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- **A new service for families**
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Family Drug Help

Announcing a new service for families

On Thursday, August 9th 2000, the Premier of Victoria, the Hon. Steve Bracks and the Minister for Health, Mr. John Thwaites, officially announced the formation of a new and innovative service specifically designed to address the needs of parents, family members and significant others where someone in the family has a drug problem - *Family Drug Help*.

A key feature of the service will be the leading role and responsibility taken by the very people directly affected - the family members themselves. Drug treatment agencies and individuals with professional backgrounds in the field of alcohol and other drugs will also form a vital part of the service delivery, supporting and complementing the initiatives of the people with direct first-hand experience of the issue. Family Drug help will have

three main components.

The first is the establishment of a network of parent and family drug self-help groups right across Victoria. This will include offering assistance to existing groups and helping family members to start new ones. Local drug treatment services and other agencies will be encouraged to provide assistance and support.

The second is the establishment of 24-hour telephone line catering specifically for parents and family members of the person using drugs – the *Family Drug Helpline*. This will be operated by a combination of trained volunteer counsellors with direct experience of the issue and a team of professional

counsellors specifically trained in working with families.

The third aspect of the service will be a statewide Service & Resource Centre located at SHARC, 1242 Glenhuntly Road, Glenhuntly providing both a drop-in service for family members and a point of contact for information.

Three organisations are collaborating in setting up Family Drug Help: *Parents for Drug Information and Support*, *The Self Help Addiction Resource Centre - SHARC* and *Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre* which also manages the telephone counselling, information and referral service "Direct Line." Family Drug Help will formally commence operation early in 2001.



A mother's story - How I came to be involved in Family Drug Help

Parents for Drug Information and Support is a parent and family drug support group and is one of the three organisations implementing the new statewide service, Family Drug Help. Our group has been operating in the City of Yarra since June, 1998. At the time that I started it, I remember people saying how easily self-help groups can fizzle out and wondering if that would be our fate. Certainly, the

numbers were small for a few months – 6 to 8 people at most, but it just kept on going and in September, 2000, over two years later, nearly one hundred people were present at one monthly meeting.

I started the group eighteen months after my own gorgeous and much loved daughter died from a heroin overdose in May, 1996 at the age of 24, and in her

final year of an Arts degree in psychology and sociology. I and other family members and friends had felt for ourselves the anguish and helplessness of having no where to turn, for either information about drugs or for support, despite my constant efforts. This was new territory for us all at the time. Heroin had not been part of my generation's education even though I had been a secondary teacher.

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I was not even aware then that it was becoming a pressing social problem. I had never even met a parent whose child was dependent on heroin until after my daughter's death and then it was other parents such as myself who had also lost their own child. It was then that I began to realise the extent of this problem, just how big, yet invisible, this issue of heroin use really was.

I started my own learning on the subject of heroin, I had to try to make sense of what had happened to my girl. I even completed post-graduate study in the field of health and addiction. But this was not enough. I developed a passionate desire to help other parents who were in the same position as I had been in, feeling alone, scared and struggling to handle the one situation I had never anticipated – loving and wanting to help a child who had become dependent on heroin. I felt that if parents had someone to talk to, someone who understood, who had been in that position or was in it now, then this could provide emotional relief and take off some of the pressure. This in turn may reduce the stress in their relationship with their child, improve communication and have a possible beneficial effect all round for the family.

Around the time that I decided

to go ahead with my project, I was lucky enough to become involved with the Yarra Drug and Health Forum – a local

Faine and ABD Radio for giving me the airtime to promote the event and to talk about a mother's perspective.



Parents for Drug Information and Support went into a second phase after that forum, when the parents and family members attending told us they were sick of one-off forums, wanting more regular and ongoing information about drugs and how to cope. Thus, our fully-fledged program of information and support began in

early 1999. After consultation with group members, our monthly meetings from then on featured a guest speaker from the health professions or allied professions, addressing the group on any and all issues related to drugs, with emphasis on heroin. The program is noted for its informality, the interactive nature of the talks and the generosity and enthusiasm of the speakers. In the second half of the evening we divide into smaller groups, giving parents the chance to speak to each other more intimately about their own situation, if they wish. These small groups are facilitated by parents from the wider group who have completed a Training Program in small group facilitation, which was jointly conducted by Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre and myself. Our parents display the same generosity and enthusiasm for helping as do the guest speakers.

