



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

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug policy

FFDLR NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER, 2017

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& AGM

Thursday 23rd November

Our last FFDLR meeting for 2017 will be an end of year **BBQ followed by our Annual General Meeting** including election of office bearers and presentation of the President's and Treasurer's Annual Reports on **Thursday 23rd November** at the home of Bill and Mary Bush. It would be great to see as many of you as possible attend. The BBQ will commence at 6pm followed by the AGM at 7.30pm.

Mary and Bill will supply meat for the BBQ (or perhaps just cold meats, depending on the weather) plus bread etc but ask members to bring along a salad, dessert or drink.

Please RSVP by Monday 20th November to Bill and Mary by email: bushwil@velocitynet.com.au, or phone 6257 1786. You will be given their address when you reply.

Even if you haven't attended other meetings during the year you are most welcome. Your attendance means that you support the work of FFDLR and we appreciate that.

Looking forward to a pleasant end of year event.

Another FFDLR AGM will take place on Thursday 23 November which signifies the end of another year of activity for FFDLR. These activities will be outlined in the President's report which will be presented at the AGM. We hope many of you will come along to hear about the year's work and offer support and encouragement.

Moving Forward – pill testing and injecting rooms

It has been an exciting year in some ways. A year when drug policies have actually moved forward. The trial of pill testing which was given the go ahead by our ACT government late in September was a step in the right direction for drug law reform even if on 12th October we read in a media release put out by Harm Reduction Australia:

“On behalf of our STA-SAFE consortium partners, Harm Reduction Australia expresses its shock and extreme disappointment at the announcement that its pilot pill testing service will not proceed in Canberra next month as planned.”

It would seem that the federal government had stepped in to stop the trial – not dissimilar to what happened with the Heroin Prescription Trial in 1997.

However another quote from HRA media release:

“However, the consortium will not be deterred by this setback and will continue to work to deliver evidence based harm reduction programs in the ACT. In particular, the STA-SAFE Consortium would like to thank the ACT Government for their continued support and commitment to working with us to pilot pill testing and we look forward to delivering on this promise in coming months.”

FFDLR has been in there offering support, writing letters, visiting politicians, thanking politicians who are willing to follow evidence and making sure a family voice is heard. It is important that politicians, who, after looking at the evidence and research, speaking to families and experts, understand the need for change, are given recognition for this. Especially people like the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews who changed his mind and decided to give the SIP a green light.

The announcement of a Supervised Injecting Centre in Richmond, Victoria is another step forward for Drug Law Reform. It will be difficult for the federal government to have influence here so we expect this to happen. We just hope it is sooner rather than later.

Volunteers for FFDLR: Following the ACT Volunteering Expo on 18th September we have been most fortunate in attracting three young volunteers to help, mainly with technology. Genevieve has begun upgrading our website, Susanna is looking at our Facebook page to see if this can be revived and Shiwala will give her expertise helping with the data base and newsletter. We are indebted to these young people for their expertise and willingness to help on a voluntary basis.

We hope to meet them at the AGM later this month.

The executive of FFDLR take this opportunity to wish all our members a peaceful Christmas time and a new year full of policies that will help all families. We also thank our members for the support they have given throughout 2017.



REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY

This was held on a most glorious spring day on 23rd October. The sky was blue, the tree was in full bloom, there was no wind, parrots flitting from tree to tree, and we were treated to the best display I have seen by sea gulls flying overhead among the trees. About 100 people attended and our speakers, Jo



Smith, Meegan Fitzharris (MP) and Pastor Ken Perrin all spoke well and with understanding. Well over 200 names of those to be remembered were read out and then flowers were placed at our memorial rock.

FFDLR thanks ATODA, Karralika Programs and Catholic Care for the help with organising and catering and Alison Procter for the music.

This event continues to be of benefit to those who have lost loved ones as well as raising the need for better drug policies within our communities.

The ABS reported 32 drug induced deaths in the ACT in 2016. In part our media release stated:

Many of the people now dying have become addicted while seeking relief from chronic pain. Bill Bush observed that this change poses a complex challenge to our political leaders. Clamping down on doctor shopping will drive those who have become addicted to pain medications to source their continuing supply from the criminal black market.

