the pill / shot wasn't "clean"; It's your choice to become addicted; If you only take E on weekends no-one will know you're using." We therefore, after only a minor discussion about this episode of drug use, and some minor punishment, just continued on with our lives, assuming she would not use again. This was not to be.

Last year, when we were confronted with the fact that she had been using "ice" were horrified. (We were informed by worried friends, not by our daughter herself) Our amazement only grew when we found out that she had also been using "ecstasy " on a regular basis and had tried other drugs over the last few years.

She is not a rare case, and these drugs apparently are almost the norm in the nightclubs which she frequented on a semi-regular basis, and in everyday teenage life.

We had noticed personality and behavioural changes in our daughter over recent years, and, perhaps stupidly, had put these down to teenage rebellion, a quest for independence, and an eating disorder (for which she had started to receive treatment.)

Many emotions came with this discovery. Anger, sadness, amazement, grief, horror, despair, shame, a sense of failure, but mostly helplessness. Unfortunately due to our highly emotional state, and lack of accurate information, when we confronted our daughter about her drug use, we had no success in communicating with her.

She admitted to her father that she had taken "ice" twice. Her boyfriend's friends had given it to her, she said. She had been drunk the first time, and felt she couldn't say no the second time." It was fairly obvious her story was not an accurate version of events possibly due to her shame, embarrassment, and not wanting to have her boyfriend get any blame. But she did say that she wanted to get help.

My husband agreed to get her help, but said she had to stop seeing her boyfriend. That was the end of her co-operation, she didn't want to continue the conversation any further.

Her boyfriend came to speak to us that night. His version of events was exactly the same as hers, but with an added promise that it would never happen again. When we said they both had problems our daughter nodded in agreement, but he said he had no problem and it was rude of us to accuse him. He walked out. Within a week they were engaged, and our daughter left home the next week to live with him as "there is no life without him".

Before last year we had no really accurate knowledge about drugs or their effect on people and their bodies, or how to "speak" to an addict. Our knowledge consisted of the odd newspaper report of a drug death, or watching a movie in which people used drugs (usually in an unrealistic setting). The result of the confrontation with our daughter may have been very different if we had accurate information and knowledge.

After the initial horror of the situation we did not know where to turn for help. The phone book was the only information source we had. Drug and Alcohol Services were generally sympathetic, but after giving a list of names of therapists/ rehab centres you're alone. These people (from our experience) only want to deal directly with willing addicts, not to concerned parents or family. They do not regard themselves as a source for information or comfort. This also applied in our dealings regarding her eating disorder. Private information is private, and parents are not the sufferers.

Fortunately, after deciding to tell some people about our situation, in the hope that they may have some ideas or information, a friend gave us Ann Bressington's name and phone number. We made an appointment and she saw us for nearly two hours in her Parliamentary Office. She could not have been more understanding, or informative. I realize she has had personal experience in this area and has lost a daughter, but her input was much more than was required. She referred us to Shay Louise House.

Our first appointment there was the following week. After the initial form filling out (this was kept to a minimum, as the counsellor knew that we were there for more important reasons.) We told our story, asked why we were there, and what we wanted to achieve from the experience. They wanted to know what we wanted.

Our first request was for knowledge and information about drugs. This was given readily and in an easy to understand form. We were told there is no recovery without an addict being ready and willing to accept help. This we understood. We were also told that the journey to recovery would be a journey for us as well as our daughter. Her addiction, although ultimately her choice, was also our responsibility. We would all have to learn, understand, and change to have any chance of success.

We began our personal growth sessions (run separately for husband and wife, understandably preferable for honest and open communication) and were enrolled to do the next P.E.T.E.R. Program (Parent education to encourage responsibility) which began in February this year.

This part of the program can be very confronting as you have to deal with aspects of your personality, actions, and emotions to gain knowledge of why you are who you are, and possible reasons for why the current addiction situation exists.

My biggest problem during this time was being able to deal with my emotions, and the stress which they created, and being able to accept that my daughter could not be saved now, or by me. I am here for support and guidance when she is willing to ask for it.

During all the sessions, the support and encouragement from the staff and counselors has been enormous. Some of the staff being success stories themselves makes the process more hopeful and believable.

The P.E.T.E.R. Program encourages parents to support their spouses/children during their addiction but not to encourage or enable their behaviour. They have to take responsibility for their own lives, choices and actions. This is not an easy thing to do especially when you see a loved one in pain or danger. We are given strategies and skills to enable us to do this, both through information, self-knowledge and behavioural changes.

Although we do not see our daughter a great deal, she still visits us and we take hope from this, that possibly in the future we will be prepared and ready when she needs our help and support most. i.e. to succeed in recovery.

These hopes for a future for our daughter would not have been possible without the support and information provided by the staff at Shay Louise House. I would probably still be sitting at home crying for my lost daughter, taking anti-depressants to just get through the day, and creating havoc in the lives of those around me, and destroying any life I had outside the drug problem. The effect and cost of drug addiction is much higher than the cost of one person's rehab. It affects and destroys many lives.

There is a great need for more of these centres to provide assistance not only to parents, but extended family and others, on how to deal with addiction, both honestly and with correct, detailed information about the outcomes of both drug/alcohol use and recovery.

We have a long drive through town each week to our sessions, and others are driving even further. There need to be centres in areas where need is greatest. More money for counselors in the current location is also needed to reduce waiting times for counseling/treatment due to staff/funding shortfalls. People need help when a problem arises, not after a death occurs due to drug or alcohol addiction.

Yours Sincerely,

Mary (& David) Lawrence



**ADTARP Incorporated**

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**From:** Deannelee Burgess-Morgan  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 14 March 2007 5:04 PM  
**To:** adtarpinc@ihug.com.au  
**Subject:** Re : Testimonial of Recovery

Dear Eric,

I would like to share with others my experience of the 'Powerful Gift of Recovery' that the programs offered and managed by the Shay Louise House's wonderful and committed staff members.

"Five years ago at the age of 47 years (2002) I hit my rock bottom and removed myself from a 27 year marriage that had been poisoned and destroyed by the effect of the progressive degeneration of my former husbands addiction and subsequently my own co-dependency/co-addiction. Prior to my marriage at 19 years of age I had been impacted by an abusive and violent environment and felt responsible for the protection of loved ones who were being harmed. I also felt responsible for excusing and saving other loved ones who became addicted to marijuana, heroin and alcohol. Hence after taking this pattern of existence to extreme throughout my marriage to my former husband who is addicted to alcohol and gambling, needless to say I needed a lot of help.

I had already sought help from Relationships Australia's 'Break Even' services which offers the 'Harm Minimisation' approach. Despite the counsellors best intentions, I was horrified when I realised that they actually are so ignorant to the disease that they are supposedly giving expert advice and assistance for. I persisted with this attempt of finding help for 6 months (1997). After trying to battle on blindly for another 18 months and only succeeded in further degeneration within myself and with my loved addict, I again sought help and spent almost a year making contact with Gamblers Anonymous through the Central Mission in Adelaide (●●●). By this time my marriage, my family life, the business I was in with my loved addict and not least of all my teenage sons lives was in total chaos. Through a close relative I was put in the direction of a counsellor who was trying to set up programs that worked on a 'Total Abstinence' basis. This was 2002 - I was in grave trouble within myself, I was stuck and had no idea of how to start to help myself. I started one on one counselling, family group and 12 Steps to Recovery work with the 'Total Abstinence' group. I started to learn about the disease of addiction and my part in all of it, I also started to become aware of myself as a person. I remained with this 'Self Health' for just over 2 years and I know now it helped me to hold on and survive what transpired during divorce etc procedures.