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Here are some of the speakers and issues family members have found helpful and informative:

- Dr. David Jacka: *"The nature of dependency on a drug such as heroin"*
- Dr. David Jacka: *"Drug withdrawal – all the questions you would like to ask"*
- Dr. Adrian Dunlop and Dr. Alison Ritter, Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre: *"New approaches to treatment for heroin dependency"*
- Pauline Spencer, Fitzroy Legal Service: *"Drugs and the Law"*
- Chris Hardy, Nurse at the NYCHC: *"The DROP program – risk factors for heroin overdose and how to recognise them"*
- Ross Mortimer, Eltham Community Health Centre: *"Coping strategies when there is drug use in the family"*
- Gordon Storey, SHARC: *"A Self-Help Community Residential Setting for people wishing to learn how to live drug free - and be happy about it"*
- Liz Hiskey, Senior Social Worker, Centrelink: *"Centrelink programs for young people, with special reference to drug dependency"*
- Professor David Penington, former Vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine: *"The history of Australian drug policy and a comparison with the USA and Europe"*
- Greg Denham, Director of Drug Training Programs, Victoria Police: *"The drug policies and procedures of Victoria Police"*
- Helen Barnacle, psychologist, writer, former heroin user and prisoner: *"My journey through heroin dependency to today"*
- Tony Trimmingham, founder of Family Drug Support in NSW and parent of Damien, who died from a heroin overdose: *"The value of family support around drugs"*

The program is noted for its informality, the interactive nature of the talks and the generosity and enthusiasm of the speakers

Some comments from group members

"The first big thing was the realisation that I was not alone. That was a tremendous release. That was really important. Other people were in a similar or worse situation to me and were actually surviving. After I had been a couple of times, I found the information I gained was invaluable in helping me approach the problem from my own point of view. The group provides a place, a place with people, for discussions and sharing of problems. In between times, when I think of where to turn or who to talk to, I know that it is there, they are

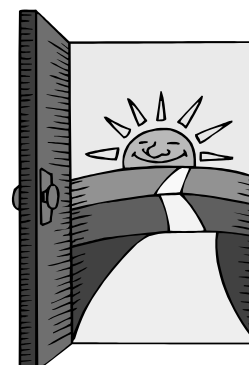
there, waiting for me. There is now somewhere to go."

Rosie, a parent.

"For me, the support of the other members of the group is the most important thing, knowing that you are not alone. The education and information we get from the speakers helps me to know

what I am dealing with. Before coming to the group, I and others felt so ignorant about heroin and the whole issue. You cannot help your child or yourself if you don't even understand about heroin and what it means to be dependent on it".

Kathy Crow, a parent.



“The first big thing was the realisation that I was not alone. That was a tremendous release”

Our program was given a small amount of funding for the year 1999-2000 by the City of Yarra, under the Community Grants Program. Without the support of Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre in the administration of our service, I am not sure we could have continued.

We are now so grateful to the State Government for recognising the need across the whole State for family information and support of this type, especially in rural areas. Family Drug Help hopes to both support any groups which now exist and to help in the starting

of new ones where you need them, possibly along the lines of Parents for Drug Information and Support, a formula which we have shown to be of help.

Brenda Irwin
Family Drug Help

Families and all that ride with them

As I sit at work thinking about my VCE student son, my 14 year old daughter, my step children and other extended family members, I am struck by how complex family forms, family responsibilities, family likes and dislikes can be and just how complicated it is to fathom families!

