

**Submission No: 126**

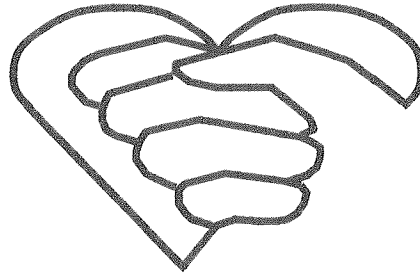
Supp to Sub:

AUTHORISED:

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KS

20 MAR 2007  
on Family and Human Services



# *TOUGHLOVE*

SUBMISSION  
ON ILLICIT DRUGS AND  
THE IMPACTS ON FAMILIES

March 2007

## **FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

Parents come to a *Toughlove* parent support group in crisis, because their child's behaviour has deteriorated and they feel helpless not knowing what to do with this problem. Often their family life has broken down, their self-esteem has zeroed and they are seeking support to help them through these difficult times.

Unacceptable behaviours have eroded relationships in the following ways:-

Emotional stress on the family – family breakdown

Arguments with spouse, siblings

Violence – physical/emotional & verbal – often the effects from drug abuse

Parents living in fear of their lives from violent outbursts

Embarrassment – cannot talk to friends and neighbours

Peer Pressure overrides family values

Children's Rights are paramount and not linked to responsibility

School problems which lead to changes of schools

Being called to schools and family counsellors regularly because of sliding grades.

Time off *work* for parents – some parents are not able to work because their children are refusing to go to school/work

Time off for kids from school – no school – suspension, exclusion, expulsion – more stress on the family

## **DRUGS**

At *ToughLove* meetings we have encountered the following drug related problems with members and their families.

Breakdown due to drugs such as:

Marijuana

Tobacco

Alcohol

Heroin, LSD

Designer drugs

Ecstasy

Ice

Legal substances such as glue, petrol, supermarket supplies

Drug abuse.

Associated problems.

Drug related paraphernalia such as pipes, bongs, marijuana, pieces of hose found in your child's room

Breaking of curfew – coming home stoned late at night both weekends and school nights.

Constant telephone calls and young strangers visiting the home – phone accounts sky rocketing

Mixing prescribed medication and illicit drugs and the reactions on children with ADHD, asthma and other physical problems

Selling of drugs – marijuana - prescribed medication, such as ADHD tablets, to their peers at school

Police intervention – child fined for having illegal drugs – child charged for being in possession of marijuana – Family counselling – Court

Designer drugs

Rave parties

Hydroponics – chemicals

Parents are afraid their children will come to great harm rescue them by paying the drug dealers bills.

Parents are ignorant of difference between decriminalisation vs. legalisation.

Please see attached graphs collected from our database over the past 15 months to substantiate the drug problems.

## CRIME AND VIOLENCE

In addition to these ongoing family problem, crime and violence becomes a big issue with families such as: -

Damage to property, both home and other.

Stealing/theft inside and outside the home (eg. theft of money from family members, house-breaking, shop lifting).

Property, personal, family & community property being sold for money.

Pawn shops and second hand dealers are a source for money.

Involvement with the Police and the Law – regular Police visits to the home – attendance at Court – bailing their child out of remand centres

Prison involvement.

# HEALTH

The effects on family life become a health issue due to the stresses and breakdowns. For example: -

Psychiatrists – huge costs

Psychologists

Rehabilitation – if the child is willing to participate

Constant bronchitis – sinus problems – respiratory disorders for both the user and family members

Prescriptions

Time off work/school

Passive smoking – the effects of

Excessive eating / munchies / binge eating

Schizophrenia & Paranoia Schizophrenia (drug related)

Memory loss

Syringes left in the communities and at home

Sexual - non consenting, promiscuity, prostitution

Physical illness of parents and illness to the child or other siblings due to long-term stress

The affect on siblings - emotional trauma in younger children

Pregnancy

Dangers of mixing prescribed medication with alcohol & marijuana

Family stress and breakdown.

## **TOUGHLOVE**

As parents of the *ToughLove* program, we have found that Community Services offer limited support to parents. Parents have a need for increased Government support in order to maintain and repair family relationships.

The current laws restricts the Police from fulfilling their roll in combating their problems with our young people.

Young people believe it is socially acceptable to use drugs [Rights of passage.], as it is widespread throughout schools & all communities.

Many second and third generation families use and abuse drugs and therefore the young people are keen to experiment. Many adults are poor role models.