BUT!!!! This time last year (2006) I had hit my rock bottom again - only much worse - because this was all about me (not the protective daughter, not the saving sister and friend, not the wife, business partner and saving enabler, not the one responsible for the perfect happiness and harmony for loved ones) and all of the damage that a lifetime of living/functioning/surviving within addiction based relationships had reduced me to. I was terrified, I felt totally unsafe within myself. I needed help to learn how to cope with myself and the state I was in. I knew that if I didn't find help, recover, heal and grow stronger before - when and/or if my sons who already have problems with drugs and alcohol continued on the downward spiral of my other loved ones I wouldn't make it. I knew I needed something structured, something that would show me how and what I had to do to find my true self and start the self healing and responsibility to oneself. Even though I still hadn't 'Individualised as a Stand Alone Person with my own Feelings and Rights' - for the previous few months I had this child within me screaming at me to do something - I couldn't take anymore!

A friend's mother told me about Shay Louise House, then I looked them up on their web site. The more I read about their programs the more overwhelmed I became - there was hope! I emailed, telephoned and made an appointment for my initial interview. After meeting with the counsellors and discussing what it was I was needing and seeking, then discussing the programs in depth I knew I was in the right place - FINALLY!!! I have now completed my Personal Development Program and Worked through the P.E.T.E.R. Program to the end of last year. However I decided to do this again because due to the immeasurable benefits of the actual

15/03/2007

process of the Personal Development Program I feel stronger now and want to do much better in the Parent Education To Encourage Responsibility Program because I have already started to experience the benefits of feeling better and thus conducting myself in a more responsible manner in my relationship with both of my sons. I know that this process works and I want to break the addiction cycle for myself, my sons and their children. Also I'm currently working through my Inner Child Development Program. Due to the programs process, teaching me to take ownership of my past responses, reactions, choices, behaviour and treatment I have finally grown through all that I could never cope with at a conscious and honest level of being. Then the process leads to self healing, self forgiveness, forgiveness of others and the reward after this level of process gives me self worth, courage, faith and love to cope firstly at the most basic level of daily living then gradually facing challenges and possibilities that enable me to grow as my authentic self, growing in my position at work and in my relationships with loved ones in a way I never knew was my right before Shay Louise House.

The programs at Shay Louise House helped me to hold on to my position as an Administration/Office Manager, keep my home, start to repair some of the damage that addiction impacted on my sons and my relationship with them, to gain self love and self respect. Importantly I've earned the respect of my sons for committing to a better life for myself and for finding the courage to keep going until I found the program that actually educates, guides, supports and cares enough to encourage those who seek it to keep at the powerful process to enable the individual to set themselves free and live their lives as happy, healthy and contributing to a society where we all have the right to a better life than one of addiction. I know from my own journey and what I have witnessed of others who have journeyed around me through recovery that the only true and full-proof way to live life as it is every individual's right to live is that addiction is not to be treated lightly, it thrives on lies, secrets and human frailty, and when the disease is treated by 'Harm Minimisation' the disease still always has control and continues to eat away at the individual human essence, wearing away the fabric of the individual's inner strength. It is my very own personal experience that addiction treats 'Harm Minimisation' as a JOKE! As I continue to walk the walk of recovery and experience the benefits of Shay Louise House's programs/lessons of self honesty, self respect, self responsibility which is reciprocated with respect and responsibility to others I witness my sons, a friend, my parents and others responding differently and showing signs of turning themselves around to a better life for themselves. The domino effect - in the positive - is happening around me with my loved ones - I humbly and gratefully thank everyone at Shay Louise House for helping me to achieve a second chance at the life that has been waiting for me.

YOURS SINCERELY

(FREE SPIRITED GYPSIE) DEANNELEE

**To The House of Representatives Standing Committee  
On Family and Human Services**

**13 March 2007**

**Annie O'Toole**

**As mother and an x user of illicit drugs, I can tell you that it had cost my family and me a great deal of and money and as for my children it had denied them a mum who should have been there for them at all times, but because of my drug uses it was impossible to show them right from wrong and even though I loved my children I just could not give up drugs, but when I finely did try to get help every where I went of help I was told that I could learn to use safely and that I needed to accept that I had been a user for along time, and that I could be taught to use safely, Then I was put on antidepressants and left on my own, to work it out when I had left I had no hope in my life and walked out more depressed than when I had walked in.**

**I kept looking for help and I never took the antidepressants; I ended up finding a place Called (SHAY LOUISE HOUSE) though friends who had been on this program and I had know them a very long time, I knew that they were very heavy users and also long time users, anyway what I saw was hope and it had all been done with out any uses of antidepressants or any harm minimization of any kind, they helped us help our selves. I was 42 years old when I found help, today I am drug free and happy and my children have got their mother who now gives them her full attention which they fully deserve, inconclusion I am aware that in some cases the harm minimization model has it uses but there should be more places that are also recovery based and that hope should be given back to those whom have the will to stop using illicit drugs, and not be told that we should just accept where we are at and just learn to uses drugs safely there it no such thing it's a lie and it is harming our children our families, our neighbors, friends, please help us to open up more rehabs like (SHAY LOUISE HOUSE) they gave me hope when there was none, but the best thing they gave me was the confidence to do it all my self.**

**Thank you for your time**

**Annie O'Toole**

19 March 2007

Mr Ren Fairclough

Mr James Catchpole  
Secretary, Standing Committee on  
Family and Human Services

Dear Secretary,

**Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families  
Letter dated 8 February to CEO Drugbeat**

Approximately eleven years ago my daughter entered into a relationship with a man two years older than herself. He was a heroin addict, and she also then became an addict. Approximately eighteen months later she gave birth to a son. Her son is now nine years old and she is thirty years old.

They lived together until June 2005 at which time the relationship ceased; ending years of aggression and misery.

Whilst the drug problem of the partner was transparent and known to his parents and my wife and me, we became aware only after the relationship ended that our daughter also was addicted.

To address the three terms of reference as per the above letter:

The financial, social and personal costs to all caught up directly and indirectly with regard to drug usage are incalculable. They spread well beyond the immediate family.

- **Cost:**

Financial: It is not possible to place a firm financial cost on substance abuse. The direct cost of drugs and alcohol purchased over the ten year period would have run into many thousands of dollars. However, compounding this is money forgone from not being physically and mentally fit enough to work and earn sufficient income to live without government and parental support.; the converse situation to non drug users. This latter cost is even greater than that of the drugs used.

To assist the young struggling family, my wife and I, and the parents of our daughter's partner, purchased in 1999 the house they were renting at the time. The property was purchased with the agreement that the tenants – our adult children - would pay rental which would assist with repayments of the loan acquired to purchase the property. The rental was heavily subsidised. Over the period the property was occupied, payments made consistently fell well short of the already subsidised rental. Thus the real subsidy over the six year period equated to between \$23,000 - \$26,000. Following the breakdown of the relationship between the partners the property was sold.

Social and personal: Substance (including alcohol) abusers make many bad choices. Life skills atrophy, self esteem is lost, judgment becomes seriously impaired, accelerated physical deterioration follows, as in addition to the poisons that drugs carry into their bodies, drug users lose interest in eating nourishing and sustaining foods. The addict retreats into a world of unreality where there are no

commitments or responsibilities. Principles and ethics are completely subsumed by the all consuming need for money to pay for drugs and/or alcohol. It is bad enough when only the addicts themselves are affected, but a new dimension of issues and problems is created when a child is involved. The father, also an addict, appears to be trying to get his life together. He has a new partner and is in what seems to be a stable relationship. The Family Court has awarded him full custody of his son. Notwithstanding this, our grandson stays with us periodically on a regular basis.