Historically, the drug and alcohol field has been thought of as specialist treatment services. Although now we recognise the importance of prevention and the role of families at every point in the life span, it is at the treatment end of the spectrum that many families now appear and often come to grief. Drug treatment services have historically been poor at responding to the family members of those with direct drug and alcohol issues or dependents. Parents often used to be seen as part of the cause or central in the development of problematic drug using. While it is true that children of those with a history of dysfunctional and harmful use of alcohol and drugs as well as histories involving neglect, abuse and gross social disadvantage are at higher

risk than others of developing drug and alcohol difficulties, it is also clearly true that drug use also occurs in the most caring of families. Families are one of the more important supports for drug users. They can provide a tenacious healing system and - for many - the essential ingredients to help, recovery and re-integration.

It's just not drug users who are harmed by drug use. Family members in both direct and indirect ways are also troubled, disadvantaged and harmed by the drug use of another family member. Children may steal from their parents in order to get access to funds for their drug habit. Some drug users may lie, cheat and manipulate families who aren't respond for fear of increasing difficulty

and making the harm already experienced even worse. These are the more obvious harms. Less evident is the division, the social isolation and shame that so often accompanies drug use in a family member. Not only parents but siblings experience this. It has long been known and recognised that brothers and sisters of active drug users are less likely to have a circle of friends and also disinclined to share their experience of the problem within their own family. Families are thus doubly and triply disadvantaged and damaged by drug use.

Families still care. Most families, even in most extreme situations of exploitation and distress, remain committed to the care of their children and other family members. The contradictions and conflict caused by the mix of experience of behaviour which is clearly unacceptable in parallel with feelings of guilt, hurt and pain, at the same time continuing to love and remain committed to one's children, must be most difficult to sustain. Families need us to recognise these complex feelings and diverse experience.

Family Drug help hopes to both support any groups which now exist and to help in the starting of new ones, where you need them...



Family Drug Help - provides us with an opportunity to develop a family response service where self help groups and those with personal experience can work in a partnership with service providers...

Many, many studies have shown that one of the most significant predictors of treatment success is the extent to which a drug user has a strong supportive social network during and following drug treatment. Notwithstanding this, we often find drug treatment services reluctant or perhaps unable to incorporate families in the treatment of those with significant drug and alcohol problems. This may be due to funding, historic beliefs or practices, a lack of confidence in skill in responding to families or due to agency crises in trying to respond to ever increasing numbers requiring services. There are certainly issues about confidentiality and the individual clients rights to be treated independently of family; but I do sometimes wonder whether we try hard enough to “think family”, “consider family” and “try to include family”. Many of our services are trying to develop this aspect of their work. The absence of comprehensive family responsive drug treatment services in the past in parallel with an increase in the numbers of families affected by drugs has led to the development of family specific self help groups. Perhaps the sharing of stories and experience as well as the sharing of possible responses is one of the most potent contributions of self help. The opportunity to identify one-self in another’s experience can be most meaningful. To watch this process occurring is moving. I have been privileged to see parents attend a first meeting of a small parent’s group and recognise the relief in hearing and seeing others with similar experience. For

some, however, this is more difficult. Families from diverse



responses even when their drug using member is disinterested in treatment.

I look forward to the challenge of working with the Parents for Drug Information Support Group and SHARC in developing and evolving a service which endeavours to respond to Victorian families who are hurting as a result of drug use

by someone that they care about.

backgrounds may not necessarily find a thread of similarity. For other families, there are quite specific problems which are difficult to manage among a group of volunteers who care and have concern but perhaps not the professional knowledge and skills to help with interventions.

by someone that they care about.

Margaret Hamilton
Executive Director,
Turning Point Alcohol and
Drug Centre

...I do sometimes wonder whether we try hard enough to “think family” “consider family” and “try to include family.”

We are most fortunate here in Victoria that the Government has now recognised the gap in our response services to drug users - the need to think families and to respond to and with families. The funding of this new service - Family Drug Help - provides us with an opportunity to develop a family response service where self help groups and those with personal experience can work in a partnership with service providers who have knowledge and information about drugs and drug treatment.

It is important to identify how families can assist in specialist treatment provision. It is also important to acknowledge the need for families to receive support and



In profile - Family Drug Help

Family Drug Help is essentially a service for families run by families. We intend to provide opportunities for emotional and practical support, for information and education, for social and friendship activities and to help improve drug treatment services. Ultimately we seek to strengthen our ability to deal with problems and help our family members who use drugs in a problematic way.