At *ToughLove* meetings parents learn alternative ways to cope with their child's unacceptable behaviours.

The *ToughLove* program empowers the parents by allowing them to find new strategies in dealing with their problems by changing their own reactions to their child's demands.

Basically it is the children's behaviour that brings the parents to *ToughLove* weekly meetings because of their drug use. Initially parents are not always aware. However, they learn very quickly.

Early intervention is a preferable solution in preventing and eliminating unacceptable behaviours before they escalate.

### **TOUGHLOVE MATERIALS**

There is a good selection of *ToughLove* educational resources available: -

Books

Videos

Working with community services.

Guest Speakers:-

Police Officers  
Youth Officer  
Drug Counsellor  
School Therapists/Counsellors

## FUNDING

Alternative sources of funding are not readily available.

ToughLove is a self funded program which is restricted in it's growth due lack of funding. Funding on a national level is needed if we are to reach out and service these families in need. Our main source of income comes from annual membership, weekly fees and minimal fund raising.

Currently our head office is run out of a converted garage and the cost is \$60.00 per week. Our vision is to have an office in every capital city with two (2) administrative assistants.

We have a need to run training workshop weekends on a more regular basis. These are a valuable tool for educating and inspiring our current members.

A massive national advertising campaign needs to be in place to bring *ToughLove* parent support program to the attention of the community.

## SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES THAT AFFECT *TOUGHLOVE* SUPPORT GROUP MEMBERS

1. **HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT AND REDUNDANCY** affects both parents and young people. Stresses associated with these problems can cause many family breakdowns. The *ToughLove* group effectively supports all family members at this traumatic time.
2. **SOLE PARENT FAMILIES** who are surviving on benefits often have nothing left after necessities have been bought. Young people often feel they are being deprived and as a result 'act out' by being verbally abusive or run away. This causes great distress to many parents and results in diminished confidence, feelings of guilt, shame and isolation and helplessness as a parent. *ToughLove* support groups offer hope and encouragement and assist parents to concentrate on the behaviour and not who is to blame. The groups also reduce feelings of isolation and helplessness by providing parents with peer support and constructive solutions for developing individual action plans.
3. **INCREASE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE** as a result of families living in a stressed society means verbal and physical abuse has increased and almost becomes a way of life. Parents often seek help because of the violence and abuse metered out to them by their teenagers and vice versa. *ToughLove* does not advocate or support violence in any form and can offer practical suggestions to dealing with this problem.
4. **ABUSE DRUGS** can be attributed to their comparatively easy availability, desire to ease the hurt and escape, peer pressure and for some, financial gain. *ToughLove* groups offer education to all family members for this problem and will refer and support individuals as they attend counselling and rehabilitation programs.

5. **AN INCREASE IN YOUTH CRIME AND TRUANCY** cause many problems in the community. The *ToughLove* support group provides support as cases proceed through the justice or education systems, and will provide advocacy when the young person is receptive. *ToughLove* groups also develop good working relations with Police and School staff, who refer parents and young people to local groups.
6. **CUTS IN EDUCATION SPENDING** means there are no resources available within the schools to give additional time needed to counsel families with 'out of control' teenagers. School Counsellors welcome the opportunity to refer parents to local *ToughLove* groups.
7. **DECREASED GOVERNMENT SPENDING** results in cuts to health and welfare services and the availability of service providers (Social Workers and Counsellors) have decreased. The "Tough on Drugs" campaign works in conjunction with our *ToughLove* program in that we believe in zero tolerance. It is our understanding that \$27m was allocated for this initiative, but nothing was allocated to parent support groups such as the *ToughLove* program. We would more than welcome becoming involved and financially supported by this initiative.
8. **THE BREAKDOWN OF FAMILY VALUES** has left parents confused over their rights and the setting of limits and boundaries for their teenagers. The *ToughLove* group is able to help resolve this area of conflict through supportive action, education and mediation.
9. **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES** have created a society where unrealistic expectations are placed on parents through the media, advertising and peer pressure and a much younger group of teenagers are being exposed to drugs not previously experienced in past generations. This has increased parent stress and anxiety and family conflict earlier than expected in most families. Living in an 'instant society' has also created problems for most families as parents and young people have come to expect their needs to be met immediately and instant solutions to their problems.
10. Further conflict surfaces when young people are readily supplied with Centrelink and homeless allowances when they have perfectly good homes with caring parents to live in.