Our daughter currently is homeless, apparently with very little income as she no longer has the confidence and skills to obtain full Centrelink income to which she may be entitled. She has a partner who also is an addict. We have no idea where she is or how to contact her. When she has made contact, she invariably subjects us to verbal abuse. She loves her son, but cannot control her abusive behaviour towards us (her parents) and others when she has come to see him or speak to him on the phone whilst he is in our care, which causes him major upset even though the abuse is not directed at him. As a consequence of this totally unacceptable behaviour, caused by drugs and/or alcohol, we can not permit her access to her son, and at this point she has not seen him for a number of weeks. It is very uncertain when she may see him again. We know she is distraught about this and it hurts us deeply also, but there is no way evident to move forward. Her son also is distressed about the situation. Not only is he upset about not seeing her, but he is old enough to know she is in serious difficulty, and he is very worried about her safety and welfare.

Members of the family of an addict – my wife and I have two other adult children each of whom has a partner – must get on with their lives, and we are doing that. However, there is always present the spectre of the family member who has estranged themselves, and each member of the family in a sense is a prisoner of this. There is no way out unless either the addict recovers and rejoins the world, or as terrible as it is to even think it, eventually dies directly or indirectly in the long if not short term, as a result of their addiction.

Many others are affected: My wife's siblings and their families share our deep concerns over the damage to a life, and the consequential impact on others.

- **The impact of harm minimisation programs**

We believe that harm minimisation programs; citing just two such as needle sharing rooms, and prescribed medication programs such as methadone, subutex (buprenorphine) and suboxone, do not address the real problem. They cater to the symptoms and in essence hide, or mask the situation, and in fact make it easier for addicts to continue with their habit. In a sense it is one of the enabling factors that encourages substance abuse.

The use of illicit drugs and the abuse of alcohol are a cancer in the world's societies. It begs the question then, if a cancer sufferer is analogous to someone suffering from drug addiction, what if the former is treated similarly in principle to the treatments currently applied to a drug addict. It is unthinkable that the cancer would not be removed as soon as possible. Imagine if treatment simply is given for the pain caused by cancer in all cases, or covered up where visible, just for cosmetic purposes. Yet drug addiction in so many cases just as surely will lead to ruined lives, and on occasion, death in the short or long terms.

Prescription medication is no less addictive than the illicit drugs for which it is prescribed. It is of significant cost, and no doubt drug companies and dispensing pharmacies generate large incomes from this source. Personal observation of

those using the medication reveals that it is mood/mind altering, and a chemical in the body that may in the long term cause significant damage, just as that caused by illicit drugs. There is one way only to deal with addiction, and that is for the addict to abstain totally from the use of all substances – illicit drugs, alcohol where that is the problem, and the prescription medication. In turn, this can only be achieved by addicts undertaking recognised rehabilitation and counselling programs. It would seem appropriate for such programs to be government assessed and accredited. Addiction has such a powerful grip, it is very rare for an addict with the best will in the world, to cure themselves.

In summary, the effects of harm minimisation programs in many instances will be to cause more damage than if they were not applied at all.

- **Ways to strengthen families etc**

The framing of this term of reference is not deemed valid. The issue should be how ways can be found to educate families when lives are threatened with severe damage from substance abuse. Effectively, 'strengthening' seems to suggest offering a form of grief counselling which again is only a type of palliative care – for the family rather than the addict. 'Strengthening' families is not a help or of real benefit in addressing the problem.

**To reiterate and emphasise; comprehensive education of all concerned – addicts, families, the wider community, governments and relevant authorities at all levels – and the putting in place of rehabilitation and counselling programs (counselling for families as well as addicts also is seen as vital) are essential fundamental requirements.**

In summary, the use of illicit drugs and the abuse of alcohol have reached such large proportions, that there is a real threat to the fabric of our society. Governments which do not view these as cancers to be eradicated rather than matters to be dealt with just as social issues, are imperilling the strength and health of our country.

With regard to the drug trade, governments surely must implement major programs also to root out the sources, suppliers and pushers of illicit drugs. There are lessons that can be drawn from the alcohol Prohibition era in the US in the 1920's that was a major factor in enabling the establishment of organised crime. The drug trade supports and further enables organised crime here in Australia, and the financially strengthened crime organisations can then expand further into other areas of crime. If for no other reason than this – even putting aside the incalculable costs in terms of human and societal suffering and financial cost - all efforts should be made to eradicate the drug trade.

Dimi Nikolaidis

20 March 2007

### Substance Abuse Inquiry

My name is Dimi and I am married with four children:-

Simeon 12,  
Elisia 10,  
Aris 4,  
Nicholas 3.

My husband George was a substance abuse user and as a result of the incompetent treatment and support from Mental Health Services our lives were turned into chaos and confusion.

The reason for my letter is due to the massive concerns I have with the existing Mental Health Services system. My belief is that harm minimisation is a major contributing factor in the the deterioration of our society.

The following is an outline of my families' traumatic experience of living with a substance abuse user and our involvement with Mental Health Services (ASCIS).

Due to my husbands substance abuse he developed symptoms of drug induced psychosis causing him to experience paranoia & hallucinations. This caused him to see, hear and feel things which were not there, he also feared that others wanted to hurt him. He had set traps on the roof and all over the house and had put grease on the fence line so as he would know if someone was entering into our house. He became hostile and aggressive, violent for no reason, agitated, manipulative and his behaviour was irrational and frightening.

I feared for my life and my children's as he would continuously yell at us, lock us in the house for hours, take my house and car keys away from me, be

extremely violent and abusive towards me mentally, physically and emotionally, destroy my belongings and turn all the power and lights off for hours at a time. We were living with a stranger and we were frightened for our safety, so I called the Police and within 1 hour packed our belongings and moved in with my parents.

In the direction from the Police I asked for help from the Mental Health Services (ASCIS). ASCIS accompanied by eight Police Officers came to see my husband and informed him that he needed to go to the Royal Adelaide Hospital for an assessment. After there assessment they informed us that he would need to be further assessed by Doctors and Social Workers at Glenside. We were taken there by ambulance and on our arrival a group of Doctors, Nurses and Social Workers were waiting outside for us. As soon as we got out of the Ambulance I was pushed to the side and they all grabbed my husband and sedated him immediately. I was furious and demanded to know where my husband was and what was going on. They told me that I wouldn't be able to see him until the next day because he was heavily sedated and would be out of it all night. I waited to speak to a Doctor or someone who could provide me with an explanation about what happened. I felt terrible as all I was trying to do was help my husband, I never expected my husband to be treated like an animal and locked in a cage. I was shocked, devastated, confused, upset, angry and furious, however, I had to be brave and strong for my husband's parents, as they were also falling apart.

The next day we returned to see my husband. He looked awful and withdrawn as he had been heavily sedated and medicated. He was not at all happy to see me, infact, he ignored me and would only speak to his parents. I still went back day after day and then after 2 weeks he was transferred to the C3 Ward at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. He was detained in the C3 Ward and once again given medication on a daily basis. Everyday I would visit him twice a day, running back and forth between him and the children. It was very draining for me, however, I needed to be there as I felt awful leaving him there on his own. His mother would also visit him daily. Eventually he was able to have home visits, 2 hours here and there. I would pick him up and drop him back to the C3 Ward, but this one particular time my husband decided out of fear of the unknown, to do a runner with the car and flee to Melbourne, he phoned and told me that he wouldn't return if they were going to put him back in C3. He also phoned ASCIS and they agreed to assess the situation on his return.



