



LOCAL DRUG ACTION GROUPS INC.

**Submission No: 159**

Supp to Sub:

AUTHORISED:

March 12, 2007  
 Mr. James Catchpole  
 Committee Secretary  
 Standing Committee on Family and Human Services  
 Parliament House  
 Canberra ACT 2600

### **Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families**

In response to your letter (dated February 8<sup>th</sup> 2007) inviting Local Drug Action Groups Inc to make a submission in respect of the above parliamentary inquiry.

#### **Terms of reference**

- 1) The financial, social and personal cost to families who have a member(s) using illicit drugs, including the impact of drug induced psychosis or other mental disorders;
- 2) The impact of harm minimisation programs on families; and
- 3) Ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member(s) using illicit drugs

**Local Drug Action Groups Inc thank the committee for the opportunity to comment on items 2 and 3 of the reference terms.**

#### **About Local Drug Action Groups**

Local Drug Action Groups Inc (LDAG Inc) is a unique West Australian, not-for-profit – prevention based organisation. It was created in 1996 as part of a government initiative borne out of recommendations generated by the *Task Force on Drug Abuse* in 1995; that an important component of an overall response to addressing alcohol and other drug issues was to work from within the community. Local Drug Action Groups Inc. works in partnership with the Government of Western Australia and is primarily funded by the Drug and Alcohol Office.

LDAG Inc. is responsible for the management and ongoing development of the network of 58 community based LDAGs operating throughout Western Australia. The board of management consists of volunteer representatives from both regional and metropolitan-based LDAGs. This network represents a significant volunteer resource in local Western Australian communities.

Local Drug Action Groups focus their work on engaging and supporting whole communities. Emphasis is on local and practical action, grass roots community development, from a prevention perspective. Hundreds of projects are undertaken by LDAGs throughout the state each year. Youth, parents and the broader community are involved in planning and participating in projects that aim to prevent and reduce drug related harm in their local communities - thereby creating long-term, sustainable changes at a community level.

LOCAL DRUG ACTION GROUPS INC

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENT 2007

working together

TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

7 Field Street Mount Lawley Western Australia 6050 | Telephone 08 9370 0364 | Facsimile 08 9272 6605 | [www.localdrugaction.com.au](http://www.localdrugaction.com.au)

### **Helping Empower Local Parents**

Local Drug Action group Inc works from a prevention perspective using a harm-minimisation framework to generate community response – creating community ownership of AOD issues. The focus of building resilience in families through prevention strategies is reflected in the Helping Empower Local Parents program, an initiative of Local Drug Action Group Inc.

Through Local Drug Action Groups across the state, the HELP program is supporting communities to;

- Build the confidence of families regarding alcohol and drug issues;
- Encourage the sharing of wisdom of families with the support of professionals and other key stakeholders; and
- Support families to seek help early if it is needed

The HELP program recognised limited capacity, and limited funding within many communities as hurdles to developing effective strategies in addressing drug and alcohol issues. HELP is currently developing a training package which aims to enable community participants to then share their enhanced skills within their local communities.

### **Term of reference item 2):**

#### **The impact of harm minimisation programs on families**

The problems associated with alcohol and drug use are a major concern for the whole community. They impact upon individuals, families and the broader community and require a range of effective and sustainable responses.

#### **Harm Minimisation**

*"Involves a range of approaches to prevent and reduce drug-related harm including prevention; early intervention; specialist treatment; supply control; safer drug use; and abstinence."*

National Drug Strategy

From a 'harm minimisation' perspective, Local Drug Action Groups Inc involves the whole community in active harm minimisation practices, activities and long term programs. The HELP program works within a harm minimisation model and is unique in that it is the only parent-family focused AOD program that is prevention based in Western Australia.

Programs that are prevention based, rather than treatment focused, should be recognised and emphasised. The HELP program recognises that parents are holders of knowledge, both innate and experienced based. Parents already actively practice many components of harm minimisation and early intervention strategies and techniques as everyday methods and outcomes of successful parenting. Some simple examples include using child safety seats, restricted access to poisons and teaching road safety skills to children.

The potential for parent-peer education to create a culture of awareness within communities of prevention and harm-minimisation strategies has been recognised by recent research (Parent-peer education and drug prevention: Druginfo Clearinghouse). By targeting the parents of primary aged children as the instigators of relevant peer-parent based education, the process could create a sustainable, long-term focused model of community drug and alcohol prevention strategies. By training and supporting parents to share their knowledge and learning around preventative and harm-minimisation strategies, activities have the opportunity to be culturally, geographically and socially relevant for their own family and wider community.

**Term of reference item 3):**

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

In particular, the Helping Empower Local Parents (HELP) program has sought to address the issues that are the focus of this enquiry.

In the past, HELP supported parent support groups as individual localised LDAG strategies. These groups, made up of parents and family members, meet regularly to support one another in their situation of living with a family member with substance abuse issues. It is important to mention here that when discussing families with a member who is an illicit drug user, that from our experience, the drug user is often an adult in the late 20s to mid 30s. This further leaves the families without support as many services are designed to address issues within a family with a 'teenage' drug user.

The topics discussed at a recent parent support group were divided between lack of resources and assistance for their family member living with drug dependency, and the lack of support available to parents and family members affected. From the parent and family perspective, the greatest need expressed was the availability of both crisis and long-term counselling support. The organisation with the training to render this service for this particular geographical area has a waiting time (for counselling services) of 6-8 weeks. Parent support groups are forced into providing a service for other parents facing similar issues.

Some parent support group members have been so dedicated to supporting other parents that they have voluntarily undergone basic training in drug and alcohol counselling focused on families of drug users. This has then lead to incidences of these parents attempting to access crisis debriefing-counselling for their own selves. Far from a perspective of self-pity, many groups of parents are pro-active within their community advocating for more services for themselves and their child(ren). Some expressed that the group was a "lifeline" for them and one member expressed that she would have been "pushed over the edge" is not for the support of the parent group, given the absence of other services able to adequately support families.

The capacity of HELP through LDAG Inc to respond to this opportunity to support families is limited due to funding and other restrictions.

**Summary**

Local Drug Action Groups Inc recognises that by supporting and providing resources for parents (beginning with parents of young primary aged children), that the whole community gains skills and knowledge regarding the social, health and financial benefits of a preventative perspective to illicit and other drug use.

Local Drug Action Groups Inc is a prevention based organisation; and as such, are unable to provide services needed such as counselling and other critical support for these parent support groups.

Local Drug Action Groups Inc supports and recommends policies that assist families to develop skills and strategies that address the complex issues facing parents and families who are impacted by illicit drug use by a family member.

**Recommendations**

- That the valuable contribution of organisations, such as Local Drug Action Groups, that focus on regional, relevant community based prevention strategies be recognised and supported to a much greater degree; and
- That organisations who are attempting to meet the significant needs of these families and parents are resourced to do so;
- From a financial perspective, recognition and action regarding prevention programs and projects are, in the long-term, offer greater economic benefits than treatment services; and
- Services that commit to a principle of grass-roots community focused education, empowers parents and therefore creates sustainable, long-term outcomes.

Should further consultation be required please do not hesitate to contact me on (08) 9370 0386 or Leesa Tapping at [leesa.tapping@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:leesa.tapping@health.wa.gov.au)

Yours Sincerely



Leesa Tapping  
Executive Officer  
Local Drug Action Groups Inc