Family Drug Help will operate on five levels:

- The individuals who attend the support groups, read the our information materials, contact the *Family Drug Helpline* and access our services
- The Group Coordinators who are trained volunteers (those who have direct experience of the problem) who facilitate and run the support groups
- Professional Advisors who are volunteer drug treatment,

health and welfare professionals who advise and support the Group Coordinators

- The Family Drug Help Steering Committee, which will formulate our policies, programs and services.
- The statewide Service and Resource Centre (SRC) which will employ a number of paid staff and volunteer staff to coordinate and provide our services

The information below describes the activities on each level.

The principles upon which we operate are:

- Families who require support and information are the reason Family Drug Help exists. Their needs, their experiences and their ongoing learning must drive the development and delivery of services
- We are dedicated to empowering family members through mutual support.
- We are dedicated to empowering family members to gain access to the latest information on drugs and available services, in the understanding that such learning in itself helps families to cope and support their drug-using family member.
- We are dedicated to empowering family members through ongoing skill development and advocacy.
- The concept of self-help is at the centre. People gain strength by receiving support from others in a similar position and by returning that support to others.
- Our focus in helping is personal and individual, non-directive, non-authoritarian and non-judgmental. We acknowledge the range of cultural, social and individual differences in families and the need for each family to adjust and cope in the way that is best for them, with the benefit of mutual support and accurate information.
- Help is freely given and free of charge
- The service operates with a framework of harm minimisation, supporting treatments and care and other interventions which aim to minimise risk to life and health both for the person using drugs and their family members.
- Networking is key. Family Drug Help will work closely to establish cooperative links with professional human service providers and other stakeholders who can build and strengthen our support, network and information systems.

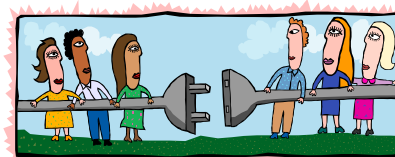
No one knows the help, support and information needs better than the family members themselves...

Individual Inquiries

Individuals interested in seeking information about *Family Drug Help* will be able to contact the *Family Drug Helpline*, the statewide Service & Resource Centre (by mail, phone, fax or email), the public homepage on the Internet in order to get local contact information, or by contacting a local group directly. The next step for interested individuals is to attend a

group meeting, read our information materials, or speak to a family volunteer or professional counsellor on the Helpline. If the interested individual lives in an area where we do not have a group, information and assistance on how to start a group (including help in finding a location, arranging publicity, building links with local health and welfare

professionals, recruiting a Professional Advisor, learning group facilitation, etc.) can be provided.



We especially aim to foster links and work collaboratively with all existing services, to increase opportunities for families to understand and support drug treatment and for agencies to develop increased awareness of the needs of families and the relevance of involving them

Group Coordinators

The volunteer efforts of the Group Coordinators is the essential bedrock of the *Family Drug Help* services. The Group Coordinators are individuals who believe in the principles upon which the service is based and who desire to help by volunteering their time to organise and facilitate the support groups. People who have lived through the experience and have gained experiential expertise in dealing with familial drug problems will be encouraged to consider becoming Group Coordinators and will be trained for the job. Within a given group there may be other office bearers for example, local information and publicity officer, group treasurer, group secretary and so on.

The primary purpose of the group is to provide a safe, non judgmental setting, offer empathic helpful relationships, instill hope and impart information through outside speakers and through the sharing of experiences by group members and provide opportunities to learn new ways to cope. In addition to facilitating the meetings, Group Coordinators (with the assistance of other office bearers in the group) will organise speakers, access and disseminate relevant information, publicise the meetings, recruit professional advisors and establish links with appropriate service providers in their locality. Through the Coordinator, the group will also maintain a channel of communication with the Service & Resource Centre of *Family Drug Help*.

