# The Impact of Illicit Drug Use on Families

## 1. The financial, social and personal cost to families who have a member using illicit drugs, including the impact of drug-induced psychosis or other mental disorders

- The cost to families is enormous, financially they have often been impacted by theft as the user attempts to fund his or her habit. Consequentially families are often left with large amounts of debt as they struggle to repay, medical, legal and other outstanding debts accumulated by the user.

- Socially they feel the effects of an issue that can be interpreted as "Modern day lepers". Addiction in our society is a subject that is often swept under the carpet. Families of users often feel isolated and left wondering what part they played in the cause behind the initial use.

- Relationally the addictive cycle leads to a breakdown in trust and communication between family members, as the habit intensifies we see drug induced psychosis come into play. Family members are not trained or aware of how to deal with the erratic and often violent nature that stems from a drug induced psychosis. Family life moves from incredible highs to incredible lows, with threats of violence and self harm in between.

## 2. The impact of harm minimisation programs on families

- We deal with hundreds of families every year and I'm yet to hear a parent or wife, brother or sister want anything but a complete 180 degree turn around from the destructive behaviour.

- Harm Minimisation does not deal with the issue but only medicates a symptom.

- We believe that if we can address the issue and tackle the problem at the original cause, things such as: Family breakdown, abandonment, self esteem / image and teaching the skills necessary to deal with disappointment and move on in life, we stand a real chance of seeing a positive future for the young person, rather than a future of monitored substance abuse.

## 3. Ways to strengthen families who are coping with a member using illicit drugs.

- The first step must definitely be a campaign to create a positive environment for families to admit they have a family member that needs support. Years ago in this nation depression was never openly spoken of, especially amongst men. Due to the hard work of organisations like "Beyond Blue" and others, along with high profile people and government support, we now see people more confident to admit they have a need in this area.

- We need to lose the tag of "Modern day lepers". Instead let's start to promote the courage that it takes to admit you have a life controlling problem and you need help. Often our centres are full of people who have hit rock bottom as there was no encouragement to seek earlier intervention in the drug use. They feel trapped by a combination of their life controlling issues and modern societies' view of "you yourself into it, now get yourself out of it".

- Over the years we have noticed that often it is not only the young person who requires counselling, support and breakthrough, but also the family.

- The first step is carefully guided reconciliation between the user and family members. Often substance abuse can be generational. If you can find the family member who is prepared to break with generational tradition and decide to turn it all around then not only have you affected that person's life, but also set up the future generations for success.

- More Rehabs or Training centres need to be encouraging family members to play an active role in the persons retraining or rehabilitation. This is often a process which is overlooked due not to ignorance, but more a lack of staff to carry out the function.

- With regard to single mothers who have small children, we need more centres prepared to run programs and build purpose-built facilities that cater for embracing the opportunity to care for both mother and child without the trauma of separation. As the mother seeks help from her substance abuse issues they also receive instruction in the keys to being a good parent. This is all conducted in an environment of professional and caring support.