There are no checks made with the parents. The cost to the government and taxpayers is enormous and unnecessary. It is a waste of public funds, as these allowances are often used to support drug habits.

11. There is an increase in parent abuse when parents are stood over for money to fund the drug addiction.



## **OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS OF THE *TOUGHLOVE* PROGRAMME**

### **PARENTS & FAMILIES**

Parents learn skills and strategies that enable them to change their own behaviours and ways of responding to the problem and in turn regain control of their family life.

Parents gain an understanding of what is happening in their family.

Self-confidence is regained and a sense of direction and purpose is achieved. Feels of disappointment, guilt and failure as a parent are reduced and expectations are placed on a more realistic level.

Communication and parenting skills greatly improve.

Health improves and parents are able to function more effectively.

Isolation of the nuclear family is decreased as support group members fulfil functions once performed by extended family members.

Dependency on professionals and service providers is reduced as the parent's confidence is restored.

Siblings regain the parent's attention, which had been solely focussed on the 'acting out' teenager.

Parents regain control of their family and home.

### **YOUNG PEOPLE**

Receive appropriate assistance in changing their behaviour and learn to take responsibility for their own actions.

Become more accountable for their own behaviour and experience realistic consequences for their actions.

Gain an extended family and have a larger number of caring adults taking an interest in their well being and future.

Realise their dependency and obligation to the family unit and learn better parenting skills for the future, from positive role models.

### **LOCAL COMMUNITY**

Mutual support and a shared responsibility are gained when a collective response is taken with outrageous, unacceptable and anti social behaviour.

Communication between parents and service providers is improved.

A more co-ordinated response to drug abuse, family violence, runaways, vandalism, graffiti and theft is achieved.

The problem is dealt with in a more effective manner when adults in the community are more unified, informed and prepared.

There is less impact on the health system when stress related illnesses are reduced.

*ToughLove* Support Groups are cost effective as parents voluntarily work to support other families in the community.

Less time is taken off work, when parents are no longer the only adults dealing with their teenager's behaviour.

Levels of youth homelessness and crime are greatly reduced.

Relationships improve between parents, teenagers, and service providers when young people are no longer able to manipulate the parents, medical, legal and educational systems.

## **WE ENCOURAGE THE INVOLVEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS**

*ToughLove* parent volunteers support our groups within Australia with media interviews, contacts with family services, police and the Justice System.

Families are then referred to the *ToughLove* programme for support. *ToughLove* support groups are run solely by the parent members who volunteer their time and energy to support and encourage other parents.

Practical support is vital and this may include referring parents to appropriate local services, crisis call-outs, mediating and negotiating between parents and teenagers. This requires commitment and training which is available through *ToughLove* Training workshops. *ToughLove* Representatives train and devote many hours to *ToughLove* by supporting, publicising and extending the *ToughLove* network.

## **PROMOTING TOUGHLOVE**

Leaflets are distributed to local schools, doctors and specialists, the police, health and welfare agencies, etc. and local Member of Parliament offices.

Advertisements are placed in other local community newsletters (schools, MP's, Churches).

Advertisements are placed in local Press providing funding is available.

Word of Mouth – as Parents benefit from the *ToughLove* programme, they tell their family, friends and neighbours.

Trainers and representatives are authorised representatives of the programme.