He returned after a week and someone had called ASCIS and informed them of this situation. That morning I received a frantic phone call from my husband telling me that the Police were at our house and as he was not willing to go with them, they sprayed capsicum spray in his face. As he was fearful of going back to C3 he hit one of the officers so he could make a run to the front door, and lock himself in our house. He was afraid and begged me to get down there. He also called his mum, brother and sister for support. When I got to our house the Police Officers wouldn't let me into my property, my brother-in-law arrived soon after and jumped the fence to get inside the house. I was afraid and confused and didn't know what was going on, the police advised me that ASCIS had phoned them and they asked me to follow them to the park at the back of our house. They informed me that the starforce was there by the instructions of ASCIS and when I got to the park it was covered with Police Officers and vans. I was furious with ASCIS as they had caused such an outrage, and hadn't even bothered to phone me to handle things in an appropriate manner.

I communicated with my husband on the phone who advised me that he would go willingly with them. I advised ASCIS that I was appalled by their actions and disgusted that they didn't bother to communicate with my husband or myself in the first instance instead of creating such an annoyance.

He was once again taken to the C3 Ward and medicated heavily daily, I was able to have him transferred to the Adelaide Clinic, where he agreed to see a private psychiatrist. He stayed there for a further 2 weeks and was then able to come home. He continued to see his psychiatrist who put him on a drug suppressant which turned him into a Zombie for the next few months. His psychiatrist also informed him to put his emotions and feelings into a box and close the lid and never open it. What the psychiatrist failed to see was that the reason for taking drugs in the first place was due to underlying emotional issues.

After several months my husband returned to work, however he was incapable of working everyday. He was still visiting with the psychiatrist which was really pointless as he wasn't dealing with his emotional issues. So eventually he turned back to drugs and alcohol and became hostile and aggressive again. The kids were frightened so we moved to my sister's house where they could feel safe. After a week he was apologetic and

promised he would continue to see his doctor and that things would improve. I returned back home as it was difficult for me staying at my sister's with 4 kids, even though they didn't want me to leave as they were afraid.

The abuse was less than before, so I battled and kept on going for the sake of my children. Until one day I woke up and he was cutting a chunk of hair from my head with a knife, this was extremely scary and I phoned his aunty who lived down the road to come immediately.

I once again moved this time to his aunt's house where we stayed for a week. His uncle stayed with him in order to ensure that he was taking his medication and going to his appointment with his psychiatrist. Once again things had calmed down and we moved back home. They remained calm for the next three months.

But once again we were on the same rollercoaster ride, the kids were crying every night. My husband was always on the roof setting up sensor lights and cameras around the place or putting bugs everywhere. If he wasn't there he would take off and most often he would lock us in the house while he was gone. At night he would keep all the windows open so he could hear any noises, we were cold and afraid. The mental and physical abuse was happening on a regular bases and the kids were afraid and would constantly be by my side.

I once again turned to ASCIS who phoned the police to come over and assess the situation, they informed my husband that he would need to go to the Royal Adelaide Hospital for an assessment and they would take him if he didn't go willingly. We went with his sister and mother to the hospital where he was assessed by a doctor. The doctor then called me in and advised me that he believed there was nothing wrong with my husband and that we should seek marriage counseling and that he was free to go home. I was shocked by his assessment and this just gave my husband further ammunition to continue abusing me and telling me that even the doctor can see there was nothing wrong with him.

His behaviour was becoming even more dangerous and unmanageable as he was now involving other innocent people. One morning when I answered my front door a seventeen year old boy was standing there with his father and his boss. They were extremely angry and the father explained to me that the night before my husband had threatened his son with a tow bar for no

reason at all. He also explained that his son was a shift worker and had only started working the 4.00am shift for the past few days. My husband had obviously been observing this vehicle passing every night at the same time and started to feel that something was going on. I was concerned by his behaviour and apologised to them for my husband. They were understanding and explained that they wouldn't press charges this time, however, if it happened again they would go straight to the police.

I phoned his psychiatrist to explain to him what had happened and to express my concerns to him that over the past few years there had been no progress in my husband's behaviour. Without my awareness he involved ASCIS. ASCIS arrived with the police and they had apparently phoned my husband prior to coming over. He was once again taken to the Royal Adelaide Hospital for assessment and once again detained in the C3 ward. When I went to see him he was nasty to me and only nice to his mother. After three days he came home, his mother was instructed to come over every night to ensure he was taking his medication. He was calm for a couple of weeks until one night my sister and a friend came over, they noticed that he was extremely agitated and restless. Out of nowhere my husband in front of them hit me to the ground. The kids were hysterical and he started throwing things and calling me abusive names in front of everyone. My sister and friend left and called the police as they were afraid for my life. At that moment my mother-in-law arrived and heard screaming and the kids crying from outside. She ran inside and my husband immediately left and took off in the car. My kids were begging me to leave as they felt he would come back and hurt me. They ran outside as they were, with no shoes on which I hadn't realized at the time. We got into my mother-in-laws car and just as we were about to leave my husband returned. He started banging on the window of the car trying to break the window, we left as fast as we could. We went to his parents house, however my husband was soon there angrily asking me for the keys to the house and car. I refused as my kids needed their belongings, they weren't even wearing shoes. He came towards me and grabbed me by the hair and demanded the keys, I had no choice but to give him the keys. He left in a rage and threatened to kill my parents. The police arrived with my sister and friend and they immediately called for back up. We called my parents and told them to leave right away and go to my sister's house, my brother-in-law was home so they would be safe there. The police took the kids and I to a crisis care safe house, where we remained the night. The next day I went to my sister's house but was advised not to tell anyone my whereabouts.

I was furious that my children had to go through this.

A couple of days later I was informed that my husband had been detained again by C3 but this time he was detained for even longer, as he still had my keys we were unable to return home and had to do with the things we had.

I once again visited my husband and at the beginning he was giving me the cold shoulder but after a few days he was better and gave me back my keys so we could go home. As soon as possible I had him transferred to Adelaide Clinic for the remainder of his detainment. He then returned home and was fine for a month until once again the same situation reoccurred over and over again.

We had now been involved with ASCIS over a four year period and we were in a far worse situation than we had begun. A tragedy was waiting to happen if the appropriate help didn't appear and fast.

Thankfully we heard about a feelings and abstinence based recovery program. However, as my life had been out of control for the past few years, in all honesty I was hesitant in trusting another organization to assist me. However, for the sake of my children I couldn't give up now, there dad needed help no matter where that left us as a couple, and I decided to give this place a go.

Finally I had found an organization that listened and supported me and offered support and guidance to his family as well. Together with my mother and sister-in-law we attended weekly and we soon learned how to deal with my husband and his behaviour. Our biggest obstacle was to get my husband to attend. I explained to him that I wanted him to attend, however he flatly refused. I couldn't blame him either as he felt this was a trap to get him detained. The counselor advised me that he would eventually attend.

On 21st November 2005 we had attended my husband's Grandmothers funeral and my husband had been extremely upset and had a couple of drinks which as a result of his mental state became hostile. That night he was locked up in the City Watch House and then taken to Yatala Prison. My husband was released from jail with a set of bail conditions and on home detention.

With the help of our support system the organization who had a Recovery Based Program, we arranged that one of his Home D conditions be that he attended The Recovery Base Structured Program for drug/alcohol users.