Professional Advisors

The volunteer Professional Advisors (in most cases drug treat-

ment service providers with special expertise in drug related family issues) will support Group Coordinators by providing advice, training, supervision and practical help on organising and facilitating group meetings. Training and supervision



may be accomplished by brief contact as needed, as well as by regular meetings between the Advisor and one or more Coordinators in a given locality. It is envisioned that the Professional Advisor and other collaborating health professionals will also be available in the event of a crisis experienced by a group participant and help with appropriate referrals. Professional Advisors in local agencies may also have the capacity to offer additional practical help.

We see the substantial involvement of professional service providers with families affected by drugs at both, local and state levels as beneficial in two important ways. First, it will provide ongoing education and information for families to inform themselves about the nature, scope and availability of drug treatment services and second, it will pioneer new ways for families to become meaningfully involved in helping improve drug treatment services.

Steering Committee

The *Family Drug Help* management approach will be underpinned by encouraging and promoting group member involvement on the highest possible level, resulting in a self-run, self-organised service.

The role of the volunteer Steering Committee will be to:

- provide leadership and direction
- provide conceptual input in the development of policies, programs and services and approval of the action plans
- approve the budget and oversee the appropriate allocation of resources
- ensure that members are kept informed and involved in the activities of *Family Drug Help*
- represent *Family Drug Help* at appropriate functions and meetings
- establish and maintain the image *Family Drug Help* wishes to project.

The Steering Committee will have nine members. Six positions will be allocated to people with personal experiences and knowledge of the issues as a family member and three co-opted positions to complement the skills and expertise of the other members. Each of the collaborating partner agencies (Parents for Drug Information and Support, Turning Point & SHARC) can nominate a candidate into one of the three co-opted positions. The auspicing agency is SHARC who will be responsible for the financial administration.

...pioneer new ways for families to become meaningfully involved in helping improve drug treatment services

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Service and Resource Centre (SRC)

The statewide SRC is the activity centre of the service and incorporates the *Family Drug Helpline*, information services and administrative assistance. The SRC will employ paid staff and volunteer staff. As the name suggests, the Centre is a resource for help and information. Its principal functions will be to support the groups with their ongoing information and educational needs, to provide technical assistance, for example, helping new groups get established, assist in setting up programs, applying for funding and linking people to other helpful services. The SRC will also help groups get to the next level – of not only providing support for each other but helping to improve the quality of drug treatment services. On a statewide level the SRC will identify issues of concern and areas of unmet need and get involved in high level advocacy. Specific services of the SRC will include:

Family Drug Helpline

This 24-hour telephone service is solely dedicated to families of drug users across Victoria and in collaboration with Turning Point will incorporate direct access to DIRECT LINE, the largest single database of specialist drug services in the State. The Helpline will be operated by a combination of trained volunteer counsellors who have had direct experience of the issues and a team of professional counsellors specifically trained in working with families.

The Family Drug Helpline will have the capacity to provide a caller with information and services that include supportive

counselling from a family volunteer, professional telephone counselling, information about drug treatment services and information about the services available in *Family Drug Help*.

Speaker and Consultants Bureau

The SRC will establish and maintain a 'Speakers Bureau' (a pool of individuals with expertise in the alcohol and drug area who will be available to address the support groups on identified topics of interest). This service component will also include a number of consultants who can assist *Family Drug Help* in a range of other activities such as training, network development and service planning.

Internet and Intranet Services

This component of the service will see the development of a information and communications platform which will incorporate an Internet site (information for the general public) and an Intranet service (information for group members) including a 'listserv' through which the groups can have a dynamic internal and external information management, communications and knowledge transfer system.

The internal system will allow rapid and effective communication and information dissemination between group members, groups and the SRC. The external system would allow inquirers to gain access to key information about the Support Network and a rich collection of resources relating to support for families of drug users.

Information and Education Services

This area of service delivery will see the development of information materials and pertinent to the needs of families.

