



Family Drug Help

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FAMILY DRUG HELP OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED

Family Drug Help was officially launched by the Premier of Victoria, Steve Bracks and the Minister for Health, John Thwaites in Queen's Hall, Parliament House on Tuesday, March 20th, 2001 – a historic and dignified setting for the commencement of this important new service.

In his speech, the Premier spoke of his total commitment to supporting the family members of people who use drugs and showed his genuine concern for addressing their needs, while the Minister expressed his particular appreciation to all who have volunteered to support this service – on the Helpline, the Steering Committee and in a variety of other ways.

These sentiments were echoed by Brenda Irwin, a founding member and Project Development Officer of Family Drug Help, who also acknowledged the enormous contribution made by so many parents over the last four years. Some have suffered the loss of their own child and others continue to live with their own anxieties and all have contributed so much to others. These parents and family members, in their courage, their love for their children, in their generosity and in their own willingness to ask for help, have provided both the impetus and the backbone for the new service, Brenda said. Executive Officer of Family Drug Help, Gordon Storey, affirmed the value of self-help and of helping others and of the value of experiential expertise - a form of support which can be truly empowering. Gordon spoke of the role of the professional in Family Drug Help as one which at best



Brenda Irwin, Premier Steve Bracks, Hon. John Thwaites and Gordon Storey at the official launch of Family Drug Help at Parliament House

responds to the expressed needs of the family member, rather than imposing a solution or taking charge.

Despite the short notice, Queen's Hall was packed with family members, telephone volunteers, professional workers, local government staff and others who have helped along the way. The atmosphere was so warm and friendly, such a wonderful acknowledgment that families there on the day and so many others in the wider community do love and care for their family member who is using drugs and they want to help each other as well.

The launch provided an opportunity for Brenda and Gordon to publicly thank some of the many people who have helped in the establishment of our service. Firstly, they thanked the State Government of Victoria for recognizing the value of and funding such a service. Others thanked included Professor Margaret Hamilton and staff of Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, the third partner in the Family Drug Help development, Michelle Keenan from

the City of Port Phillip and former foundation member of Family Drug Help, the telephone volunteers and members of the Steering Committee. They further thanked the Cities of Yarra, Port Phillip and Glen Eira, Laurie Bebbington and staff of the Department of Human Services, Tony Trimmingham from Family Drug Support NSW, Rob Hudson, Director of Social Policy in the Premier's Department, Dr. David Jacka and other professionals who have given of their time to address our support groups.

Brenda especially thanked her own family and friends for their ongoing support and the memory of her own daughter which continues to inspire her and give her strength.

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Family Drug Help helps launch new information and support groups

Three community forums have been held across Victoria to help with the establishment of family drug information and support groups. Families in Wangaratta, Belgrave and Whittlesea attended forums on "Hearing how families are coping" to listen to a panel of guest speakers talk about their own personal experience of coping with drug use in the family, Family Drug Help services and local treatment services available for people who use drugs and their families.

These families also had an opportunity to ask questions of the panel and discuss their information and support needs. These forums have led to information and support groups being established in each of these areas. Families interested in finding out more about these groups can contact:

<i>Andrea Grindrod at Ranges CHS, Belgrave</i>	<i>9754 8963</i>
<i>Paula Barassi at Ovens and King CHS, Wangaratta</i>	<i>5722 2355</i>
<i>Gerry O'Connor at North Eastern Drug & Alcohol Service, Epping</i>	<i>9219 8990</i>

A listing of family drug information and support groups is available from Family Drug Help. People interested in setting up a new support group in their local area can contact Tracey Brooke, Network & Information Services Coordinator at Family Drug Help on 9573 1777.

A mother's story of the benefits of attending family drug information and support groups

This article is a reprint of the talk Family Drug Help Steering Committee member and volunteer, Sue McSwan, gave at the community forum held in Belgrave.

My husband and I are the parents of two adult children. Both of our children completed secondary school with little trouble or difficulty, and went on to university. Our daughter completed a degree and went on to travel and marry.

Our son, however, was a different story. He had a very difficult first year at university and eventually decided to leave and join the workforce. At the age of 24 years, we discovered he was using heroin. This started for us the roller coaster of detox, rehab, relapses, and deceit - all the things that go with the daily struggle of drug abuse.