My husband was heading towards being rehabilitated, there was an obvious change in him after just a few appointments. They dealt with the underlying emotional issues which my husband had never released from inside him and by being clean from all drugs and alcohol while receiving skills which educated, supported and guided him he was able to establish a clear understanding of where he had been, why he had gone there and what benefits there are to never go there again.

My husband has been clean of all drugs and alcohol for over a year now and that is an amazing result in such a short period of time for anyone especially someone who had been on drugs from the age of 14. I can't bare to imagine where our lives would have been if we hadn't found this feelings and abstinence based recovery program.

Harm minimisation in my opinion is suppressing emotions and feelings which need to be brought to the surface and dealt with. By continuously ignoring and not dealing with our emotions and feelings we are creating a layer upon layer of emotions inside us which unless dealt with is a recipe for disaster to occur.

This substantiates my concerns regarding the damaging effects of harm minimisation and how it is vital to improve on our current system before we destroy our society further.

As I stated earlier my family now has a life and a better future to look forward to, therefore, the reason for my letter is to be able to help others before it is too late. I wrote to the Hon. Gail Gago who is the Minister for Mental Health & Substance Abuse and the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health explaining my situation and concerns regarding the existing Mental Health Services, her reply is attached.

Yours truly,



Mrs Dimi Nikolaidis

Hon Gail Gago MLC

**COPY**



**Government  
of South Australia**

06MH1474

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and Conservation  
Minister for Mental Health  
and Substance Abuse  
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Minister.Gago@saugov.sa.gov.au

Dear Mrs Nikolaidis

Thank you for your letter concerning your husband's recovery through the assistance of the DrugBeat of South Australia Program (*DrugBeat*), operated from Shay Louise House. I apologise for the delay in my response.

I am aware that the recovery and healing process for mental health disorders and substance misuse is very difficult for both the individual and their family.

The mental health and drug and alcohol service systems offer a range of programs provided through both Government and non-Government agencies. This enables those who are seeking help to find a program that best suits their needs.

The Government currently provides funding to non-Government organisations, including the Australian Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Program Inc, who operate *DrugBeat*.

I appreciated hearing feedback on people's experiences during my visit to *DrugBeat*.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me about your experiences, as it is invaluable in assisting the Government with improving service delivery across the whole community.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gail Gago".

HON GAIL GAGO MLC

25/1/2007

**Date : 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2007**

**To Parliament House,**

**Subject : Harm Minimisation**

My Name is George Nikolaidis, I am 36 years of age, Father of 4 Children, Husband to a beautiful wife and I am now a recovered addict enjoying 14 months of clean time and proud to say pro-active and have no intentions of returning to my life as an addict. Some people say is there anything you would die for. My answer is I would rather die than live life as an addict again.. The purpose of my story is one which I wish to share with the world and my aim and goal is to help others that are in the same situation shedding a light of hope as I was given. I will try to stick to facts although for the reader to get the true story I will have to explain some areas in detail.

My Journey has been taunting , scary and life threatening. So Here goes. At the age of 11 I started to drink alcohol at family gatherings , parties and basically anywhere there would be alcohol served I managed to some way consume it. Come my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday I had cannabis offered to me for the first time, assured to me that it was not harmful in anyway by people around me and also remember hearing things on the media stating that cannabis smoking was actually therapeutic and beneficial for relaxing. Upon smoking cannabis for the first time I enjoyed the effects and continued smoking the drug , before smoking cannabis I was a very good soccer player and had the potential of becoming a professional player some people say if I kept it up I would be playing for the Australian soccer team one day. I chose the path of smoking, drinking and drugging as at this time I was unaware of the future harm I would be causing to myself and people around me.

September 1985, Adelaide hosted the Grand Prix this is an event I would never forget, I managed to get myself into the stag hotel corner corporate box , I was 16 years of age and had access to any alcoholic beverage and one of the best smorgas boards I had ever seen. I was there all day until the police came and arrested me for drunken disorderly and locked me up in the city watch house. My mother was then called to arrange for me to be bailed out. My mother was upset with my actions but nothing was done to stop this from happening again, I look back now and wonder this could have been a good time to have my problem identified.

Years went on and I would continue to drink heavily , smoke cannabis 4 times a day on the minimum and also get myself into some regretful situations related to my act of abusing alcohol and drugs, it funny that intervention was never there . I mean I seriously had a problem with my drinking and drugging.

I married at the age of 21 and continued to drink , some cannabis together with my partner, My partner was not an excessive abuser but used more regularly than she would have , by being around me this encouraged her to use more regular.

We had our first child when I was 23 , happiest moment in my life, but still continued to drink excessively and some cannabis excessively. We then had another child when I was 25. I cut back on my drinking to evening only and smoking cannabis evening only. At this time I was experiencing growing pains in my Property maintenance business . Business was becoming more demanding and taking up a lot of my time day and night working hard during the day and doing paperwork at night and somewhere in that time find some time to spend with my young family.

One night I was invited to a friends bucks night and I could smell cannabis smoking going on and thought I would go and join in as they were smoking in the male toilets. Upon entering the toilet I spoke with the brother of the buck and like normal asked for some. Well before I knew there it was he had racked up a line of speed or amphetamines as we know it, my first reaction was no, I don't take that shit. He said to me and was amazed that I had never tried it and said to me you don't know what your missing. He said just put a little in your drink and see what it does, being a trusted friend I agreed to try it.

That night was amazing I felt on top of the world and nothing could stand in my way, invincible so to speak. I was out all night and didn't return home till 2 pm the next day. Well my wife was furious and wouldn't speak to me for days. Anyway the next few days I wasn't feeling to well anyway, always wanting to sleep.

I then took it upon myself to get in touch with this friend and organise some speed for myself as I enjoyed the feeling the cost of a jewelry bag of cannabis then was around \$20.00 to \$ 25.00 , the cost of 1 gram of speed then was \$200.00 , and not once did I think twice of the high cost of the speed because I just liked the way it made me feel.

I then used to take speed a few times a week to assist me in keeping up with the business growing and also to assist me in not being to tired to spend time with my young family. As time went on I would start to use more and more , eventually becoming an every day and night habit . Basically I had reached a stage that if I didn't have it I would be out like a light sleeping for days until I would have it, therefore becoming dependant on it.

Time went on almost a year later after having speed every day and night , I started to begin to accuse my wife of having affairs, people watching me, people crawling in the roofs, police surveillance pretty clear I had developed a sickness known as psychosis.

My wife was now pregnant with our third child, I had beliefs that this was not my child and began to doubt if the kids that I already had were mine. So I had this plan set out to catch my wife thinking she was having an affair, I had beliefs that she was meeting someone in our home whilst I would be sleeping, so I would take massive amounts of speed to stay up every night and day to pursue this idea that I had developed as a result of abusing the speed on an obscene level.

Well time went on and my drug use was taking its path , I would not sleep some weeks I would probably only average 6 hours of sleep in a whole week. I developed a **circular thinking** pattern. This means my mission was get drugs at any expense and priority at all times, meanwhile my children would be suffering from circumstances resulting from this circular thinking, missing out on their school activities events , after school activities, and my wife had no support from me at all. My life was now beginning to spiral down at a rapid rate.

Due to the drug induced psychosis that I had developed I was acting in ways that my wife would call the police when situations became out of hand. My wife believed that this was the only way to defuse the situation. Her ringing the police only made me more angry and aggressive and therefore processing this action in my mind at the time as yet another form of betrayal. Betrayal is a strong and nasty feeling to have floating around your home. After my wife had several discussions with the police, they had become aware of what our problem was, the police officers advised my wife to get in contact with ASCIS.

