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Witness at the enquiry into the impact of illicit drug-use on families

Perth March 14th, 2007

I am a wife, mother and grandmother whose life has been badly affected by the drug-use of a family member and its tragic consequences. Our daughter used drugs, sometimes with long clean times, over a period of 14 years until her death from a drug overdose at the age of 28 years. Ironically this happened at a time when she had been clean for several months.

During that time our family encountered all the financial, social, personal and legal problems with which the families of a drug user are so familiar and we lived with the feelings of despair and hopelessness that resulted.

The situation became much more complicated with the birth of her baby 6 years before our daughter's death. In that time the conflict arising from our roles as both parents and grandparents caused us much pain and impacted severely on family relationships. We have been the legal guardians of our granddaughter since her mother's death and found attempting to fill the dual roles of parents and grandparents extremely difficult and stressful. I know sure our granddaughter shares these feelings.

Anything I have to say is based on personal experience and a long and extensive involvement with many of the aspects of the AOD field as outlined below. I will give you a copy rather than take time reading them.

I have been, and in many cases still am

- a volunteer with the Parent Drug Information Service (PDIS) almost since the inception of the service, offering families support, both on the telephone lines and in the Drug Court.
- a member of the PDIS reference group
- a PDIS representative at the Drug Court monthly team meetings and planning days
- a member of the Board of Management of Palmerston Inc., a leading and well-respected AOD treatment agency with a residential Therapeutic Community and outpatient branches throughout the metropolitan area and the Great Southern area of W.A. Apart from general Board duties, my particular role on the Board is to represent families
- a founding member of the Palmerston Bereavement Group for parents whose child died of a drug overdose
- a founding member of the State Advisory Committee on Family Sensitive Practice

- in regular close contact with Wanslea Grandcare, a support organization for grandparents with the fulltime care of their grandchildren, mainly because of drug and alcohol abuse

In all the above roles, I maintain constant contact with families whose lives are affected by the drug-use of one of their members.

Lee-Anne has outlined the problems faced by parents of drug-users. These problems magnify in both size and complexity when the user is a parent and the safety and wellbeing of young children become issues.

During question time, I hope to address these problems and discuss possible ways in which families can be strengthened and become more resilient when dealing with this difficult situation.

I also wish to address the question of harm minimization programs from the perspective of the many family members with whom I come into contact.