My way of coping with this roller coaster was to gain some knowledge and understanding of drugs, treatment and addiction. I did this by going along to family drug information and support groups.

For me, there have been many benefits of attending information and support groups. I have gained a lot of

information and knowledge about drugs and their effects, different treatment options and other subjects from guest speakers who have given presentations at the groups, as well as from talking to other group members. These people have also shared with me some simple coping skills that I have found to be helpful. When we are feeling fear, anxiety and general exhaustion from the day to day struggle, we don't always think clearly!!

Going to support groups has enabled me to associate with people who relate to the daily struggle of families dealing with drug addiction; people who really understand what it is like to live with someone who is addicted to drugs. Unless you have a family member who is drug dependent, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible for people to understand what these families are going through.

The groups enable people to discuss things that you may not even be able to discuss with a partner, family or friends for various reasons. Quite often a partner can be at a different stage in coping which can be difficult. The groups allow me to express emotions such as fear, anxiety and anger amongst people who will not judge me. For example, being able to tell stories such as the need to hide your purse to remove temptation for

the drug user or that your son or daughter is in trouble with the law, knowing you are amongst people who have shared the same experience.

Through the groups, I have made contacts with people who I can seek advice or just an understanding ear when I'm really having a bad day, week, etc. I personally have found that going along to a group allowed me to bring things back into perspective. I may have had a dreadful week, but there was always someone in a worse situation. But above all, going to groups have given me a sense of hope, to never give up.

VOLUNTEERS READY TO GO

Family Drug Help's first volunteer recruitment drive took place in January and February of this year. This resulted in an outstanding 120 enquiries from potential volunteers; an overwhelming response. As a result, the Family Drug Helpline held its first training program over a weekend in February 2001. A total of 35 volunteers participated in the program run by Tony Trimmingham from Family Drug Support in NSW.

The two-day program consisted of basic counselling skills, role-plays, an overview of drugs and their impact, discussing reasons why people use drugs and general discussion around frequently asked questions.

Volunteers were given the opportunity to discuss their fears about being on the Helpline. They were also given the opportunity to talk through their own experiences and share these with the group. This was a great chance for each volunteer to find out how they would cope sharing their story with others just as they may be called upon to do on the Helpline.

The training was a great success and our thanks are extended to Tony for travelling from NSW to deliver the program.

A third session was held in March to go through our Volunteer Policy Manual and provide a further opportunity for role-plays. This training was attended by 30 participants and was also a great success. Again volunteers were able to express how they felt about the previous training and explore any thoughts that had come up since then. Volunteers reported that the training had given them the chance to really explore how they felt about being on the Helpline and express any concerns they had.

Ongoing training will be provided on a quarterly basis with topics being determined either by gaps in the training or by volunteer requests.

Volunteers are always needed so if you are interested please contact Family Drug Help's Volunteer Coordinator Michelle O'Sullivan on 9573 1782.



Family Drug Help Volunteer Coordinator, Michelle O'Sullivan (centre) with volunteers Joan and Kemal

The most helpful responses to people in trouble often come from "ordinary people" who don't think of themselves as experts - a parent, an older sibling, a friend at the office, a cab driver. People who listen with their hearts as opposed to their brains.

Jacquelyn Small (1990) *Becoming Naturally Therapeutic, A Return to the True Essence of Helping*, Bantram Books.

Family Drug Helpline now taking your calls

1300 660 068

For the first three months of our service, the Family Drug Helpline will operate within the following hours:

Monday to Friday — Family volunteers will directly answer your calls between the hours of 6.00 pm and 10.00 pm each day, listening to your concerns and providing support. Outside of these times, calls will be answered by a professional counsellor.

Saturday and Sunday — At this stage, all calls will be answered by a professional counsellor.

Our service is a developing one and we anticipate the family volunteer hours will expand as more telephone volunteers are trained. The Helpline can be called from anywhere in Victoria for the cost of a local call.

The value of support groups

Joan Manton, Family Drug Help volunteer

Family support groups are there for the support, education, and maintaining a parent's sanity in a time where there is shock, horror, bewilderment, anger, frustration, disgust and any other emotion you can name when you find you have a child and/or children who are caught up in drugs.