My wife was led to believe that this was the solution to her problems. As this information was recommended by the police my wife took this advise and rang the department for advise and assistance. At this time she was unaware of any other solution to her problem.



Then one day January 2002 my wife had no choice but to call the police again, this day was the most daunting time in my life, the police had come to our home with a team of staff from ASCIS, they were there to assess the situation, I never forget the staff that had come to assess me they were not interested in what I had to say, they acted on what they were told and what they had seen.

There action was, Take me to the RAH for further assessment I was driven to the RAH in the back of a police car on my own. When I arrived they took me in where I was escorted to a interview room. There were chub security guards everywhere with rubber gloves on. No testing was done to me regarding blood test or any testing at all, there was no communication with me at all by anyone not even my wife or family, they had basically made up their mind as to what their action plan was, and at no time were they communicating with my wife as to what their planned action was, in fact they had told my wife a totally different action plan as to what they were about to do.

I was ordered to go into an ambulance together with my wife and we were told that we were going to Glenside, section called Brentwood south for further assessment. When we arrived there were 10 security guards waiting, as the doors opened to the ambulance my wife was pushed out the way and they grabbed me like a wild animal and the instant reaction I had was to resist, I was then thrown into a dark room held down and a injection shoved up my ass sedating me. Whatever they gave me in knocked me out for what I can remember it felt like a whole day. When I finally came around I found myself in a dark room with just a mattress on a floor, this was a nightmare in reality, I felt like a zombie.

Then eventually some guards came into the room and cuffed me. Oh buy the way I had given them no reason to treat me in this way as I was complying with what ever they asked me to do. I was then taken into the isle where there were bright lights and saw many rooms just like the one I was in. They said to me they would take the cuffs off if I didn't resist, I said to them at no time would I have resisted if they had just let me know what their action plan was.

Whilst I was drugged out with whatever they gave me they then asked me a few questions one I remember very clearly and that was DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU ARE HERE? Is this the appropriate question to ask someone who has just been treated like a wild animal and at no time had I broken the law. I was not feeling very well and my state of mind was totally mixed up.

Anyway they then escorted me to the showers where I had a shower in place which I noticed just by the facilities they had in the shower it was set up or designed to eliminate people trying to kill themselves. EG: no mirrors, just polished metal. At this time I am just trying to get a grip on what the \_\_\_\_\_ is going on. After my shower I was taken to a room were I was debriefed on where I was. I was told that I had a mental illness and that I had to take these tablets. I was hesitant to take anything they had given me as I felt like I was hard done by and treated like an animal. I mean I wouldn't even treat an animal the way I was treated. I was there for three days and during those three days I would ask questions as to what I was doing there and when I would be going home and what there action plan was. Their response was we can't tell you we don't know you will have ask the doctor. I would ask can I speak with the doctor and there response was you will get your chance. During those three days I was becoming very angry and was feeling betrayed by my wife and the world.

On the fourth day my mother and wife came to visit, I was that angry I went to walk out of the interview room feeling betrayal, and told them I never wanted to see them, They asked why, I had told them what they had done to me and how I was treated, and they where in a state of shock, as they where told other information, such as that I had been seeing a doctor and that I didn't want to see anyone and that was not true, Brentwood south's staff were giving us both incorrect information causing rifts between my wife and I and yet further escalating the situation as I believed that my wife knew of this action plan but now know she had no idea of their action plan.

On the fifth day I had finally had the chance to see the doctor, I was woken up at 7.00 am and without even having the opportunity to wash my face or have time to even just wake up I was taken to an interview room for assessment which was very brief and was told that I was not able to leave yet and I would have to be further assessed, I asked the doctor why I had to stay longer and she had told me that I was psychotic and that I needed to continue taking the prescribed drugs.

While I was being further assessed I was ordered to take drugs that I didn't want to take as they made me feel like a zombie with no brain, I wonder what is worse, a zombie or a zombie with no brain? This is one for the "so called" professionals to answer. I was told that if I didn't take these drugs that they would medically induce me. So I was basically left powerless with no option but to take the drugs that made me feel like a zombie or a zombie with no brains.

Another three days had passed feeling doomed, I had over my course of being there had many discussions with other people that were there and they also felt the same way that I had, I never forget one guy his name was Scott, he was actually leaving that day and said to me if you want to get out of here focus on one eye when the doctor is talking to you and don't look from eye to eye and you will get out.

Well as stupid as this sounded I thought I would try it and to my amazement it worked, the next day I was released and taken to the RAH C3 well that place was even worse to the fact that there we patients in their that looked and acted like total freaks, and zombies with serious mental health issues. My family would visit and say to me and the staff that I did not need to be there and that this was not where I needed to be, it was actually pushing me further and further toward severe depression.

During all this time I had not seen my kids as I did not want them to see their father in the hospital because they would ask what was wrong with me and being one who does not mislead or lie to his kids I would have to tell them truth and this would have devastating effects on A) my children's process of thinking & B) myself feeling more and more like a failure.

I could not take this type of treatment any further, after three days I was allowed to leave the ward only for an hour to spend some time with my wife and see the kids as I did not want them to see me in this state or in the hospital. So I was allowed to go home for an hour and see them there, then when I had the chance, I grabbed just a few clothes, some cash and the keys to the car and took off to Melbourne for a long drive escaping from the mental health system that the existing government provides for "so called" "rehabilitation".

How can someone be rehabilitated when they are forced to take drugs that make them feel like a zombie or a zombie with no brains?

When I reached Melbourne I rang my Wife and had advised her that I would not be returning as I felt that they were destroying my mind and causing me to suffer severe depression. As I had felt betrayal from my wife I did not inform her on where I was going as I felt that she was the reason I was in the situation I was in and would inform ASCIS on my whereabouts. I then asked my wife to tell them that the only way I would come back is if they agreed to not detain me any longer. They then rang me and advised me that that was not possible. Whilst I was in Melbourne I stayed for 4 days trying to clear my mind of the drugs they had been forcing me to take. Trying to focus was virtually impossible, so I made some calls and bought some speed to bring me back up. After another day I felt I was ready to return and by this time I was missing my kids badly.

When I returned home I started to try and start living a normal life as I didn't want to go back to RAH C3 or Brentwood south. Whilst I was working on my home repairing damages that were caused as a result of domestic violence, my wife had broken windows, doors and other items that needed repairing as I am in the property maintenance field I took it upon myself to repair these damages to save money. Trying to return our lives back to normal as I did not at anytime want to end my relationship with my wife as it was family life I cherished and always wanted as a young child.

While I was working on my home trying to restore and make good of what had happened and wanted to seek other help to assist me with my problem with drug abuse as I found that the method I was forced to do was not working. Two police officers accompanied by a ASCIS staff member attended my home as they were notified by an unknown person. Their instant request was that I just drop what I was doing and go with them. I was the only one home and was getting a tool from my truck which I needed for the work I was doing which was in the driveway of my home. I said to them let me just lock up the home and call my wife and tell her what was happening. They refused to let me do so and said "NO" just come with us now leave everything the way it is. This to me was a silly request as the house was fully opened to anyone who was walking by tools out just not a realistic request.

