



Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

June Newsletter 2017

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Hi All,

Below are details of our next meeting:-

- **General meeting 7:30pm at St Ninian's Uniting Church in Lynham on the 22nd of June.**
- **David McDonald will speak at 8:00 pm.**
- **Light refreshments available.**

We are very fortunate that David has agreed to speak to us just a few days after returning from Europe. I have asked him to focus *on drug laws and the current Canberra scene, and how FFDLR can be most effective in bringing about changes.*

Below is a short synopsis of the many years of experience David has had in this arena. We invite as many members and friends as possible to come and hear such an erudite presenter.

David McDonald (BA, DipSocWk, MA, GradDipPoplnHealth) is an interdisciplinary social scientist with research interests at the intersection of criminal justice and population health (the new discipline of epidemiological criminology), and building evidence-informed public policy.

David is the Director of the consultancy Social Research & Evaluation Pty Ltd, a Visiting Fellow at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, and the research advisor to the ACT Government's drug policy advisory group and to the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Association ACT.

He has wide experience in research & evaluation, policy analysis, and policy & program development in

the alcohol and other drugs, criminal justice and related fields.

In 2009 David was the recipient of the Outstanding Contributions Award in the ACT Alcohol and Other Drug Awards Program, and in 2011 he was inducted into the National Drug and Alcohol Honour Roll, and was made a Life Member of the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia.

Queensland Meeting

For those in Queensland an important discussion with very well know speakers is to be held on Wednesday the 14th of June in Brisbane.

Australia's failed drugs policy

A discussion sponsored by The Kurilpa Citizen and the Qld Council for Civil Liberties.

Mick Palmer
Former Commission of the Australian Federal Police (AFP)

Keith Hamburger
Former Director-General, Qld Corrective Services

Desmond Manderson
ANU social historian, author of *From Mr Sin to Mr Big*

Ann St Anglican Church Hall,
Cnr Ann & Wharf St, Brisbane

6.30 for 7pm start, Wednesday, JUNE 14
rsvp: <https://qcdl.org.au/events/>

To RSVP: <https://qcdl.org.au/events/>

Membership and Newsletters

Membership

A big thanks to all those who continue to support FFDLR through membership fees and donations. If you haven't paid membership yet you can do so via direct debit to

Bank: Service One Alliance Bank BSB 801 009

Account Name: Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform

Account Number 1194974

Please identify the payment with your full name for our records.

Newsletters

We are more than happy to post these newsletters but if you wish to supply an email please as an alternative please email me at president@ffdlr.org.au

Meetings

Joan, Bill and I had a very rewarding meeting with Canberra MLA Health Minister Megan Fitzharris. We thank the Minister for her time and her attention.

We are meeting with the Attorney General, Gordon Ramsay, in the near future. Minister Ramsay will play a pivotal role in the workings of the proposed ACT Drug Court.

A third MLA we are due to see shortly is Rachel Stephen-Smith. Rachel has many ministerial appointments including Community Services and Social Inclusion, and Disability, Children and Youth. FFDLR has long considered the effects of the criminalisation of drugs on those who are marginalised and it will be interesting to hear the Minister's perspective.

As a result of the meeting with Minister Fitzharris we have been invited to sit on an ACT Health Department committee in relation to pill testing at music festivals in the ACT. The first meeting we will be involved with occurs before the end of June.

Press Releases

The follow press release was issued after the Federal

Budget proposed a drug test as a condition of receiving pension payments:

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (FFDLR) is appalled at the government's retrograde step of linking drug tests to welfare payments in last night's budget. This was further compounded by the PM's response on Radio National this morning - when questioned about this issue he responded with the trite comment "Don't do drugs"!

"Our organisation can provide first hand testimony of family members who have died from drug overdoses", said Peter Taylor, President, Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform. "These people were often struggling to make their way in the world. For the most part their lives were not working due to their addictions, but they were working hard to change their circumstances. How much more difficult will it be for them when faced with an added worry that if they slip, and take drugs, and are found out then life will be even harder", added Peter Taylor.

"The real economic savings are to be made by putting more money into treatment, treatment based on a health response not a criminal response, and to turn around the great human potential that is currently being wasted. The "tough on drugs" approach repeatedly has been shown to fail but unfortunately the simplistic moral approach is still with us. FFDLR has been advocating for over twenty years that an evidence based health response gets better results than a moral punitive one. This has been demonstrated overseas. The cross party parliamentary summit on drugs in Canberra last year, that comprised many of our leading drug researchers, came to similar conclusions.

