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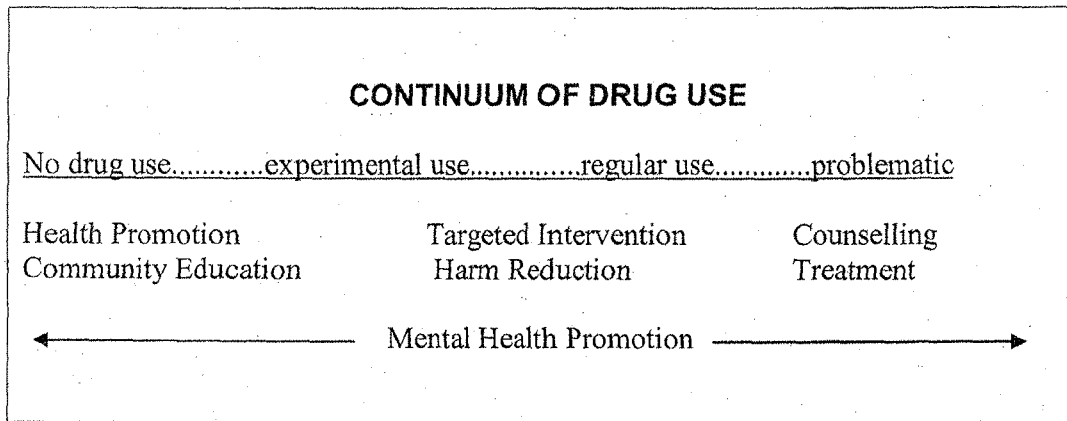
Parliamentary Inquiry – Impact of Illicit Drug Use on Families

Submission by Manly Drug Education and Counselling Centre (MDECC)

Background Information:

The Manly Drug Education and Counselling Centre (MDECC) is a community based non-government organisation. MDECC provides a range of programs targeting young people, parents, and families. These include community education/health promotion, targeted intervention, and counselling/treatment programs.

Addressing alcohol and other drug issues can be complex. MDECC operates on the belief that people have the right to access accurate information, education, and treatment for alcohol or drug related issues. Our prime concern is to promote mental health, and reduce or eliminate the harms associated with alcohol and other drug use.



MDECC's philosophy is that people have the right to access information, education, appropriate interventions, and treatment no matter where they are on the "Continuum of Drug Use". Therefore this model for the structure of MDECC's programs ensures adequate appropriate access for all client groups and their families.

The financial, social and personal cost to families who have a member(s) using illicit drugs, including the impact of drug induced psychoses or other mental disorders:

MDECC acknowledges that -

- Illicit drug use has a significant impact on the families of drug users, including family functioning. According to Broome et al (2000) 'The physical and financial effects of illicit drugs at the personal/family level often leads to various forms of dysfunction in family life'.
- Families can play a significant role in preventing illicit drug use, and according to Odgers et al (1998) 'Families have been found to directly influence adolescent substance use through parental modelling'.

Hayes et al (2004) outlines a conceptual model of parenting influences on adolescent alcohol use. 'This model suggests that parental monitoring, parental norms for adolescent use, and parental behaviour management skills all have direct links to adolescent alcohol use. Parent-adolescent relationship quality has an overall effect on these parenting behaviours. Parenting characteristics depicted as having an indirect effect include parental alcohol use or abuse, as well as family factors, and broader cultural norms regarding alcohol use'.

- Families can provide valuable support for family members experiencing problematic drug use, or participating in a treatment program. According to McCollum and Trepper (2001) 'Research suggests that family involvement may assist the drug user to enter treatment, retain in treatment, and result in better treatment outcomes'.

The impact of harm minimisation programs on families:

Programs based on the philosophy of harm minimisation aim to reduce or eliminate the harms associated with illicit drug use. Treatment outcomes can include reduced illicit drug use, reduced crime, and increased psychosocial functioning for the individual and their families.

Ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member(s) using illicit drugs:

It is imperative that a broad multi-strategy approach is employed including education, early intervention, and treatment strategies. Examples of current strategies utilised by MDECC are listed below and at Attachment A and B.

Responses by MDECC to the Impact of Illicit Drug Use on Families:

MDECC provides a range of programs to families affected by illicit drug use from education through to treatment approaches.

Parents Prepared Peer Education Program - a specific peer education program targeting parents. This program aims to equip all parents with credible up to date knowledge about drugs and skills based training to improve communication strategies. Parents then act as peer educators within their local communities passing on credible information to their friends, work colleagues, and family members (See Attachment A).

Counselling/Treatment Program - provides assessment, parent or family counselling, and ongoing support to families affected by illicit drug use.

Paving Ways Family Intervention Program – a six-week group program targeting families affected by illicit drug use. The program is structured and facilitated by professional drug and alcohol counsellors. The Paving Ways Program aims to provide support, education, and increased coping skills for families affected by illicit drug use (See Attachment B).

Key Recommendations:

- Ensure that a broad multi-strategy approach is employed including education, early intervention, and treatment strategies
- Advocate for sustainable parent education programs to provide parents with drug information and skills based training to deal with illicit drug use and mental disorders.
- Utilise peer education models as an effective strategy for community development in regards to families and illicit drug use.
- Promote family inclusiveness in drug treatment service delivery, and improve access to family intervention programs.

