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My Story

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At around 15 years of age our beautiful daughter was introduced to marijuana by a young man she met at a church youth group. From that day onwards our family has been torn apart by her unacceptable behaviour.

In the beginning we visited all available counseling and medical practitioners to try and help her realize the path she was heading down was a dangerous one. Unfortunately a family therapy session with a government funded agency only proved to further justify to our daughter that she had every right to go out and experiment with drugs and we as parents had no right to try and prevent that. She and her boyfriend ran off together and were assisted to find accommodation to "set up house" by youth workers. They were actually placed in a brand new unit for a rental of \$50.00 per week for a 3 months period. Neither our daughter nor her boyfriend had jobs or had finished school. Any information we tried to find out about our daughter was to no avail as we were always quoted the Privacy Act. Eviction was eventually the only way the department could remove them from the unit after no rent had been paid and the premises trashed.

Both her father and I have always held down good jobs and not once have we availed of any social security payments nor have we ever discussed this as a means of living with our daughter. However, her boyfriend's mother has, I believe, availed of social security payments for most of her adult life and was able to educate my daughter on the benefits of living by such means. I do not wish to bore you with every little detail of our daughter's unsavory lifestyle however would like to outline the drain on government provided benefits that as escalated over the past seven years.

Firstly there was a serious car accident which necessitated ambulance transportation for both she and her boyfriend (in separate ambulances) to two separate hospitals all expenses being met by the public health system. Neither party has been able to hold down a job for any length of time due to increased drug and alcohol use and therefore both receive unemployment benefits, together with rent assistance. Our daughter fell pregnant and gave birth to a still born child 16 months ago at 20 weeks gestation, however she and her boyfriend were still handed a cheque for \$3,000.00 for their efforts which amount was spent in three days. No doubt the drug dealers did well out of this lot. During this pregnancy I tried to alert welfare officers at Monash Medical centre of my concerns as to the suitability of the couple as parents given their lifestyle however I was once again reminded of the privacy act and the fact that it was none of my business.

My daughter's boyfriend was convicted of assault on more than one occasion and finally sent to prison for a brief stay of 4.5 months in August last year. He thoroughly enjoyed the stay and was fed very well managing to gain quite a bit of weight during his stay and managed to save quite a lot of money from his allowance whilst in prison so a huge party was thrown for days on his release, very good use of tax payers money don't you think?

His drinking problem certainly has not improved any nor his drug habit. My daughter once again was pregnant and gave birth to a premature baby 3 weeks ago. This child is still in intensive care and all medical expenses are being covered by the Public Health system. Once again an attempt was made to make welfare aware of the situation and concern as to suitability as parents. This time they did give us a hearing as they too had been building up their own picture at regular check up and were also concerned. However, the matter was reported by the hospital welfare officer who was told that not enough evidence was available to raise concerns at this stage. I am assuming therefore that until some physical evidence of abuse is available nothing will be done. This child is extremely small and our concern is that a death may occur. Either way, whether this child survives or not there will be more drain on the public purse. Of course the couple have already been paid the now \$4,000.00 which the male party has used to purchase a vehicle. His previously suspended driver's license will be re-issued soon allowing him to once again get behind the wheel in a drugged or alcoholic state.

I believe it is about time that governments started to listen to "the parents" of these kids the majority of which are honest, hardworking and caring people who want the best for these kids. Welfare and social workers are so intent in taking kids from good solid homes just because these same kids do not want to live by rules yet society itself is also governed by rules. Once these kids get out there on their own at such young ages their lifestyle goes down hill rapidly, they are not emotionally ready to cope with all the consequences. They need to be taught that with rights there are also responsibilities.

There is far too much government money available to enable these kids to live away from the family home thereby enabling a lifestyle of drug dependence and creating another generation of children who from birth will also be dependant on government handouts for survival. Parents should be encouraged to keep their family together not have youth workers encouraging these kids to leave home just because Mum and Dad have rules at home they do not wish to abide by. When these same kids get out on the street committing crimes the arresting police officer is not going to give them a cuddle for their trouble he will be expecting them to take responsibility for their actions and that is exactly what most of us parents are also trying to do when we make rules in our own homes as to acceptable behaviour for the smooth running of our families.

It is time the Government supported parents in their role to help them keep their families together not encourage our youth onto the streets into lives of crime and drug abuse. The money being wasted would be far better spent by supporting parent groups to help them steer their young people in the right direction thereby making them responsible young adults and upstanding members of society.

Signed – A loving caring mother, whose pain and hurt have at times been an unbearable burden.

Name withheld for reasons of confidentiality – Member of Toughlove Victoria Parents Support Group. (Ph. 9513 7222 email victoughlove@ozziweb.net)

21 March 2007.

Around late 1999 we noticed a change in our beautiful 14yo son. His mood swings were incredible, from a reasonably happy boy to blistering anger in a few seconds. Not just normal teenage anger, but something that was very frightening.

