

13 Georges Rd,
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8/6/00

The Federal house of Representatives
Parliamentary Standing committee on family and community Affairs.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF DRUG ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA.

Dear Sir,

I am responding to the above in expressing my opinion on this subject.

I am a mother of two teenagers 17 and 19. My background is working for DOCS Disability for 9 years and nursing over 20 years. I have been conducting Parenting Courses for over 6 years voluntarily within the community in schools and churches. Time and time again the issue of Drugs is a major worry to parents attending our courses. Due to this stressing demand I have since been trained by Focus on the Family to facilitate a course called, 'How to Drug Proof Your Kids'. My contact with parents enquiring about this course and other parents from our other courses has bought many stories of heartache.

One of your questions you asked was, 'How do drugs affect our families and the workplace?' The parents, who are going through this nightmare, say that they feel like they are swimming against the tide and just waiting for that phone call to say their child has been found dead, overdosed. US Journal of diseases in children stated that 40% had used pot within 8 hours of adolescence suicide, 61% used pot and 31% alcohol in suicide. Suicide what guilt it leaves in parents?

Their frustration with lack of services for their children, when finally they admit they have a problem is so sparse. Energy level for these parents is extremely low and they find that, as they are complete consumed by their drug-abused child the other children suffer from their lack of attention. The remaining children are also suffering from such conditions of bed-wetting or 'acting out' due to stress in the family. Drug use delays or impairs the maturation and their opportunities in life. Drugs onset and progress is not apparent to users. Dependency takes over and destroys most of their enjoyment and fulfilment in life. This shatters whatever dreams and hopes a parent has for their children.

You mentioned the affect in the work place. If pot usage is 3 to 5 per week over 6 month period they will experience brain dysfunction down the tract hence the effect on employment. Using pot for over 6 months shows abnormal brain function for up to 5 years. What hope have they of lasting in any employment? One employee was not keen to employ a teen that was 'using' as his level of work had dropped considerably in recent time. Another employee said he had to keep employing new staff, as once they are using they become totally unreliable. They are also dismissed if they are working on high-risk jobs e.g. roofing, as accidents are common.

'What impact do they have on our safety in the home, on the roads and in the community?' is a very relevant question. Many of us have experienced a break in to our houses, most probably caused through the need for drug money. I had my bag stolen from my house even while there were people out in the back yard. This shows their desperate need to even risk being caught while people are on the premises. These are desperate people and will not allow anything to stand in the way of their next hit. It is noted that there have been 737 lives to heroin last year, compared to 3,500 to alcohol. If heroin is made legal then we would see that figure somewhere near the level of alcohol abuse.

I have a two close relatives that have been involved in the drugs. One started on pot for a period of 3 years after leaving school and smoked 20 cones a day. He has ceased this and now suffers now from short-term memory. The other did not take up drugs till he was 40 and is now suffering from a mental condition that can probably be put down to drugs. The second one is now on a pension, as he cannot work. This is a blow to his self-esteem and affecting his relationships with family and friends.

A quotes from 'Anna's Story' by Bronwyn Donaghy. Ann's mum said,
"I gave them as much information as I had, but that wasn't a lot"

There is a great need for educating **all** parents in not only how to help your child to say no to drugs, but general common sense parenting. I believe that it should be a law that all parents attend parenting school being a six-week course when their children are 12 months, 5 years then 12 years. Like school is law, so too this could be with penalties applied. They must learn how take responsibility for the nurture and growth of character of their children.

I hope these thoughts can be of some help,

Yours sincerely,

Lyn Roberts.