

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

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M e d i a R e l e a s e

ACT Prison Inquiry – Prisons Damage Families

“The ACT Assembly needs to confront the hard fact that much of what we’re doing with corrections is hurting families and damaging society,” said Brian McConnell, President of Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform.

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform will give evidence to the current inquiry of the Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity into Support Services for People in Custody at 11:45 tomorrow, Thursday 16 October.

“We welcome the inquiry,” he said, “but it will be valueless if, at the end of it, people continue to:

- have a worse drug problem on exit from prison;
- contract HIV or hepatitis C in prison;
- have a minor mental disorder transformed by prison into a serious mental illness;
- lose the skills and confidence necessary for the world outside.”

“Our submission,” Mr McConnell said, “focuses on the two main reasons why people end up in prison - addiction and mental illness. We cannot pretend to desperate families that an addicted or mentally ill family member will be in a drug free environment there where they will receive good psychiatric and other treatment. Nothing could be further from the truth.

“In addition to proper care and support for prisoners, Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform calls for a focuses on strengthening the bonds between prisoners and their families. The deprivation of liberty involved in imprisonment should not also mean social isolation.

“Corrections’ responsibility must extend beyond the prison walls to the wellbeing of the community as a whole.”

Ends

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The 25 recommendations of the submission are attached.

The full text of the submission is available at www.ffdlr.org.au.

RECOMMENDATIONS

from

SUBMISSION OF FAMILIES AND FRIENDS FOR DRUG LAW REFORM

to the

INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT SERVICES FOR FAMILIES OF PEOPLE IN CUSTODY

by the

Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity

Recommendation 1:

Programmes for the support of families of those in detention should be consistent with the following principles:

- (a) the hardship of family members dependent on the member detained should be minimised;
- (b) the family's support for the detained person during the detention should be maximised;
- (c) the capacity of the family to assist in the reintegration of the released member into the community should be reinforced;
- (d) the capacity of the family to bring up children should be strengthened; and
- (e) the health of the detained family member should be protected.

Recommendation 2:

Support should be provided:

- (a) to meet the crisis and longer term material needs of families whose life is disrupted by the detention of a members; and
- (b) to assist the family to cope with the non-material stresses associated with detention, notably where these are compounded by substance abuse and mental disorder of the member in custody.

Recommendation 3:

Procedures should be in place to make a prompt assessment of the needs of the family of everyone who is detained.

Recommendation 4:

Strategies should be developed for relevant government and non-government agencies to provide a co-ordinated range of support to the families of those detained.

Recommendation 5:

Obstacles arising from the regime of remand centres and prison that serve to limit reasonable access of families to members detained should be removed.

Recommendation 6:

Where necessary, assistance with transport should be provided to families to enable them to visit detained members.

Recommendation 7:

A dignified and congenial human and physical environment should be provided for families to visit detained members.

Recommendation 8:

Leadership, support and training is required to bring about recognition among

custodial staff of the need to enhance family support for prisoners and on how this can best be brought about.

Recommendation 9:

In order to maximise the support from families for the transition of detainees to the community:

- (a) the needs should be assessed of the family as a whole as well as the released member; and
- (b) community programmes providing the support required should be co-ordinated.

Recommendation 10:

Where a family is able to provide useful support falling short of accommodation for a member released from detention, help should be provided to enable the member to secure accommodation convenient to the family.

Recommendation 11:

People with serious mental disorders should not be detained in remand centres or sent to prison.

Recommendation 12:

Concern for some interests of those with mental disorders should not undermine the capacity of those willing to provide support.

Recommendation 13:

Interventions should not focus on blame and separation of someone with a mental disorder from his or her family but should focus on enhancing the capacity of the family to provide support.

Recommendation 14:

Support should be provided for families seeking to support a member who has a mental disorder. In particular a scheme of treatment plans should be established. These plans should involve the person with a mental disorder and all those closely involved in the life of that person including the family and professional helpers.

Recommendation 15:

Policies for admission to psychiatric service units and attendance by the Mental Health Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team should be adjusted or co-ordinated with other services to permit early intervention in the case of each new relapse rather than when the relapse has reached crisis proportions.

Recommendation 16:

One or more facilities with necessary separations should be established to provide a caring environment for those with a mental illness including those under 18:

- (a) to head off a crisis before it occurs and to provide relief for family and other carers; and
- (b) as an alternative to remand or prison for those who may have become caught up in the criminal law.

Recommendation 17:

Mental health services should be integrated with other support for those with a mental disorder and their family.

Recommendation 18:

All measures available in the community at large should be taken to maintain and improve the physical health of those detained. In particular:

- (a) every effort should be taken to ensure that people do not emerge from detention with infectious blood borne diseases contracted in detention;
- (b) effective interventions should be implemented that are known to reduce or eliminate the dangerous public health risk of blood borne disease within remand centres and prisons.

Recommendation 19:

Recognising the reality of availability of illicit substances in corrective institutions, detention regimes should be framed around effective drug strategies that maximise the health and welfare of those detained.

Recommendation 20:

Sterile syringes should be provided in corrective institutions where ACT prisoners are sent.

Recommendation 21:

The guiding principle of corrections should be to strengthen the community links of those subject to corrections and should not be their isolation. This principle should apply even for those deprived of their liberty.

Recommendation 22:

Corrections must own a broader social responsibility that extends beyond the containment of detainees to the integration of support services for families and detainees consistently with the best practices in the community at large.

Recommendation 23:

Measures of harm minimisation available in the community for illicit drug use should also be available in prisons and remand centres in conjunction with best practice drug treatments.

Recommendation 24:

As part of a broader social responsibility, authorities should not allow efforts to prevent drugs entering corrective institutions to undermine the maintenance and development of family bonds and capacity of the family to support the detained member's reintegration into the community after release.

Recommendation 25:

Consistent with the findings of early intervention research, the Legislative Assembly and Government should take leadership roles in support of the introduction of a consistent set of social policies to address the serious social problems including mental illness and drug abuse presently associated with detention.