

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug policy

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MEDIA RELEASE

The ring fence is giving way: 24 years of remembrance; lifetimes of grief

This Monday lunchtime many will gather at a memorial in Weston Park to honour the memory of a loved family member or friend who died as collateral damage in our efforts to save them and society from drugs.

"For 24 years, Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform has challenged the politics and the fear that has blocked changes that could save lives, reduce harm and cost society less but until now the call has been ignored" noted Bill Bush, the group's president.

We gather in Weston Park under the spring shoots of a tree in a season of new politics of hope to hear from a mother, Adriana Buccianti, who lost her son at a music festival in Victoria.

"Across the border in New South Wales, by a strategic leak of a draft, an attempt is apparently being made to derail the findings of the deputy NSW coroner into six festival deaths," said Bill Bush.

In contrast, here, thanks to pill testing and other health strategies endorsed by the ACT government, no deaths have occurred.

"This year the gathering will also take place against the backdrop of a recognition by the Legislative Assembly that criminal law enforcement has no legitimate place in tackling personal cannabis possession and use."

Bill Bush welcomed the dawning of realisation here and overseas that law enforcement against drug users intensifies the very harms it seeks to avoid. "Indeed," he stressed, "the application of the criminal law to address health problems associated with certain drugs has been the most destructive social policy over the past century." It:

- destroys social capital and compassion;
- intensifies mental health problems of people who sought relief from the pains of their existence;
- drives disadvantage and alienation, creating the risk factors that shovel people into prison;
- wrecks the lives of those seeking relief from chronic pain;
- fractures family bonds, pushing people to the margins away from support and help;
- sets off a spiral of generational disadvantage linked to child abuse and neglect and school dropout.

Mr Bush explained that our hope is that out of the grief of personal suffering, the ceremony will resurrect good sense along with compassion, respect, and community."

Uniting's Fair Treatment campaign gets all this: "Wouldn't that be a nice world to live in!" affirms their film, *Half a Million Steps*, showing at Palace Electric Cinema the day after the ceremony.

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