I then said no I will wait here until my wife returns so that she can secure the premises and then I will go with them, again not refusing to go with them but, just to secure the premises and advise my wife on what was happening and then I would go with them. Then the police officer went to restrain me and I resisted, as I resisted I was then sprayed with capsicum spray. In my fear and confusion I punched the police officer in the face and managed to secure myself in the home, trying to carry out what I had asked them if I could do. Within moments the whole house was surrounded with the SA police task force approximately 50 to 60 agents had surrounded the property front back side in neighbors property everywhere not that I had seen this but was later told by neighbors my wife and brother because they were there. It looked like a war zone my neighbor had taken some pictures and had e-mailed them to me at a later date. I'm talking spike chain across the driveway the whole box and dice. Don't you think that this problem was escalated due to the lack of cooperation from the police officers who initially came? Was the departments action plan a waste of tax payers money? Can we learn anything from this? Or do we just continue to do insane things? As we all know the meaning of insanity is repeating the same actions expecting a different outcome.

While I was in the home terrified as to what was happening, confused, I looked out the window and I could see there were police officers with vests on, helmets on, rifles pointing toward the windows, I just could not believe my eyes, at this stage I did not know what to do. The first thing I thought of was to ring my wife and tell her what was going on. She was furious as to what had happened and rushed down with my brother to try and defuse the situation. I then rang my wife's Auntie who was a doctor and involved in the family situation and asked her for advise I explained to her that I did not want to be detained and drugged out again and that I wanted to be helped and just talk to someone and try to get to the core of the problem rather than just being sedated. After explaining what had happened she advised me to just go out and give myself up, I had told her all I wanted to do was lock up the home and phone my wife to let her know what was happening. Was this the price I had paid for doing what I thought was the right thing to do? When do people leave their home wide open and not advise their partner as to what is going on? Was I lucky that the task force had not shot me for just wanting to lock up my home?

I then gave myself up with approximately 30 rifles pointing at me at a distance of no more than 4 metres away it was almost like the guns were up my nose. I never had been a person to have weapons of any kind in the home because I was always afraid that weapons in the wrong hands can have devastating affects. My hands were behind my head as asked, how easy was it for one of the task force police officers to have possibly made a blue and shot me as they had me at point blank range. Is this the way society is handling people who have a drug abuse problem get help?

I was then cuffed and taken to Brentwood south again, and this time I was dealt with in a more appropriate manner to the effect that I was told that if I resisted that they would sedate me and put me in the dark room again. I did not want to go there and communication is what I was crying out for, answer to my questions is what I was needing. And slowly but surely I started to get some answers. This time around I was aware as to what was going on and I was out in 2 days and then transferred to RAH C3 again, which lasted another 2 days. My wife had then organized a private psychiatrist to assist me in my drug and alcohol problem. The only problem was that he could not visit me in the RAH as he was private Dr, he could only work with me in a private hospital. So I was then transferred to the ADELAIDE CLINIC.

Well this place was like a hotel. I was taking medication prescribed to me as if I didn't then I would risk being medically induced. The ironic thing that I was drinking alcohol whilst in the clinic and taking medication at the same time and my private psychiatrist said it was ok to have 1 or 2 alcoholic drinks a day. HA HA HA HA. I'm thinking hello is there anybody home. Q. Who is the mentally ill people here me who doesn't want this zombie medication or zombie without a brain medication or the doctors who are the professionals and who you put your life in their hands thinking that this will help me with my problem. What a JOKE. I apologise for thinking like this but it is only because I know what I know now, we will get to that.

March 2002, I continue my regular visits to my psychiatrist taking my medication as prescribed at this stage I was prescribed a drug called ABILIFY. I would take this drug for the next 12 months, I was unable to work due to the side affect of the drug, I registered into social security, I was a zombie for this period or a zombie with no brain with no sense of feeling and no sense of hope or direction. My psychiatrist visits would continue to be once a month as if I did not continue these visits then I would face being detained again. All he would ask is how are you feeling, I would respond to his question saying I feel like a zombie and I have a problem I do not like who I am and this is why, his response would be just lock those feelings in a box and never open it. I could not take it anymore I was not myself and nothing mattered to me and that really had a negative impact on my young family and myself. In this time we also had our third child. The birth of this child was not as exciting as the others and that really hit some buttons and I could see that I was becoming a vegetable. So life was pretty grey. I took it upon myself to stop taking the medication as I wanted better for myself and I could see the harm it was doing to me after all what is the purpose of living with no sense of hope or direction.

After 1 month I began to work again and start to lead a normal life for the next year drinking alcohol at a responsible level not knowing the devastating affects this would have for the future to come. Why was I drinking, happy people don't take drugs. There was obviously some underlying issues that were not resolved or dealt with. I continued to regain my clients I previously had and started to build my business up again. 12 months went on. Meanwhile drinking alcohol was never addressed as a problem. I then found myself looking for the need to use and wanted to use speed again.

July 2003, We had now had another child which makes that 4 now. I started to work hard again and developed a need to re-use speed again to keep up with the work load and fore fill my family needs as far as family quality time, paper work. By this time I thought that I could control my addiction. So I continued to work, drink and drug thinking that life was sweet. I was basically faced with two options. Live life like a zombie or a zombie with no brains, or life as drug addict, working toward my goals which were to run a successful family and business, you will be surprised as to what goes through your mind when you are intoxicated with speed.

As a result of my 12 months of no-work we had no alternative but to sell the home we were living in and move into our investment property as the payments got the better of us. And to the fact that my drug addiction by this time was costing me between \$600.00 to \$ 1000.00 a week. So we moved into the property and started fresh.

It was now July 2004. My drug taking was becoming a problem again, my visits to the psychiatrist were proven to be useless. Clearly my needs were not being met. ASCIS become involved again. By this time the kids were suffering emotional distress and pain family dynamics were all over the place domestic violence was in the home. Before you new it I was detained again.

I was then taken straight to C3 RAH where I was sedated again for a period of 5 days. By this time the psychiatrist I had been seeing [REDACTED] refused to see me and responded in a letter to the Eastern Mental Health System as he could not help me nor was interested in having me as a client. Clearly there was no rapport built there. Q. Why was this the case? And as our funds were low we couldn't afford a private psychiatrist anyway. Dr [REDACTED] from ASCIS now known as the Eastern Mental Health Service also known as Eastern MAC. Q. Why the name change and was there a restructure? Dr [REDACTED] is a private Psychiatrist contracted out to the Eastern Mac team. Dr [REDACTED] visited me at my mothers house as I was ordered to stay there until the problem could be resolved and a action plan be put in place and there was enough evidence to allow me to not pose a threat to my family. Well this went on for about two weeks and then I was allowed to return home. Each time this is going on the drug problem is not going away , I am just becoming more educated on how floored the system is and by working out these floors eventually get what I want and work out how to fool the system.

Time goes on I say I'm taking the medication but I'm not and I continue to take speed as to cope with my underlying issues as also the betrayal I have with my wife. This goes on and slowly the attention drawn from the eastern MAC team diminishes not solving the underlying issues. Q. Am I in you views by now becoming a ticking time bomb? Q. Is the system in place resolving my issues or is the system trying to sweep my problems and issues under the carpet? Hoping that one day they will just go away. We all know a problem not dealt with is a problem inevitably going to create an explosion. Whilst I continue to visit DR [REDACTED] at no time could he identify that I was not taking my medication and still taking speed. By this time my wife was terrified to notify them of this as she wanted her husband back but I threatened to leave her if she raised this to their attention.

It is now October 2005, yeah that's right 4 years of hell, roller coaster riding , circus acts the whole box and dice. By this time I have been using the well known drug "ICE" this is a highly addictive drug and there is no such thing and controlling this addiction, before I knew it I was smoking it 24/7 circular thinking, Family dynamics all over the place, domestic violence , emotional disaster for the whole family.