## ATTACHMENTS

Relationship to Caller dated Feb 2007

Referral Source dated Feb 2007

Problems Experienced By Parents, dated Feb 2007

Family Dynamics date Feb 2007

Age Groups date Feb 2007

Main Types of Violence dated Feb 2007

Drugs dated Feb 2007

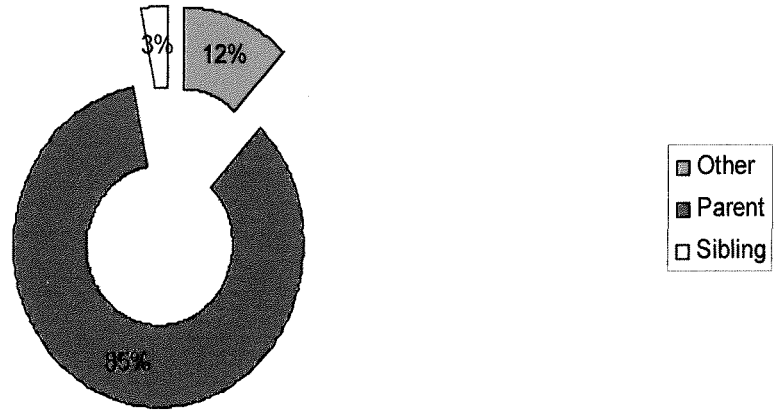
Child Gender dated Feb 2007

Testimonials from Parents

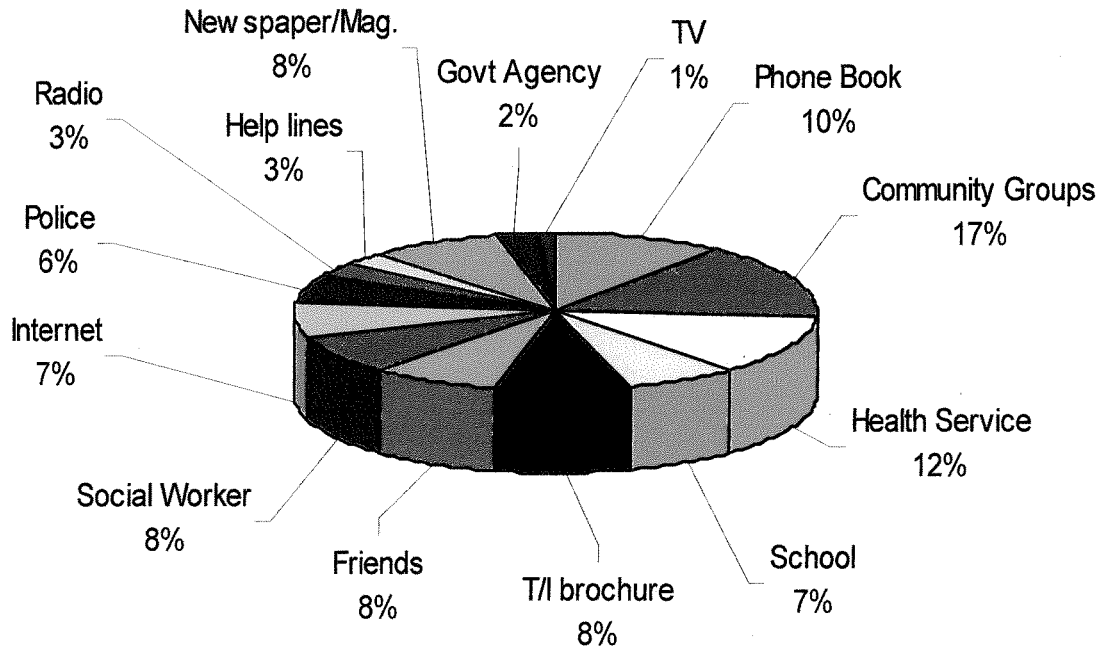
Advertising articles

**DATA**

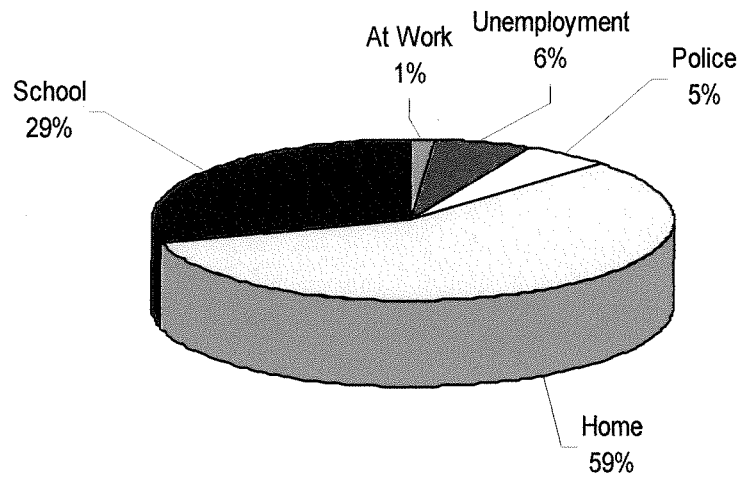
### Relationship of Caller Dec/05-Feb/07



