

TALK AT INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILY DRUG SUPPORT – 25/2/2018

Just a couple of weeks ago I stood by my son's grave. He would have turned 50 on that day but he died at 24 because of futile drug laws. I reflected for a short time on what might have been if drug laws and policies had been different and we'd been given the time we needed to work through his troubles.

Today we are commemorating the International Family Drug Support Day. Today Tony remembers his son and many of us here and in other places remember and reflect upon those we have lost not so much because of the drugs but because of the policies that are counter-productive to helping our family members.

Back when my son died there was no specific help for families. In fact parents were often seen as the problem. I wonder if even today that is still the case in many situations

The death of Tony's son, tragically, was the catalyst for the formation of Family Drug Support in 1997 – a much needed service for families. It continues to be so to this day but can it keep up with demand? Is it given the funding it needs to provide for families?

As a founding member of Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform which began 23 years ago I am becoming more and more frustrated and despairing with governments that continually refuse to look seriously at changing policies that obviously add to the harms of drugs.

There are now reams and reams of research and evidence and more and more people daily adding their voices to the call for drug law reform. The only thing holding it back is governments refusing to embrace that evidence, and take action.

Unfortunately until they do families will continue to bear the burden, the heavy burden with very little support compared to the size of the need. And service providers will continue to struggle to meet the need with the inadequate resources they receive and the challenge of a continually changing drug scene.

The Portugal system of decriminalisation and a shift towards a more health-centred approach to drugs as well as wider health and social policy changes is a model that our governments should seriously consider. And with the rise in heroin use once again heroin on prescription for severely dependent people should begin.

Perhaps next year as I stand by my son's grave on his birthday I will be encouraged by a government that is finally taking the steps that will truly support families - steps away from criminalisation to a truly health oriented harm reduction position.

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