Publications that will be developed in house include:

- Periodic newsletter
- *Group Member's Manual* - a compilation of practical information designed to assist family members and carers to minimise the harm of drug problems in the family
- *Group Coordinator's Manual* - practical information on: facilitating a mutual support group, start-up and basic information, networking with local agencies, basic counselling and communication skills
- *Volunteer Training Program* - a package of learning to assist family members to engage in volunteer work in *Family Drug Help* for example, group coordination and facilitation, telephone counselling and so on.
- A collection of pamphlets and group meeting lists

Network Services

The key functions of this support component will be the establishment and maintenance of the *Family Drug Help* network. Activities will:

- assist existing groups and support the development and maintenance of new groups
- build and strengthen communication channels to ensure resource sharing and continuous learning within and between the groups
- ensure high quality training of Group Coordinators, Helpline staff and other volunteers
- maximise opportunities for representation and advocacy on the needs of families of alcohol and drug users with policy makers, service planners and service providers.

Family members and others usually want to help the person who is using drugs but are not sure how to do this



Underpinning the establishment of this new service is an awareness of the enormous need for information about drugs and for support for people with a family member affected by drug use problems.

In establishing the statewide network of family drug self help groups additional functions of the SRC will be:

- Determining what family groups are currently operating throughout Victoria
- Defining areas of greatest need and providing support for self help group establishment
- Meeting with agencies and family members in areas of defined need and providing advice and information on group establishment. Guidance and materials will be provided on conducting public meetings and getting media coverage group meetings and activities.

At the regional level the development of the service and its activities will be communicated on a regular basis to regional alcohol and drug coordinators and other relevant regional staff. At a statewide level there will be ongoing liaison with the Drugs and Health Protection Services Branch of the Department of Human Services on network development, and key practice and strategic policy issues for families.

In addition, *Family Drug Help* will ensure that local municipalities who have developed drug action plans and/or community safety plans are kept abreast of the establishment

and activities of groups.

The descriptions of the Support Network's service model given here are benchmarks. *Family Drug Help* is in a very

early phase of its development and it is anticipated that there will be variations in the activities of Group Coordinators and Professional Advisors, depending on local needs and circumstances. Members of the Steering Committee and *Family Drug Help* staff in the SRC will be available to all levels in the Support Network for consultation. Through collaborative relationships between group members, group coordinators, professional advisors and the support from Parents for Drug Information and Support, SHARC and Turning Point, *Family Drug Help* will form a statewide community of support resulting in empowerment of self help for family members.

Family Drug Help will form a statewide community of support resulting in empowerment of self help for family members

Implementation Plan Summary

October 2000	Recruit service establishment team Choose location and negotiate leasing arrangements Develop model of service delivery, service standards and implementation plan Formulate service agreement with the Dept. of Human Services
November 2000	Develop a Memorandum of Understanding between collaborating parties Financial plan Office fit out and commence operations in new location Develop and implement communications strategy Establish and activate Steering Committee Recruit staff (paid staff and volunteer staff)
December 2000	Conduct survey of existing relevant services and support groups Commence product development (Internet and intranet services, group member's manual, group coordinator's manual, volunteer training program, pamphlets, posters, newsletter) Commence networking with existing groups, establish new groups and assist groups as required
Jan/Feb 2001	Develop and document the model, guidelines and protocols for the Family Drug Helpline Recruit and/or train volunteers and professional staff
March 2001	Commence full service delivery and coordinate developments

Family Drug Help

Service and Resource Centre - SRC
Ground Floor, 1242 Glenhuntly Road
Glen Huntly, Victoria 3163

Tel (03) 9572 2855

Fax (03) 9572 3498

Commencing:

Network Services November 2000

Family Drug Helpline March 2001

Current Staff:

Gordon Storey

Executive Officer

Brenda Irwin

Project Development Officer

Eric Tyssen

Family Drug Helpline Administrator

The Family Drug Helpline will formally commence in March 2001.

However, family members and interested individuals may contact the Service & Resource Centre in Glen Huntly.

Have you experience of dealing with drug use problems in the family?

We need your knowledge and insights gained from personal participation!

Call Family Drug Help if you are interested in becoming a volunteer helper

Notice to all drug treatment and other relevant services

“Please make copies of this newsletter and pass them on to any family members involved in your service and also place copies in your waiting areas”

Thank you