"It is disheartening in the extreme to see our current leaders going against such a tide of expertise and knowledge by targeting those struggling the most in society. Surely Australia can do better!"

Hearing of the Victorian Parliament's law reform Road and Community Safety Committee inquiry into Drug Law Reform.

The submissions that we prepared for the Victorian inquiry along with many others are available at the website:

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/lrrcsc/inquiries/article/2810>

FFDLR's submissions are listed at number 123.

Marion (as part of her involvement with the Uniting Church) met with the committee. She prepared the following report of the experience:

On 23rd May at the NSW Parliament in Sydney Marion McConnell joined with the other members of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT who had been invited to present at a hearing of the Victorian Parliament's Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee Inquiry into Drug Law Reform. They were given 45 minutes to give a brief introduction and then respond to questions. The Synod's main thrust was that personal possession and use of illicit drugs should be treated primarily as a health and social issue rather than an issue of criminal justice. It supports decriminalisation of personal use. More should be invested in those evidence-based initiatives that reduce harm and support people who want help. Also giving evidence for the Synod was Rev Keith Hamilton, Senior Minister and CEO of the Parramatta Mission and Jon O'Brien CEO of the Uniting Church Synod Social Justice Forum.

All members of the Victorian Committee were in attendance - Mr Geoff Howard (Chair), ALP; Mr Bill Tilley (Deputy Chair), Liberal Party; Hon Martin Dixon, Liberal Party; Mr Khalil Eideh, ALP; Ms Fiona Patten, Australian Sex Party; Ms Natalie Suleymanm, ALP; and Mr Murray Thompson, Liberal Party.

The committee was impressed that the Uniting Church was taking an interest in the issue and asked relevant questions. They showed some concern at the end of how to encourage the two Victorian leaders to work together on this issue and asked

how could the community help to make this happen?

It could be that this is just another inquiry but Marion believes that it is a little different in that it has actually used "Drug Law Reform" in its title and presently there are 223 submissions published on the website. A large majority are calling for some sort of reform including decriminalisation, injecting rooms, pill testing, naloxone programs.

Let's hope this Inquiry leads to real change.

One cannot but echo Marion's final thought!

The British Medical Journal

Alex Wodak supplied FFDLR with the full text of an article in the BMJ about parents seeing drug laws as directly responsible for the deaths of their children. The introduction is as follows:

When Leah Betts died in 1995 after taking an ecstasy pill at her 18th birthday party, extraordinary media coverage resonated with the "just say no" mantra. Leah's parents railed against all non-medical drug use, backing new laws to prohibit drugs, circulating a photograph of their comatose daughter in hospital, and running a poster campaign with the words "Sorted: Just one ecstasy tablet took Leah Betts."

Two decades on, and ordinary families ravaged by drug deaths still attract media attention—but sometimes their messages are very different. Donna May and Anne-Marie Cockburn, for example, blame their daughters' deaths not on the illegal substances that they had taken but on the laws that did nothing to save them.

As part of the international campaign Anyone's Child, they protested outside the United Nations in New York last April, during a key meeting to discuss drug misuse worldwide,¹ and they've given hundreds of media interviews.

Anyone's Child says it aims to show the human cost of the war on drugs. It is sponsored by the pressure group the Transform Drug Policy Foundation, which wants not just to decriminalise the taking of heroin, cocaine, and cannabis but also to legalise and regulate their supply.

Access to the full text is available at this link:

<http://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j1876>

New Scientist and Ecstasy

A New Scientist article¹ entitled “Ecstasy boost's people trust” starts off by saying “Ecstasy makes you feel like everyone's your friend”. It goes on to describe an experiment in which Anthony Gaber and a team at King's College London gave 20 men MDMA and asked them to play a game of Prisoner's Dilemma whilst lying in a brain scanner.

The effect of MDMA was to make the men more cooperative with trustworthy opponents, but not with betrayers.

The scans showed increased activity in brain areas linked to social behaviour.

Another researcher, Michael Mithoefer, is investigating the use of MDMA as an aid for treating post traumatic stress disorder.

Perhaps the future holds the possibility of medical MDMA?

Remembrance Ceremony

The ACT Remembrance Ceremony will take place on Monday the 23rd of October.

If there are any family members or friends reading this newsletter who would consider sharing their experiences of loss at the ceremony please get in touch with me. I know that this can be a difficult thing to do but it makes a powerful contribution for everyone there.

Best Wishes to All

Peter Taylor (President)

1 New Scientist volume 234 issue 3121, 15th April.