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The Parents Supporting Parents group was founded in 1999 by a group of parents that had undergone an 8 week structured course with the local Community Drug Service Team. The course was to help parents understand drug use within the family, setting up boundaries, ways of communication with the child and developing ways to cope with stress and grief. During that time members found great comfort and support by being together and felt there was an urgent need for it to continue. With the assistance of the Community Drug Service Team and the ongoing support of Local Drug Action Groups Inc. the parent group has managed to run successfully for the past 7 years.

The group meets fortnightly on a Wednesday evening at the local MP(Tony O'Gorman)offices in Joondalup. We are a very informal group offering members a confidential, supportive and non-judgemental environment. Parents are welcome to come along and feel comfortable to share their stories with each other, as most members are experiencing the same problems and concerns, for many of the parents its just to know they are not alone and that most of the group are going through the same turmoil as themselves.

I am proud to be a member of this warm, friendly and supportive group, it has kept me sane for the past 6 years and many others like me, I believe we have been the quiet achievers over the years as we do make a difference to the parents who attend, we let them know there is always a light at the end of the tunnel and that positive outcomes can be achieved for us all.

The House of Representatives Families Committee  
(Parliamentary inquiry into the impact of illicit drugs on families)

Unfortunately our society despite the ever rising problems associated with drugs and our young people still lives in denial, it is someone else's problem as we all believe it will never happen to us! We see and read in the media the stereotyping and negative labeling and in many cases reflection on parents (where did they go wrong) when in actual fact most drug users come from good, hard working, well educated, law abiding, loving families from all walks of life and we are as a group of parents living proof of that statement!

Realistically-our youth of today are risk takers and will probably at some time or other innocently experiment with either smoking, drinking or using marijuana which may lead to a dependency to a much powerful drug, it can happen to anyone at anytime regardless of who you are. Dependency is a long and painful journey not only for the user but for all associated with them.

Most families deal with it secretively as the shame and embarrassment is too difficult to share through fear of being prejudged, parents loose confidence in themselves not just at being a parent but as the person they once was, and so become very isolated as it takes enormous courage to speak out about what is happening within the home.

We are as a group of parents the courageous ones and would like to be heard, who better to share our knowledge, fears, frustrations, disappointments, anger, and mostly sorrow, we have experienced first hand all the above and much more associated with having a child with a drug problem, we have learnt the hard way the importance of seeking out help with information and knowledge, as until it happens to you do you realize how little you know about drugs and drug taking, but more importantly the need to seek out and gain support and guidance to help you cope and survive the trauma, chaos and devastation you go through.

When you first step on the road of drug abuse within the family no-one can prepare you for what is ahead, as a group of parents all traveling on that same hard, wearisome road we can let others know just some of what we have encountered on our journey.

You enter an alien world, some call it the black hole of despair, a place with situations and feelings you have never experienced before and would never wish on anyone else, all your principals, values, morals and believes are shattered and you are confronted with lies, deceit, theft, unemployment, bills, fines, hock shops and eventually the law, along with this you experience feelings of denial, doubt, panic, guilt, shame, grief and an enormous sadness that is so overwhelming you feel you are drowning and will never make it, but as loving, caring parents your instinct is to fight this evil that has entered your lives and save your child, as that is what being a parent is all about, as nothing can be that big and strong that your love and strength cannot diminish it, but unfortunately that is not the case and eventually the pull and persistence of the drug is much too powerful and wins most of the time.

The constant struggling with your feelings and emotions is exhausting it consumes your every waking hour, afraid the next phone call or knock at the door will be the bearer of bad news, you cannot understand how or why it has happened or how you missed the signs, you just want someone to blame. Depression sets in and you become sick and tired, wallow in self pity "why me" "why my child" your whole world at your feet in pieces. Looking around you see the destruction the situation has caused the neglect of the stronger siblings, strained relationship