Over the next several months our worst fears became apparent, discovering the binge drinking, cigarette smoking and the marijuana use, which began to take its toll on our family. The effects from the marijuana use were by far the worst. It began to tear our family apart.

We sought many places for help, but even mentioning this problem to anyone was very embarrassing to us and we felt we had a monster on our hands at times. There just did not seem to be anywhere for parents to go and receive support when there out of control kids ruled the roost at home.

(The children in Australia have all the rights and no responsibilities and certainly no respect for anyone or anything, which they are taught at a very early age, thanks to our Government laws.) Most parents are trying to do the very best they can for their children with two arms tied behind their back.

Our son went to a psychologist which turned out to be very expensive over many months and in the end, of no use.

When we rang this man up to see how the counselling sessions were going we were told that because of the privacy laws he could not tell us. The behaviour at home remained in crises. He also went to a drug counsellor at Edas in Ringwood for a period of time, there was a little change, but the anger and drug taking remained the same.

He tells me now, many years later that the counsellors did nothing for him and that he told them what they wanted to hear, so he could be out of there and on his merry way, back to his friends to do the same old same old. He became a very good liar and bully to get his own way.

We were hurt, angry, disillusioned, tormented, afraid to leave the home and afraid to come home not knowing what or who to expect when we got there, day in day out.

Toughlove has given us hope and strategies to take back control of our home and our lives. We have like minded parents who can support us at any time of the night or day when we are in crises not just during business hours. These parents have been through what we have gone through or similar. They are not judgemental and believe what we say we are going through, having gone through the heartache themselves.

Our son has come through the other end and says now, if it wasn't for this support group, he believes he might not be here to tell the tale.

Name withheld for reasons of confidentiality.

(Member Toughlove Victoria Parent Support Group Ph. 9513 722

Email – victoughlove@ozziweb.net

Son number 2

Our son began to use Marijuana when he was 14, and slowly his behaviour changed. His priorities changed, he stopped being a part of the family, keeping himself separate from the rest of us, and resisting our efforts for him to be closer to us and our day to day activities.

He kept his friends away from us, we only met his new friends briefly, he met them away from the house and didn't bring them home for any periods of time.

His began to behave in a risk taking fashion, which led to crime – stealing cars and dealing marijuana.

By the time he was 15 his behaviour had led to him leaving home for random periods of time, he began to hide from us for no reason and to avoid contact as much as possible. Most of the time we had no idea where he was and when we would see him again. During this period he stopped going to school and as a result hasn't finished year 9.

His behaviour leading up to his 16 birthday was consistent with someone using amphetamines, although I have no proof of this – he has admitted to using ecstasy, but not on a regular basis.

The effects of this on us as parents has been at times highly traumatic, we have travelled the path of despair and uncertainty to anger and denial and back, on numerous occasions. As a family we have all been abused and stripped of our trust and belief in our son and brother.

Our son no longer lives at home and coming up to 17 has spent the last 6 weeks in remand. He is currently living with friends, as until he shows an effort to change, not only do we refuse to have him living with us, but youth housing organisations on our side of town refuse to rehouse him due to his history of abusive and destructive behaviour.

Son number one

Our eldest son began experimenting with marijuana when he was about 15. For the past 2 years he has been suffering from mild to moderate psychosis which while there is no evidence is drug induced, it has been amplified by drug use.

He no longer uses and is currently studying at university and is coping so far, but under high levels of stress tends to digress to an agitated sometimes psychotic state. The stress of his younger brothers', sometimes violent and threatening behaviour hasn't helped his state of mind, and he has been far calmer and in control since his younger brother left home.

The effects of drug use on both of the boys has been severe and distressing. The effects of this on the family as a whole has at times been destructive, the most soul destroying position that we found ourselves in was not knowing what to do for either of them, and not being able to find anywhere to get help.

Once our eldest son began to actively seek help for himself, he began to turn his life around, but our younger son is not anywhere near to admitting that he has a problem and is therefore not remotely interested in getting help. This has left us in the past with no where to turn as most programs are directed at the addict, not the family.

Once we began to find help for us, we began to get some control back into our lives. While we are no closer to our son admitting that he has a problem and asking for help, for change, we are in a far stronger and calmer position as we now feel that we are back in control of our lives and the lives of our younger children.

From our experiences we are convinced that the key to helping families and ultimately addicts is to nurture the family, as they are accepting of help, and even though the addiction is not something they have control over, the effects of the addiction is something they need to feel power over, otherwise they will continue to drown in their own fear and uncertainty.

Name withheld for reasons of confidentiality
(Member Toughlove Victoria Parent Support Group – Ph. 9513 722
email victoughlove@ozziweb.net)