



FAMILIES & FRIENDS FOR DRUG LAW REFORM

NEWSLETTER JUNE 2018

Addressing homelessness requires more than just bricks and mortar

Insecure housing is an affliction that impacts on more than the homeless. The huddle of rags and cardboard are an affront to the citizen who once took pride in the absence of rough sleepers that were a shameful feature of unhappier lands. They give our society a bad name. They are a bother to the local government and the cops instructed to move them along - but where to.

If you are homeless the chances are that that won't be your only disability. You will have been harried from pillar to post. You'll have graduated to the street from a lifetime of rejection - probably kicked out of home and school, outstayed the fickle hospitality of the couches of mates, sacked from jobs, never managing even an interview from the endless string of jobs that Centrelink requires you to apply for. You beg to supplement welfare and may be tempted to flog drugs to your peers. You are highly likely to

be robbed, assaulted and exhausted of hope, let down by everyone including yourself.

If you didn't begin with paranoia or some other mental health condition, after sleeping rough you're more than likely to end up with one. Substance dependence on an illicit drug will generally dog you on the same path or provide you some relief on your journey to the street.

Without hope, the street is preferable to the cheerless shelter of charity with its paralysing reminders that you have always let yourself and others down and are perpetually doomed to continue to do so.

How to move someone from that black place? Those who believe in the efficacy of therapy administered in the form of a targeted kick are fundamentally optimistic about the capacity of people to get off their backsides and do something for themselves. That optimism underpins the wish of the Federal government to subject welfare recipients to drug testing.

SUPPORT DON'T PUNISH FORUM

MELB TOWN HALL

26TH JUNE, 6PM—8PM

More info here

https://www.drugpolicy.org.au/support_don_t_punish_melbourne

Alas, that mindset ignores the dynamics that landed the human beings into their dependent situation and can be guaranteed to merely aggravate it. We should not have policies that undermine the capacity of people to assume responsibility for their own lives and that of their dependents.

The careful nurturing of relationships, which will work wonders for some, is a precondition for a rebalanced, reconnected life. That it works is shown by the Early Morning Centre in Can-

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Next FFDLR meeting

- **Thursday 28 June, 7.30pm**
- St Ninian's Uniting Church Hall, cnr Brigalow and Mouat Sts, Lyneham
- **In conversation with Bernadette Bryant, a more recent member of FFDLR, who has wrestled with the system to gain access to medicinal cannabis for a family member. Come and join in the conversation.** Enquiries to 62571786 or 61697678

An evening with Manuel Cardoso

Were you able to attend the evening with Manuel Cardoso on 5 June? It was an inspiring event held at the historic St Stephens Uniting Church in Macquarie St, Sydney. Even though it was a cold, wet Sydney night over seven hundred people filled the pews in the church to hear Manuel Cardoso, the man who helped reform Portugal's drug policy.

It was inspiring because so many people were willing to come and hear about a more humane drug policy that treated people dependent on drugs as people needing assistance rather than requiring punishment.

The event was jointly organised by Unharm and Uniting. Will Tregoning from Unharm directed the event. Other speakers were Geoff Gallop, former premier of WA and Dr Marianne Jauncey, Medical Director at the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre.

The model that Portugal has adopted is one of dissuasion. Someone who is discovered by police to be in possession or using illegal drugs, instead of ending up in court or jail, is directed to a Commission where their drug use is assessed in the context of their whole life. Treatment or support is offered according to

drug users characteristics and individual needs. The different services with responsibilities in the area of drugs work together to achieve the best outcomes for each individual. Social re-integration is seen as important and the drug users are actively supported in gaining employment. There are 18 commissions throughout the country.

The outcomes of this approach have shown reduction in overdose deaths—from 350 per annum to 27, and 60% reported that contact had contributed to a change in their lifestyle. They pay more attention to health, drugs no longer have an important role in their life and they spend more time with family and friends.

More on this event can be viewed on FFDLR's website: <http://www.ffdlr.org.au/2018/06/07/an-evening-with-manuel-cardoso-the-man-who-helped-reform-portugals-drug-policy/> The video of the event is available here.

Hearty congratulations to all those involved in organising the event.

We look forward to further initiatives from Uniting on drug law reform .



FFDLR Membership Fees

Thank you to all who have paid their 2018/2019 membership fees. Your membership is very important to us and enables us to continue the work to bring better drug policies that help families by not making life more difficult.

Bill Bush has been busy preparing a submission request from the Senate's Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee re The Criminal Code and Other Legislation Amendment (Removing Commonwealth Restrictions on Cannabis) Bill 2018

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berra City and supported accommodation like Common Ground but so too do strategies that address the most insistent and destabilising factors like substance dependency and other mental health conditions.

