

Submission No: 43

Supp to Sub:

AUTHORISED:

9/5/07

RS

Submission to

The Inquiry into the Impact of Illicit Drug Use

On Families.

Submitted by

Patricia and William Ryan

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF ILLICIT DRUG USE ON FAMILIES

From Patricia & William Ryan

Summary:

- An abbreviated story of our family's experience, incorporating our personal and financial costs and the impact of mental illness and social alienation
- The help we received through harm minimisation programs
- Ways to help families who are coping with member(s) using illicit drugs

Introduction:

We are thankful that the Government has initiated this inquiry, as from personal experience we are aware that the impact on families of illicit drug use is huge and devastating.

Terms of Reference 1: *"The financial, social and personal cost to families who have a member(s) using illicit drugs, including the impact of drug induced psychoses or other mental disorders."*

Our son, an intelligent and sensitive boy attending a Selective High School, became involved in drugs through peer pressure and the desire to experiment. It seemed that our world fell apart – disbelief, anger, unfounded guilt and desperation. The whole family was impacted and pulled in different directions. We were ashamed to tell people and couldn't understand why it had happened to us. The only support we found was through the group Family Drug Support where we met other parents fighting the same awful battle. As our son's condition worsened, he slipped into mental illness, eventually schizophrenia. FDS made us aware of the Mental Health System. It still took a long time to be "really heard" but eventually action by the Police saw him taken to a Mental Hospital for assessment.

This of course, was not the end, our son still used heroin to "stop the voices". It was a long battle, hospital, court and family chaos, constant financial drain and a huge personal cost to our peace of mind, emotional and even physical health. Frequently he would cause damage to our property and there were a regular number of fines etc to be paid. This obviously placed strain on the family's relations as there was a constant fear of what damage or injury would occur next.

Twice he detoxed painfully but returned to drug use as an escape from his illness. Eventually a Doctor recommended that he be placed on a Methadone program. For our son it saved his life, gradually he regained a kind of balance to his life, became compliant with his medication and could see hope. He was on Methadone (not a free program) for about six years, as well as requiring ongoing psychiatric help (which he still requires).

Until he was more conscious of his responsibilities to the family unit, the methadone program caused additional costs to the family as it was not provided at a local level. Daily transport to the clinic and return needed to be arranged and in the first two to three years the daily cost of the methadone was met by the family. Over time he gradually reduced his dosage and by mid 2006 he finally was able to stop the program.

Terms of Reference 2: "The impact of harm minimisation programs on families"

Our son is a lovely person and without the help we eventually found (which was not easy) and our standing by him, he could well have been dead 10 years ago. This help consisted of:

- FDS – this group supported and guided us
- Mental Health Team – did not discard him because his mental illness was connected to drug use
- The Methadone Program – this **SAVED** his life

This support plus his family sticking by him through emotionally, psychically and financially terrible times, gave him the time needed to recover.

Terms of Reference 3: "Ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member(s) using illicit drugs"

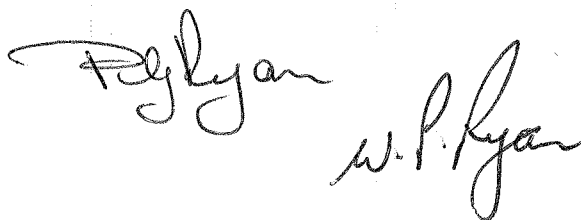
Families affected by illicit drug use, desperately need more understanding from the wider community, from Politicians, GP's, some members of the clergy and the public in general.

Those whose lives have not been touched by the pain of illicit drug use and its consequences have no understanding and are harsh in their judgement and condemnation. We need programs to educate the community to the impact on families and society of addicts who are not getting help. We realize that abstinence is the goal, we beg that others will realize that it is not an easy thing to achieve for some addicted people.

- Support Groups like Family Drug Support are vital
- Programs like Methadone and the more recent Smart Recovery Program for amphetamine users need to be maintained and others set up; with access to be made easier for those in need.

People need help; many many want to recover but it is a long hard struggle and impossible if alone, alienated and even living on the streets. As with cancer treatments, and other physical illnesses, the treatment for drug abuse can be long and difficult.

YES, educate the young, tell them of all the dangers, pray that they will take note and say "no", but for God's sake (we use His name with respect as believers) don't condemn those who fail and make them the lepers of our society.



The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'P. Ryan' and the signature on the right is 'W.P. Ryan'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.