Contact:

Ms Kerri Lawrence
Manager
Manly Drug Education and Counselling Centre (MDECC)
91 Pittwater Road
Manly NSW 2095
Telephone 02 99770711
Mobile 0416159511
Email: admin@mdecc.org.au

Attachment B

Paving Ways Family Intervention Program

Background:

During a strategic planning process in 1999, it was identified that there was a significant increase number of parents and families accessing the service. In response to this a working group was formed to establish a supportive, therapeutic program to meet demand for family-orientated treatment. Based on outcomes of the initial pilot Family Intervention Program conducted in 2001, the program was revised and changed to better meet the needs of the current population. The Paving Ways Family Intervention Program has now been operating for six years. In 2006, fifteen families completed the program with a further thirty families attending Family Intervention Program Reunions after participating in previous programs.

Rationale:

Alcohol and other drug problems affect not only those using these drugs, but also family members. The negative impact illicit drug misuse may have upon families can become overwhelming and stressful as families try to resolve the varied problems that can arise as a direct consequence of the drug using behaviour. Parents, partners and other family members can become tired and anxious when dealing with a family member's drug use and the challenging behaviour that often accompanies this.

Families who face these challenging circumstances can benefit from support and coping strategies for themselves. When family members seek assistance, often this can impact on the relationship with the drug user and help to bring about a change for them as well.

Target Population:

The Paving Ways Family Intervention Program targets parents and or family members whose lives are affected by a family members drug use.

Aims:

- The program aims to provide support, education and increased coping skills for families
- The program aims to help individuals adjust and cope with change and regain their own lives
- The program has a solution-focused approach that provides participants with new strategies for handling a crisis, as well as increased personal strengths and growth
- The program encourages the sharing of experiences within the group and as a result participants gain support and courage from one another.

Program Outline:

Paving ways is a six-week structured program consisting of two-hour sessions per week.

Session 1 - Introduction to the program, stages of change model, and goals for the program

Session 2 - Fears and coping strategies

Session 3 - Responsibility, trust and letting go

Session 4 - Self esteem issues

Session 5 – Communication, identifying blocks to communication, and how to use effective communication

Session 6 – Revision of personal goals and course content and future directions

Key Outcomes:

- Participants are less isolated with the problems they are experiencing
- Improvement in participant's problem solving, communication and general functioning
- Participants gained more confidence, therefore they began to practice and implement the skills and strategies that are gained in the program
- Participants learned to take less responsibility for the family member who uses drugs
- Treatment outcomes show that there has been a healthy average improvement in participants' problem solving, communication, family roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behaviour control, and general family functioning.

Attachment B

Parents Prepared Peer Education Program

Background

The Parents Prepared Program is one component of MDECC's community drug action strategy to address drug and alcohol use. This well evaluated program utilises peer education as a strategy to educate parents about the harms of both illicit and licit drug use whilst also acting as an early intervention addressing familial issues. It was developed in 1999 as a result of community consultation and since then over 200 parents have participated, sharing the information learnt with many other parents and families in the community.

Rationale

Adolescence is a time when it is normal for young people to experiment with a range of ideas and choices and for some this includes experimentation with alcohol, tobacco and possibly illicit drugs. Adolescence can also signal a significant change in relationship between young people and their parents. To be able to talk confidently with their children about drugs, it is imperative that parents have correct and up-to-date information. Without this, credibility is damaged and having an open and honest conversation about potential or current drug use is hampered.

The Parents Prepared Program not only provides education in regards to alcohol and drug use, but also provides skills based training to ensure that parents have the competence and confidence to communicate effectively about the issues. This means parents are in a better position to be able to prevent drug related harm amongst young people.

Target Population

The primary target group for this project are parents of young people either in their adolescence or younger, who may or may not have experimented with licit or illicit drugs.

Philosophy

The Parents Prepared Program is based on the principle of eliminating or reducing the harm associated with alcohol or other drug use through education and early intervention.

Program Aim

The primary aim of Parents Prepared is to provide parents with up to date alcohol and drug knowledge and the skills to address drug related harm in their families and local communities.

Program Outline

The program consists of two components:

1. Parents Prepared Program Training Session –

Comprehensive 14-hour information and skills based program conducted over either two Saturdays or four evenings. Participants are provided with up to date information about drugs, drug issues, normal adolescent development and some skills and strategies to improve communication, conflict resolution and address issues of responsibility in families.

2. Parents Prepared Network & Web-Link –

The Network enhances sustainability of the peer education component by ensuring that the Parents Prepared peer educators are kept motivated and updated with accurate information. In addition, an interactive email-based group is being developed whereby Parents Prepared peer educators can interact with each other and the MDECC Intervention Program Team in relation to alcohol and drug education and family and community issues.

Key Outcomes

As a result of completing the Parents Prepared Program parents:

- Gain improved knowledge of alcohol and drug effects, patterns of use and factors that may contribute to harmful drug use including issues around mental health
- Gain increased knowledge and understanding of normal adolescent development
- Are able to identify and practise effective methods of communication for use with their children and families
- Gain the ability to apply appropriate strategies to address issues around drug use with their children
- Act as peer educators by sharing information with friends and social networks
- Are able to identify and participate in community initiatives that aim to reduce the harms related to drug use.

In general, parents are more confident, competent and less fearful in addressing drug issues. Positive role modeling by parents and the provision of accurate harm prevention information contributes to attitudinal change by children, family members and peers in terms of alcohol and drug using behaviour.

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