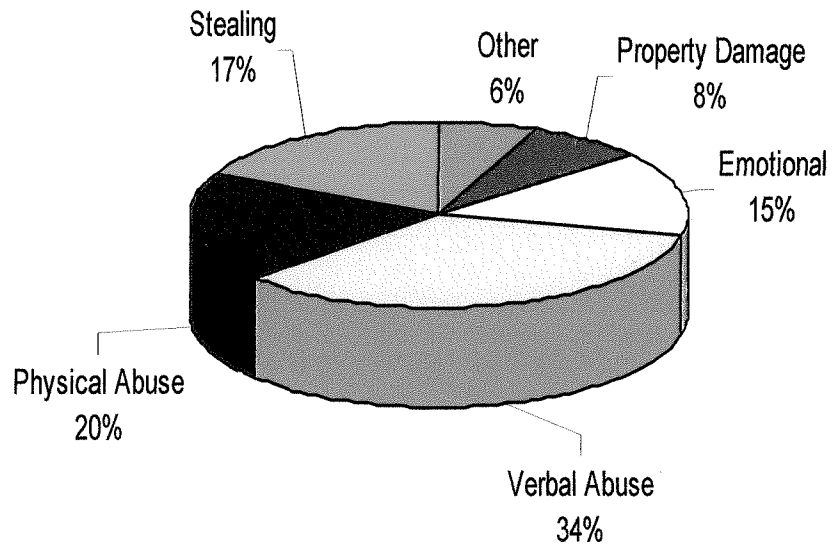
**Referral Source Dec/05-Feb/07**



**Problem Context Dec/05 -Feb/07**

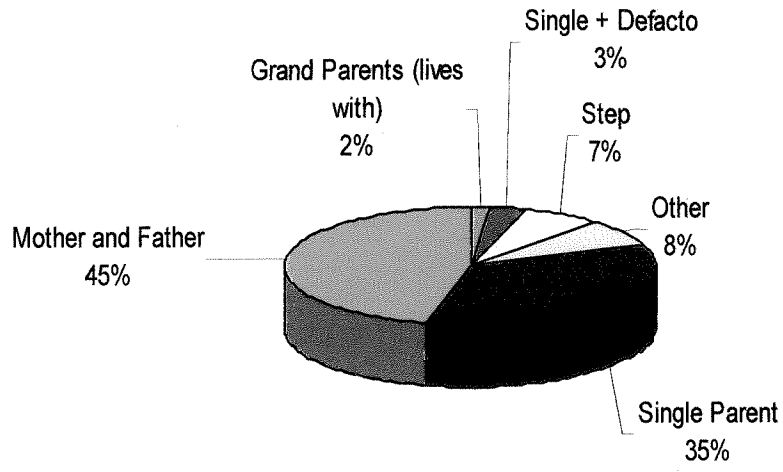


### Main Type of Abuse - Dec/05-Feb/07

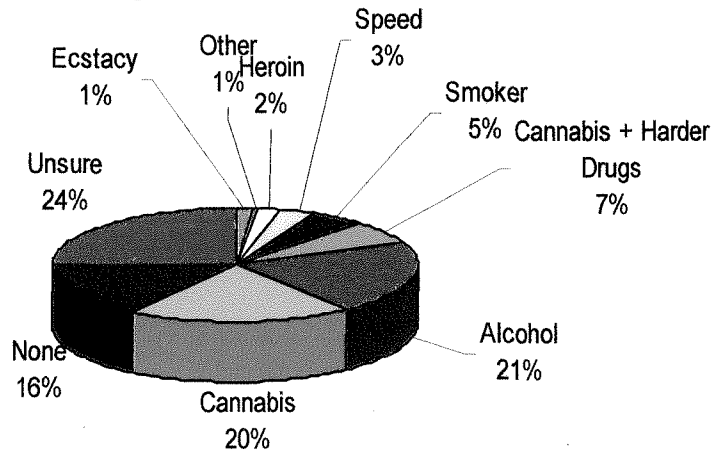




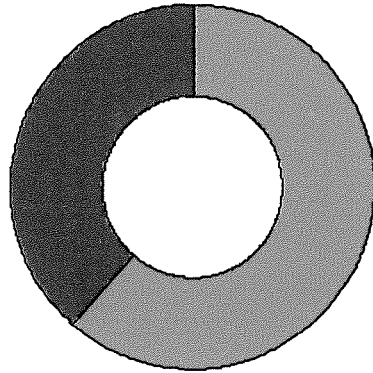
### Family Dynamic Dec/05 - Feb/07



### Drugs? Dec/05 - Feb/07

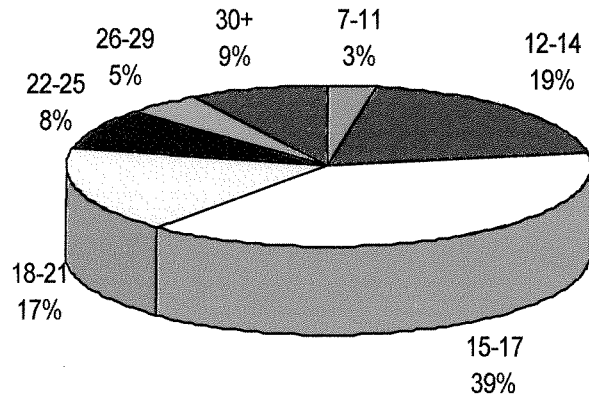


**Child Gender Dec/05 - Feb/07**



■ Male  
■ Female

### Age Groups Dec/05 - Feb/07



PARENT  
TESTIMONIALS

We are a family in limbo, not knowing when the nightmare may end.

Our daughter Melloney suffered from depression from an early age, which was controlled by medication, but, as the years go by and they grow older you have no control over this and unfortunately they seem to think that drugs are a better form of controlling this disease.

Melloney started off on so called "soft" drugs, but of course this only is a temporary fix, and leads to drugs that control not only her but the family and people around her.

Having lost her friends of many years due to her behavior, she found new ones. This new group was of course not your "normal friends" but "drug friends", which led to living on the streets for short periods, then coming home to clean up, then disappearing again.

She shoplifted, threatened people, stole from people, and we believe also prostituted herself to get the drugs she now needed.

When she was at home it got harder to understand and control what was happening. We got guidance from "Toughlove" on how to take back control of our lives, by not confronting her when we knew there was no end to the argument and letting her know that this was our home and that we were not prepared for that behavior under our roof, but, it was very very hard being tough.

Melloney eventually rang the Methadone Clinic at the Royal North Shore Hospital and made the commitment to control her life.

Even though we were aware this was still being on a drug, we were pleased that her life was on a more even keel, in that she didn't have to go on the streets looking for it and stealing to get what she needed.

Our lives also became more settled until she moved out of home and her partner and our son had an argument at our home and she took out an AVO on her brother, influenced by her so called partner.

She had been going to the clinic for 3 ½ years and lived out of home for a year when she went missing, from her partners home.

We were not at home at the time and did not realize until 3 weeks after the event, and, 3 years later we have still not found her.