with your partner, employer's patience wearing very thin with constant lateness and interruptions, extended family give up trying to talk to you because everything they say is wrong, friends don't ask you out anymore as you only make excuses, the house and garden chores a mess, everything you took pride in and enjoyed slowly eroding away, no one should ever underestimate what it can do to your once loving, happy and normal home. So you somehow find the strength to pick yourself up and decide you are going to get your life back as no one can do it for you, the drugs have destroyed too much and too many of your lives. You start on another journey seeking information, gaining knowledge, asking questions, wanting answers, searching for someone to get your child well, at the same time wanting support for yourself and the rest of the family experiencing this living nightmare. This is the time of frustration, disappointments and eventually anger, constant doors shut in your face, especially if your child is an adult, they may be the age of an adult but in most cases their actions and state of mind are that of a teenager and are not capable of making decisions in a drug-induced state, you are offered counselling but it is now you need the help and support the most, not in 4 weeks time (what are you supposed to do until then)? Your child decides to detox as it is a requirement before rehabilitation but where do they go?, again hit with the age barrier, if its alcohol or heroin there seems to be more options, but with amphetamines which is the current drug trend it's a different story, if you are lucky enough to find somewhere you are placed on the long wait list which by time the appointment has come through for your child they have taken off and the window of opportunity is lost, it seems a major issue providing users with assistance the very moment they agree to seek help.

Parents are forever frustrated, they need respite from their children desperately, in some cases violence is a big issue and through fear of their safety and the safety of others have to resort to bringing in the police, but where can they take them?, away from the home but they come back more angry than ever, so the next step is restraining orders but then who gets them to appointments?, who's going to help them sort their lives out?

Many of our children have psychotic episodes, depression and are suicidal they are in and out of mental institutions and if there long enough parents see a big improvement because they are getting the care and medications needed by professionals, but due to lack of beds and staff its back out the door with no follow-up just the medication which they usually forget to take.

We battle with Social Security as we know as soon as the money goes in they take it out straight away, monies that is supposed to last a fortnight! Is it so hard to deduct rent and give them food vouchers especially if they are addicts or unable to manage finances, they are priorities a roof overhead and food in the stomach instead they give them more, \$500 grants which they should insist on proof of what it is for and pay that money direct if it is genuine, what happened to work for the dole?, parents want it enforced especially on the young people they need to give back something to society, but try and get your point of view across to authorities about your child and you are hit with bureaucratic barriers, if only they could see how they are enabling your child to continue their behavior.

Then you get the people who make money out of the situation, low-life that prey on the weak and vulnerable that hang around our schools, colleges, universities and night venues, selling their wares waiting to recruit some other poor innocent persons child, we also must not forget the pawnshops such as cash converters and such like that blatantly take your precious goods and other peoples from our children knowing full well its not their property despite all the identification they produce, just their appearance alone is a give away, they give them next to nothing for the items and sell them and an inflated price, many a parent has approached them in

vain their attitude appalling, its all about making the money at anyone's cost and it is allowed to go on, where is the justice in that?.

Rehabilitation can work and during those times you see your child back, the true and happy one, the one you have missed so much your polite, thoughtful, loving child not the monster drugs had made them become, you believe this is the magical moment you have been waiting for, months pass by and you have found peace and calmness at long last, things are getting back to some semblance of normality, you have found support and friendship from other parents traveling the same journey as yourself, you can cry and laugh about experiences together and more importantly know you are not alone.

Sometimes your child will relapse as they seem to need constant support, continual motivation to find employment or training, assistance in accommodation and regular counselling sessions, but alas that is not the real world and these needs are hard to put into place, so its easy for them to turn back to their old ways and get back on the merry-go-round of the drug scene, and once again an ocean of more grief, sadness and pain is before you and as awful as it sounds many a parent has prayed it will be the last time you will grieve, as it will be over and healing within can take place, that is how desperate as a parent you become!

So you can hear the impact illicit drugs has on our group of families, some of our children have got well and that is just wonderful, some incarcerated, others may have permanent incapacity and unfortunately a few will have an inevitable premature death, and although your expectations and dreams for your child are broken a glimmer of hope stays with you that one day they will be strong enough to get well and come back to you,

Parents and families should not have to suffer in silence, they should not be made to feel ashamed, they should be a voice to be heard, professionals and law makers should include them in decisions being made, they are the ones that are always there, battered and bruised after every one else has gone. There are many, many more like us out there, some live in denial, but who are we to say that's wrong and not the way, maybe it is easier, we will never know I do hope so for their sake.

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