

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug policy

25th Annual Remembrance Ceremony at Weston Park

Two young lives, lost to drugs, to be remembered

Two young lives which were tragically taken by failed drug policies and support services will be the focus of attention at the 25th Annual Remembrance Ceremony by Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform.

Speakers will be the mother of 19 year old Alexandra Ross-King, who was among the five young people to die at music festivals in New South Wales in 2019 and two friends of Matthew Lloyd. Selfless, gregarious Matthew died earlier this year in Canberra from an overdose of multiple drugs including Xanax to which he was drawn to cope with his anxieties.

Alexandra's mother, Jennie Ross-King, is coming from the NSW Central Coast to speak of her daughter. Her attendance will be leavened with the bitterness of knowing that the pill testing that the ACT government now permits - and which may well have saved her daughter's life - has been rejected by the New South Wales government.

Matthew Lloyd, a music lover, illustrator, video editor and comedian died following a long struggle to find quality mental health care. The Canberra Institute of Technology student, originally from Berry, will be remembered by mates Julian Juhas and Oscar Wilson. They will speak of his warmth and talent and touch on his struggles with a system that let him down at every turn.

For a quarter of a century now, Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform has been holding a remembrance ceremony at a memorial rock in Weston Park in honour of those, mostly young people, who have been lost in our efforts to save them from drugs. The Liberal Chief Minister, Kate Carnell and Anglican Bishop Randerson dedicated the memorial on 16 December 1996.

In each of those years a parent, a sibling or a friend has spoken of their eternal loss and pain that bears witness to the bone headedness of our political leaders whose efforts to save these young lives has led to their death. Boneheaded because there is only half the number of treatment places available that are needed and because other countries are showing how these deaths can be avoided by meeting health and social needs rather than loading the people with stigma – something that we would never dream of doing for any other life-threatening condition.

The heart of these ceremonies is to honour publicly in the midst of Canberra's beauty all the lives lost from our efforts to save them from drugs.

This year Rev Simon Hansford, the Moderator of the New South Wales and ACT Synod of the Uniting Church will read the names of those whose family or friends have asked to be remembered.

The Synod was the first church in the world to call for lifting the stigma of the criminal law from people who use drugs. The church and its welfare arm, Uniting, are leading [the Fair Treatment campaign](#) for accessible, effective and non-stigmatising health care.

WHERE: Memorial, east side of Weston Park Road (Opp Pescott Lane), Weston Park, Yarralumla

WHEN: Monday, 26 October at 12.30-1.30pm

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