Please read more of our media release on our website ffdlr.org.au

The following appeared in New Matilda on 9 November, 2017

STARVING WELFARE RECIPIENTS OFF DRUGS

By Bill Bush

You have to admit that having a go at drug users is enticing politics. What pushback could there be against introducing drug testing of welfare payments for those who are likely to use them to support their habit? The spongers! Impecunious drug users themselves are only too familiar with such negative attitudes. The Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) commissioned research that confirmed the negative stereotypes:

"The dominant personality traits of a person who injects drugs are seen to be selfishness, unreliability, dishonesty and untrustworthiness. The expectation is that as drugs are the focus of the person's life, they are selfish in all the actions they undertake and do not consider the impact of their actions on others. It is expected that they would do anything to get drugs, due to being addicted, so are unable to be trusted as they are not able to control themselves from acting on impulses."

What better therapy than a dose of honest hard work as Thomas Malthus prescribed in 1798. To Malthus, poor relief destroys the work ethic, it reduces productivity and maintains the causes of poverty. Poverty should be tackled through shame and a withdrawal of assistance from able bodied workers. Thus, the Prime Minister calls for "incentives and penalties carrots and sticks to ensure we help those who need it but don't stand by while people who could work, choose not to". Will the shock of withdrawal of benefits be enough to transform drug users into responsible citizens? Every dependent drug user I have met wants to be free of addiction and the hundreds of parents I have spoken to have expressed their desperation at the absence of drug treatment, not next month, not next week,

not tomorrow but today when their child has summoned the resolution to submit themselves to it. We don't leave accident victims writhing in agony on the road for want of hospital beds. It is said that Australia has only half the number of treatment slots that are needed. Willingness to go through with treatment predicts success; "evidence of the effectiveness of compulsory treatment is inadequate and inconclusive". Far better to focus on funding treatment slots than intensifying the shame of drug users

Shaming reinforces the very factors that probably led them to dabble with drugs in the first place. It will be the friends and families of drug users on whom the impact of the withdrawal of benefits will quickly fall. Their love steels them to endure the inevitable desperation and frustration.

What does the government hope to achieve by applying stick to drug users? Coerce them into treatment? Reduce unemployment? Improve the bottom line? Gain electoral advantage? The Prime Minister and the Minister for Social Services, Christian Porter, have openly claimed all except the last of these benefits. Those who have had to do with drug treatment and living with addiction contest those claims.

The government is of course justified in its concern about Australia's drug problem but the problem is much bigger than they think. Mr Porter has it "that unemployed people are over three times more likely to use meth/amphetamines, and 1.5 times more likely to use cannabis, when compared with employed people". He makes no mention of the unemployed who have become addicted to pharmaceutical opiates in the course of treatment of chronic pain.

An indication of the extent of this evolving problem is given by a survey of the Australian Bureau of Statistics of drug induced deaths. These have increased in recent years to the level of the 1990s with the difference that rather than heroin, "Prescription painkillers such as oxycodone, morphine and codeine were present in over 30% of deaths in 2016."

Australia is following the United States where the dependence on prescription opioids is having economy-wide effects. Princeton University research published just this year revealed that 40% of prime age men who are out of the labour force report that pain prevents them working full-time and that nearly 2/3 of them take prescription medication to relieve the pain. Here well over 1 million Australians (4.8%) misuse prescription pharmaceuticals. Eliminate their legitimate supply by cutting down on doctor shopping and they will quickly turn to the illicit black market.

Trials of heroin assisted treatment in countries like Switzerland have shown that “despite a difficult labour market situation, there was nearly a twofold increase in permanent employment whereas unemployment dropped to less than half.” If the Australian government is really concerned about reducing unemployment of drug dependent welfare recipients it will invest in treatments like these that stabilise lives.

FFDLR MEETING DATES FOR 2018

FFDL meetings for 2018 will be held on the following Thursdays in 2018. Please mark them in your diary now.

22nd February

26th April

28th June

23rd August

15th or 22nd October for Remembrance Ceremony

25th October

22nd November – Annual General Meeting.

10TH ANNUAL CO-MORBIDITY INTERAGENCY DAY

Wednesday, 29 November from 11.00am to 2.00pm in Blackfriars Rose Garden, Australian Catholic University, 127 Phillip avenue, Watson.

CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn are hosting the 10th Annual Comorbidity Interagency Day.



This is a free event and great opportunity for Alcohol Tobacco & Other Drug and Mental Health Services to network and

strengthen interagency partnerships and referrals.

Service providers are invited to host a stall to promote its service(s) It includes a free BBQ lunch.. FFDLR have registered and will host a stall to promote drug law reform. If you are able to help for some of the time on the stall please contact Bill 62571786 or Marion 61697678.

A big thank you to all those who have supported us during the year. Thank you for your emails, phone calls, tweets

THANKS A MINION



letters and donations. Please keep them up in 2018 as we continue to try and make a difference especially for those families suffering because of our crazy drug policies.