

28/2/07 KS

Simon Emily (REPS)

Sent: Wednesday, 1

To: Simon Emily, F

Subject: Inquiry into the impact of illicit drug use on families

The Secretary of the Committee.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to thank you for the opportunity to voice my feelings regarding the impact my son's drug use had on my family.

Before I start, I wish to state that I remain anonymous and I wish my son's name to be kept private.

The financial, social and personal cost to this family was, in retrospect, enormous.

My son's drug use began in university and continued for about five-six years.

I believe his drugs of choice were marijuana and alcohol. The innocent marijuana, the soft social drug, the drug that is legal in some countries eventually caused psychosis in my son. He also had Cushings syndrome from excessive use of steroids which he used to cure his asthma which was caused by his bong. He has life long scars from stretch marks on his legs and stomach.

When he moved home he was beginning his psychosis. We attempted a stay in the Melbourne Clinic, at a cost of over \$20,000 a week, but that was unsuccessful after only one day because of the psychiatrist's mismanagement.

This led to him detoxing at home with the help of an exceptional GP.

He is now a very successful professional with a life time of experience crammed into his young 28 year old body.

Looking back, the toll, this innocent drug called marijuana and this legal drug called bourbon and coke has had on my family has been huge.

I, being his mother, took most of the stress. I shielded what was happening from my husband and my other two children. The money I spent on his alcohol and his marijuana actually did mount up to quite a few hundred dollars. Although he was earning money from his tutoring, he often ran out. When you have a 6' psychotic standing I over you, you help in any way you can.

During his rehabilitation, the cost of his psychologist, his psychiatrist, his GP and his barrister mounted to thousands of dollars.

My job was to be there for him no matter what the circumstances. I played a waiting game. Eventually, with the combined help of all the professionals and his immediate family, he survived and is now drug free. I have to admit that my extended family became very scarce during the entire episode of his drug taking. Fear.

I do not think there is a harm minimisation program for marijuana or alcohol because they are

both deemed to be low risk drugs of choice. Here lies my dilemma. I want these drugs to be upgraded to be high risk drugs of choice. I want the message to get out that marijuana can cause death. That alcohol can cause death. I know we know that they can but there doesn't seem to be any emphasis placed on these drugs because other drugs such as ICE can cause death so much faster. ICE, heroin, speed etc seem to have a better reputation than the common old marijuana bong and the odd can of bourbon and coke.

I know what these innocent drugs can do and it can cause unimaginable stress and money.

My current health situation seems to have been affected by the stress of three years ago. I am now at risk of a stroke due to an irregular heart beat because of the stress of five-six years of uncertainty regarding my son's life. Our family is once again joined and happy but the effect on the relationship between my son's siblings, although repaired, has taken its toll. My husband and I have remained strong and amazingly survived this ordeal.

Ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member using illicit drugs would be:

1. To advertise support groups such as the Mount Evelyn Group.
2. To promote the incredible dangers marijuana can pose especially if the user is genetically pre disposed to addiction.
3. To make it mandatory that GPs have specific training in how to treat and refer drug addicts and not prescribe drugs they are not familiar with. (psychotic drugs)
4. To make the cost of rehabilitation accessible.

Once again I thank you for giving me the opportunity to voice my concerns regarding the dangers of these seemingly innocent drugs of choice.

Yours sincerely,

Ms. S. Chapman

Partner of Mount Evelyn

Ms. Chapman