The Police found that when Melloney left her partner she went to live in a DRUG HOUSE and got back on the HARD DRUGS which led, we believe to her death.

Financially going through the many years of ups & downs drained us all as we paid speeding fines, court costs and medical care.

The stress to the family of our heartache and loss lead to Diabetes, Heart problems, cancer and the constant thoughts of what happened to our beautiful baby.

I was talking to an acquaintance in recent days and she told me that her son had just committed suicide. He is the same age as our daughter Melloney and he also had been struggling with drugs over many years. She thinks of me and how our family keeps going, knowing that in a way she has been able to say her goodbye and we have not.

They always say life goes on, and it does, but in a different way. There's always that person in a crowd or walking in front of you that in some way reminds you of her and your heart just starts to bust out of your chest hoping and praying that maybe there she is.

Our children are a gift of love and whatever they do in life will always be loved.

Tom, Louise & Matthew Menhennitt

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2007

## The Destruction Caused By Illicit Drugs On Addicts, Families & Society

### Financial Cost

- The financial cost has impacted on our entire family. Due to psychotic episodes, there has been destruction to our home and belongings.
- My son has at times been unemployed, sometimes because of the mood swings, going between anger and depression, therefore the cost to him has been both the loss of paid work as well as the cost of buying drugs.
- Supplying his basic needs of food and shelter when he has been out of work has been a very big expense to me.

### Social Cost

- The social cost is an expense to our entire community. Taxpayers are paying for the cost of police being called when situations are out of control and for court costs. Gaoles are also a financial burden on society, but by no means an answer to the problem.
- The cost of Social Security payments is another enormous expense for society, but doesn't solve the situation ... it just feeds the problem and leaves our young people with no incentive to make a change.

### Personal Cost

- The breakdown of personal relationships has been a huge cost to our family, but for me personally it's been heartbreaking. After a psychotic outbreak and my husband stepping in to hold our son down to prevent him from doing any more damage to our property, our son did not speak to his father for 14 months. To this day he does not speak to his brother. This makes for a very stressful situation, as we all live in the same house.