My wife became aware of a Recovery based Program, located at Elizabeth SA called Shay Louise House, and she started to seek counseling through this agency. She would ask me if I would consider counseling but after going through what we had been through the last 4 years of our life I was reluctant to try anything as my trust went right out the window. I would say I want to deal with my problem but I am not taking those zombie drugs or zombie without a brain drugs. She advised me that this agency was a recovery based program and aimed at rehabilitating drug addicts with the absence of any mind altering drug. I was still reluctant as our trust toward each other at this stage was non existent . My wife continued to seek counseling there as she found it very helpful as she was for the first time given information that was actually true and a rapport was developed between the agency and her along with my mother and my sister. They were told that my addiction was heading toward the end and that I would have no choice but to find myself going there given the right circumstances. No one can be forced to recover, the addict must want to recover in order for the program to work. She was told that life as addict results in 1 of 4 things and they are 1) Insitutionalised 2) Jail 3) Death 4) Choose to recover. Whilst my wife was hoping for No.4 we had to let destiny take its path.

I don't remember much, I know that is because of the twelve courses of shock treatment or (ECT) I was told I needed to help me forget.

It all started when I began experiencing panic attacks. I was prescribed Xanax from my doctor to help calm me. I began by taking 1 per day or as I needed it. My panic attacks became more frequent and I even began getting them in my sleep. My 1 tablet per day became 3 or 4 at a time and sometimes I would even take some to try and prevent me from getting them. I soon became a prisoner in my own home and was paranoid to leave my house. I felt constantly tired and everyday chores became a struggle. I had three young children that also kept me busy.

I remember telling a doctor about how paranoid I was in leaving my house and I remember what she said to me. "Take a Xanax with a shot of brandy half an hour before you go out and you will feel fine". OH, if only I could remember who she was.

Well eventually a shot of brandy became almost a bottle a day and that became my medicine. I thought I had everything under control, you see I wouldn't start drinking until I had picked up my kids from school at 3.30pm. I would cook while I drank for my family but I can't remember sitting down to eat with them.

I was becoming very depressed and family problems were getting too much. One day after a huge argument with my husband and his family I decided I needed a break. I swallowed around 15 Temazepam and went to have a shower. I ended up collapsing and was rushed to the Royal Adelaide Hospital by ambulance. A Doctor there told me that if I was trying to kill myself Tempazepam wouldn't help, you see Temazepam stops working after 4 hours, they said. They wanted to admit me into C1 for a while to get some help and I agreed but chickened out at the last minute. I believed I could cure myself. I was prescribed anti depressants and was told that I had suffered an emotional break down.

I took the tablets for a little while but did not feel like they were doing anything so the doctor prescribed me other ones. I had tried 5 or 6 different types. Some of them were called Luvox, Zoloft and Effexor included to that was a tranquilizer, which gave me severe side effects and needed to go to hospital. I was still drinking and taking my Xanax daily, I became a ticking time bomb.

Problems with my husband's family escalated and I needed a rest. My husband found me on the bathroom floor. I had slashed my wrist. I don't recall it happening but I do remember the nurse at the Modbury Hospital telling me that I had cut the wrong way because my veins don't run across my wrist, they run downwards. I had been told about ACIS but noone could come to see me until the next day. I was a wreck but silently screaming for help. I agreed to go to Woodleigh House for a break.

I remember being detained for 21 days and new medication was introduced, Chlorpromazine. They thought I might be Bipolar. So I was given that with 2 or 3 other tablets, along with a sleeping tablet everyday. Nothing seemed to be working so they recommended ECT...shock treatment. I was told that it would help me deal with my depression and that I would forget a lot of bad memories. I thought this would be my only hope, so I agreed to the treatment. At that point in my life I became desperate and trusted that these professionals would know what is in my best interest.

They said I would need around 12 courses of it to make it effective.

After 3 or 4 months at Woodleigh House I became restless and wanted to go home. I was released and was told that I should continue my medication. I was a walking zombie. I remember the look of pain in my mother's eyes when she was with me and told me about this woman she thought could help me so I agreed to go and see her. I can't quite remember what she was about but I do remember her telling me to stop my medication. I thought she was crazy, I thought I would die without them.

After a few days I decided to try a day without my tablets. That ladies voice kept haunting me. I'm not sure what happened but I ended up throwing my tablets in the bin.

With the love and support I received from my family I improved each day. I became stronger. I didn't feel so sleepy and I started to loose weight, I had ballooned to a massive 105kg due to all the drugs the doctors had prescribed me and the alcohol didn't help.

Looking back I don't know how I survived. The amount of drugs in my system almost killed me. I wasn't that bad when my depression first began. I think all I needed was someone to listen to what I was feeling. I needed someone to teach me how to deal with my problems, to tell me that what I was feeling, considering my circumstances, were normal, that I wasn't losing my mind. I have learnt that is ok to cry, its ok to get angry sometimes and its ok to express myself. I could not have possibly been able to express, let alone think when so many drugs were in my system. I remember asking the doctor what antidepressants would do to help me and he said that antidepressants help to calm you temporarily until you become stronger to deal with what issues you may have in your life. How could you possibly become stronger when you cant remain focused on anything? It makes me angry and terrified to think that I almost died due to our pathetic mental health system. A mother almost lost her daughter, my children almost lost their mother, a husband almost lost his wife and the list goes on...To them I was just another number. Noone actually took the time to really listen or give me some sort of direction. All I can say is thank god I had some sort of strength left in me to realize I needed to help myself and give my children back their mother that they so very much deserve.

Vicky Patakos

March 15 2007

The House of Representatives Standing Committee.

I first approached Shay Louise House in 2002 regarding my son who had a drug problem, due to his circumstances I felt helpless due to the fact I had no where to go for help. I was then directed towards Shay Louise House and I was offered the education and support I needed at this time.

My family was in a state of chaos due to our circumstances, the situation affected each individual member of my family in a negative way. My son was taking drugs and to support his addiction he was involved with criminal activities which resulted in him being placed on a curfew. The police were frequent visitors to our home, day and night, including police patrols past our home checking his whereabouts. The consequential result was his imprisonment. My son is currently incarcerated and has been for a period of three years. He was first incarcerated at the age of 15 under the juvenile act. While he was detained in juvenile prison he was prescribed medication from the Prison Doctor (Second Story Doctor) this medication was an antidepressants and valium, this was done without my consent. While on this prescribed medication my son escaped from custody, he was involved in a high speed chase in a state emergency vehicle which resulted in his detention into the adult prison system.

This behaviour had a devastating affect on me, his mother and his two younger siblings. Whilst attending Shay Louise House I have been offered a vast amount of personal support, which has had a very positive and lastly effect on my situation. I have learned many skills and strategies which have improved my abilities to cope with situations. The support I have been offered has proved beneficial to me in many ways I have changed my parenting style which has had a great effect on my younger two children. I have learned how to communicate at a higher and more in-depth level with my children and others. I personally believe that this has contributed greatly to the improved situation in my family circumstances. I strongly believe that my involvement with Shay Louise House has saved my family from perhaps following their brother's example.

I have benefited in the fact that I now feel I can role model new ways of behaviour to my children which is positive and rewarding as a parent. I thank Shay Louise House management and their staffs for helping me turn my life around from the place I found myself chaos to a rewarding and fulfilling lifestyle.

Yours Sincerely

Joanne McCarthy