Processing of dependent drug users as criminals accentuates their isolation from which their mental health problems will have sprung and disconnects them from family and other support. Indeed our prison has become not only a modern day mental health institution but also a crisis accommodation facility with an inmates' survey showing about 40% had no stable accommodation prior to incarceration. I believe that includes some 40 who would otherwise be entitled to bail had they been able to give a permanent address. Effectively, homelessness is now a crime.

There are strong reasons to believe that better drug policy would ameliorate homelessness and mental health conditions afflicting the most marginalised. As The Canberra Times reports (March 8, pp. 1-2) there is an urgent need for more affordable housing and supported accommodation in which context judicious policy adjustment should be considered. With better drug policies that do not impede people from taking responsibility for their own lives, somewhat less will need to be invested in public housing and a lot less in costly support services.

Celebrating Volunteers' Week

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform, along with other not-for-profit organizations, was invited by Andrew Leigh MP to attend a barbeque to celebrate Volunteer Week on 25 May. This was to celebrate the work contributed by volunteers to the community. At this event, Genevieve Hudson, one of our volunteers, received a certificate of appreciation for her contribution to FFDLR.



Genevieve with Andrew Leigh MP

Up date on Pill Testing

Following on from our April Newsletter it is very pleasing to be able to report that the first trial of pill testing at musical festivals in Australia did go ahead in Canberra at the Groovin the Moo Festival on Sunday 29th April. FFDLR congratulates all those involved. It is a great step forward in saving our kids.

It was reported that a dangerous substance linked to mass overdose overseas was uncovered. Dr David Caldicott, a member of the consortium carrying out the testing said that while many of the pills tested were "duds", many were potentially quite harmful.

ACT Health Minister, Meegan Fitzharris said the trial was a success and Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury praised it as a milestone for Australian drug law reform. The ACT Chief Health Officer, Dr Paul Kelly and the Police Commissioner, Justine Saunders both showed their approval. However the opposition legal affairs spokesman, Jeremy Hanson remained against the trial.

Unfortunately other states don't appear to be following the ACT. NSW Police Minister, Troy Grant said he was "a thousand percent against pill testing" and the Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews said his current stance on pill testing would not be reconsidered.

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Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform began in March 1995 following the death by overdose of eight young people in Canberra. At the request of one father, Michael Moore, then Independent Member of the ACT Legislative Assembly, called a meeting to include families who had been affected. Forty people attended this first meeting which was the beginning of Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform. All in attendance believed that the drug laws were more the problem than the solution and called for change. They wanted laws and policies that caused less harm. They wanted addiction to be treated as a health and social issue not a law enforcement one. They believed that the huge profits made by the illegal trade made drugs more available to their kids. Their efforts continue today. If not already please consider becoming a member via the website ffdlr.org.au.

Drug services forum

ATODA ran a very informative forum on 1st May focussed on the Adult Drug and Alcohol Court. Members from ACT drug services were in attendance as well as Meegan Fitzharris, Minister for Health and Wellbeing and Mr Gordon Ramsay, Attorney General.

This was a time for the AOD sector to put questions to the Ministers relating to their concerns about the proposed drug and alcohol court.

Participants were concerned with the impact the DAC would have on present services and that there had not been sufficient consultation with NGOs of the AOD services. Concerns included the impact that priority for criminal justice referrals would have on their voluntary clients. Ability to maintain clinical integrity was another concern. This would occur if services are forced to focus on the needs of the justice system rather than on the treatment needs of the clients.

Ms Fitzharris assured those in attendance that the DAC would have no impact on present services and that the evaluation and implementation group would be reconvened.

Sniffer dogs in schools

It is very disappointing to read that the Premier of South Australia, Steven Marshall has affirmed a campaign pledge to send drug dogs into South Australian schools. It has been known for many years that sniffer dogs in schools is counterproductive. A study conducted by the Jesuit Social Services back in 2005 was clear. It says about zero tolerance in schools:

Rather than acting as a deterrent to other students, it served to alienate students from the school community and drive the problem of drug use underground.

Schools that were more understanding of the causes of drug use and were prepared to work through these issues with their students, created a more caring and supportive learning environment.

In these cases, the school's teaching staff were better equipped to identify and help those students 'at risk' of drug misuse.

Keeping them connected outlines a number of strategies aimed at reducing illicit drug use, while keeping young people within the school system.

Education and Therapy Groups

The Alcohol and Drug Service (ADS) regularly runs support, therapy and education groups for people who are having difficulty with alcohol and other drugs, people seeking support in preventing relapse, and for friends and family members. These are held at the ACT Health Building, Level 1, 1 Moore St Civic.

Groups available include:

Controlling your cannabis use

Controlling your drinking

Controlling your ice use

Mindfulness, meditation and Stress Management course

If interested phone the Alcohol and Drug Service on 6207 9977.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE AND FOLLOW US ON TWITTER @FFDLR