### Impact Of Drug Induced Psychoses Or Other Mental Disorders

- Watching a very bright & healthy young man have a psychotic outbreak because of illicit drugs is devastating & frightening. His life has been out of control & this affects not only him, but also our entire family. We are never sure when the next outburst may erupt.
- The emotions he has gone through are anger, frustration, memory loss and depression. This does not make for a happy person, so it causes tension within our home.
- It has cost me a great deal of time just trying to find where to go to get help. Just by chance, I heard about Toughlove on an evening current affair program. Now I'm spending a lot of time learning how to cope with life under these conditions.
- The stress impacts on my health.



### The Impact Of Harm Minimization Programs On Families

- I am very much against the idea of harm minimization programs, as I believe it sends a wrong message to our young people ... it's like saying it's ok to take illicit drugs or that we are throwing our hands up in the air & saying we've lost the battle. I strongly believe the money spent on such programs should be redirected into setting up more rehabilitation centres. **Rehabilitation, not acceptance** is our only hope.

### Ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member using illicit drugs

- More education at an earlier age for our young children. This education should include young people who have in the past been drug users, but have managed to turn their lives around. If the message is coming from someone of their own age group I think it would have a much greater influence on our youngsters than educators of our own generation.
- Family support groups such as Toughlove should be better advertised so parents aren't struggling alone due to lack of knowledge of where to go for help. This program has been a lifesaver for my family & for many others whom I have come to know through our Toughlove group. Ongoing support is essential & the best support comes from those who are going through the same or similar ordeals. I'm very grateful for the support I now receive from Toughlove and also for being able to give support to others in similar situations.
- I would like to see more rehabilitation centres available and used instead of detention centres & gaols. Punishment in such places only returns these people to society in a worse state than before they went in.

Over the last 7 years, my daughter has been using drugs in a more and more in depth way.

It started with Marijuana to keep her from thinking about painful memories in her teens. She was told by councillors and authority figures that she did not have to face the painful things if she was not ready, so she started doing Pot to numb her feelings.

Later on she dabbled in speed, but lost a couple of friends and sought my help not to use any more, however she would not give up the pot.

During her pregnancy 8 years ago, she was living with the father of her children and he also did pot, they started using more and more each day. The baby was born with the chord around her neck and it was touch an go wether she would make it or not... The labour was difficult and if not for the wonderful staff at the hospital the baby would not have survived.

This did not stop her using and the father and herself kept using... the second child came along 2 years later. The constant use of pot was starting to make both the parents quite paranoid in certain areas, they also needed more than just pot, so the father started bringing home speed and occasionally ecstasy.

He also started growing his own marijuana to try and reduce the cost. They both became very much in debt, however the father was cluey enough to make sure all debts were in my daughters name, so she had to declare herself bankrupt.

He got caught growing the pot and also had faced several charges of abuse of my daughter, and also driving offences. He ended up doing community service and weekend detention.

The use of the drugs effected the way they reacted to each other... they were both extremely volatile and selfish and would often end up fighting all night. They would have physical fights in front of the children and the children would often sit quietly hiding under beds until midnight or later waiting for dinner. At this stage the kids were only 1 and 3 years old. In fact at times they would have fights and he would hit her with the baby in her arms.

Once the oldest started school my daughter decided she had had enough and would leave him. She tried several times by coming back home to me, however this never worked. She wanted the drugs so much, that all she wanted to do was party. However, she would not admit she used drugs. She used to say she had been through so much she just needed to relax for a while. I bought the children up for several months, but could not do it any more so she went back to the father again.

In May 2006 she finally left and found a place in a refuge. At first this was good and she started getting some help, but after about 4 weeks she met more people at the refuge who used heavier drugs. Ice, speed etc. They introduced her to these drugs and again she found she could numb the pain and kept using.

The girls started to become neglected the oldest child was in first class and would attend school only a couple of days a week. The youngest was enrolled in a preschool but very rarely got there.

She left the refuge and got her own place after 3 months. Again things went sour. She did not pay the rent. She constantly begged people for money. Food, clothes for the kids. Any chance she got she would get someone to babysit for a few days "so she could unwind".

After 3 months she was evicted and had to come home again. This was supposed to only be for a week or 2 until she could find other accommodation.

After 4 weeks things were getting worse. She was not doing anything to help. Not supporting the girls, they were not getting to school and she was stealing from me. It got to the point that she started fighting with me all day every day and in the end she started getting violent.

The police were called and she also attacked them. She was charged with assault and an AVO was taken out. Docs were contacted and they arranged with her for the children to stay with me until at least the end of the year while she got sorted out and proved she was not on drugs.

