

MC 28/3/07

The Chairman,  
House of Reps. Standing Comm. on Family and Human Services.  
Dear Madam,

I am a retired Magistrate, having spent almost 20 years in that position, mostly in this area. My experience is that most drug-users start with cannabis and proceed to harder drugs from there. The use of drugs often leads to psychosis of various sorts, resulting in loss of employment, disruption of family relationships, criminal activity and the like as you no doubt are aware. Some family members are required to take out Intervention orders to prevent damage and harassment.

Harm minimization programmes whilst educating young people in aspects of drug use, tend to 'normalize' the taking of such substances. In my view, this has not proven to be as effective as it might have been. Describing drugs as 'recreational' sends the wrong message to impressionable young persons. Overseas experiences have shown that 'no tolerance' policies are more effective. In Sweden drug use of the 16-24 age group is less than one-third of other EU Members (UN Office on drugs and crime, Sept. 2006)

Adequate funding of Residential Treatment centres as part of a Court sentence would encourage families of offenders to see that some positive action has been taken. Support groups, such as Grandparents Associations would also help them to cope, as well of course as assisting the persons themselves. Drug education alone does not unfortunately deter young persons from using drugs, unless there is an effective sanction to back it up.

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James P Hanrahan