I started the children into school, had health checks done and tried to get their dental problems fixed. For 3 months they were settling down and all was going well, however when my daughter found out she would not get any money from the government while they were in my care she put up such a stink that docs allowed her to take custody again.

Over Christmas she got a housing commission house in Claymore and took the girls to live there with her. She spent most of her days coming back to Parramatta where her friends and drug dealers were. Finally when the school term started she got the girls enrolled in school in the second week of term. This year the girls had only attended school about 2 days a week.

The youngest had her teeth fixed. She had to go to hospital for the day and have 8 teeth removed and every other tooth filled. The day she arrived at the hospital, she was dirty, hungry and dehydrated.

The father took the girls a few weeks ago and is trying to look after them himself, however he is only doing this so that he can go on a pension and not work. The whole time he has been with them, he has relied on me to provide the food and clothing for them and also want me to give him money for smokes and things.

Doc's knew my daughter was using pot as she admitted this to them. They had requested she have urine tests and treatment to prove she could look after the

kids, however this never happened. The father is not much better, but at least he gets them to school.

The problem is that both these parents care more about their drugs than anything else. It is easy to get as long as you have cash. The children get neglected and forgotten in the middle of all this.

The oldest child was the top of her class when started in kindergarten. She was happy and confident. Now at the start of second year, she is only at about the standard of the end of kindergarten and she is not at all happy and acts out all the time, just to try and get some sort of attention. The drugs make the parents forget time and everything. They will tell the children to do something and then 3 hours later, check on the kids.....

The youngest used to be the happiest, most loving and trusting angel. However now, she is very insecure and rarely smiles.

All these kids want is for someone to sit and cuddle them and talk to them.

Drug use in the family destroys everyone. The children of the users get neglected and see much more of life than they should. The parents of the users go through a horrific life of constantly worrying about the next phone call. Protecting their homes from the users. (I have even had to sleep with my wallet, car keys and mobile phone in my pillow just to stop them being stolen). And constantly picking up the pieces and protecting their children.

The siblings of the users also go through a lot of trauma as the user takes all attention from the other siblings and also uses their emotions to get what they want.

The user cannot hold down a job easily and if they do, they are likely to steal and cheat to get extra money for extra drugs. They also put colleagues in jeopardy with their reckless behaviour.

I am constantly astounded at the lack of support from the authorities. The police have seen my daughter at her worst and they know she is using pretty heavy drugs. The court authorities have seen her and know. She has been assessed by the mental health system. They could not keep her because it was self induced and she would not admit she had a problem, however the psychiatrist felt she need to appologise to me for not keeping her and to warn me not to let her near me, her kids or anyone else in the family as she was a danger to all around her.

The drugs make them fell invincible, above authority and very much in control, when in fact they just spiral more and more out of control.

Ruth Tasovski

I am the mother of a 16 son who is residing in the Manly area as this is where his friends are. I left a domestic violence alcohol related marriage to move home to Wollongong and my son has made it clear he wants to be in Sydney. I am needing support as I have exhausted all avenues of support i.e.; docs, police, Raft, Burdekin, Taldamaunde, and his schools both here and in Manly. I have tried to get him counseling, accommodation etc and he refuses to take any help preferring to oscillate between one friend and another. He is drinking and I am unsure of drug use. He is aggressive and abusive especially under the influence.

Can you offer me some support. Letting go is something I am finding extremely hard to come to terms with.

Thank you

I live in Newcastle NSW Australia and really need some help with my  
14yr old

daughter and my 9 yr old son. I have looked at your website and have  
not

found any groups in this area, I would like to know what you suggest  
that I

do, I am not an out going enough person to try to start up a group  
here

but

would like to know if there has been anyone else in this area that  
has

made

inquiries.

Please help

Thankyou



Message:

Am haveing trouble with my 19yo daughter, she becomes angry and starts

smashing walls in her bedroom and has just recently smashed something and

has fractured her right hand. She has also lost her licence for 6mths for

speeding. Everything seems to be my fault. We are in a blended family relationship which has caused more dramas than its worth both lots of kids

hate each other with passion. My partners son has done stuff to my 19yo

and

to me. Wth worrying about her and my relationship which is rocky and we

fight all the time about the kids. He seems to think his kids are perfect. I

feel like I\'m going mental. I forgot to add is tough love set up in Maitland area NSW