Parents initially do not want to believe that their child is actually caught up in anything bad. They want to believe their child when they tell 'tall stories'. They cannot understand what is wrong when items like the VCR, camera, CD player or any other items disappear.

The attitude of the child can be confronting, angry, hostile. They can use the foulest of language, be dirty in their habits and not care at all about what their behaviour is doing to the family.

Parents want to be able to wave a magic wand and hope all this goes away.

To be able to do this parents must first learn to deal with themselves in that they need to know they are not the only ones going through this trauma. The group is a place where parents can 'dump' their anger and frustration. It is a place where they can learn strategies to try and deal with their child's behaviour. It is a place to be safe where they vent their anger, shed their tears and know that other people feel what they are feeling and know what they are going through.

They learn that until the child is prepared to do something to help themselves there is nothing they can do but love them and be there for them.

There are quite a lot of support groups for parents and each group is different, like 'tough' love type groups, Families Anonymous, and lots more. As each group is different, parents need to be comfortable with the group they choose. None of them have a 'magic wand'.

Parents learn it is hard work but if they love their child and believe in their child, then somewhere down the track there can be a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel. The only thing is they must remember there can be pitfalls through the tunnel.

Although each family has the 'same' story, each child is different and each family is different, therefore any progress is different.

A Structured Support Program for Parents

Drugs and teenagers are felt to be a lethal mix. How does a parent cope? How do you deal with your child when you know they are using drugs?

In addition to the work being done by Family Drug Help, the Victorian Government has funded a number of agencies across the state to deliver a structured support program for parents. The Parent Support Program has been designed to offer hope, insight, and practical solutions for parents to help them cope and manage the problems of teenage drug use.

There is no manual, no easy answers. Recognising this, the experience of those who know about parenting, youth, and substance abuse have culminated in the development of a program for parents dealing with youth drug problems.

The Parent Support Program was co-

developed by Odyssey House Victoria and the Centre for Adolescent Health. It is an eight-week structured program that offers support and strategies to help parents develop ways to improve communication between them and their sons and daughters, encouraging more responsible behaviour, as well as developing supportive relationships between group members.

Program evaluation has indicated that parents experience significant improvements in self-esteem and greater competence in their parenting. The evaluation found a high percentage of parents reported finding positive changes in their adolescent's drug-using behaviour and improved communication within the family.

An agency in each region has been recently funded to run this program at no cost to participants. For further inquiries and enrolment contact the agency in your region.



Southern Region:	Odyssey House on 8341 1600
Northern Region:	Moreland Hall on 9386 2876
Western Region:	Voyage on 9296 1200
Eastern Region:	Anglicare on 9720 3488
Barwon South West Region:	Salvation Army on 5223 2434
Grampians Region:	Uniting Care Outreach Centre on 5358 3700
Loddon Mallee Region:	Bendigo CHS on 5434 4300
Hume Region:	Upper Hume CHS on 02 6056 1500
Gippsland Region:	Latrobe CHS on 5134 2011
	Lakes Entrance CHS on 5155 1314
	Gippsland Southern Health Service on 5667 5555

I'M GONNA HAVE TO WORK WITH PARENTS!!!!

Ross Mortimer, Drug and Alcohol Counsellor
North Eastern Outreach Drug and Alcohol Service, Eltham CHC

Having worked at a large drug and alcohol hospital in the past, it was quite easy to avoid working with parents, just by using that great word CONFIDENTIALITY. A usual conversation with a parent ringing asking about their son or daughter ended with our reply, "I'm sorry, but due to confidentiality we can't give you any information." Phew, I'd avoided dealing with a parent again! Because, really what do you say to them? I don't have all the answers and they may get upset and ask heaps of questions. What if I don't know the answer, then I'll look like a goose!

The more I learnt the more confident I became in working with parents and families. Not only was it benefiting the parents but also the drug user themselves. If the user isn't willing to change then perhaps the parent could change something they do.

Then I started working in community health and again came into contact with parents, except this time I can't ignore them as they are part of the community. The same issues arose, with the same response "What can I do?" And then a thought, "I know, a support group, I'll get one of those started. End of story." I ran a focus group, three very reasonable loving mothers came along who really wanted to make a difference and I thought, "They'll be good in a group. I'll start it off then after a few months the parents can run it themselves. Now I've got a group I can refer parents to it and again avoid having to work with them."

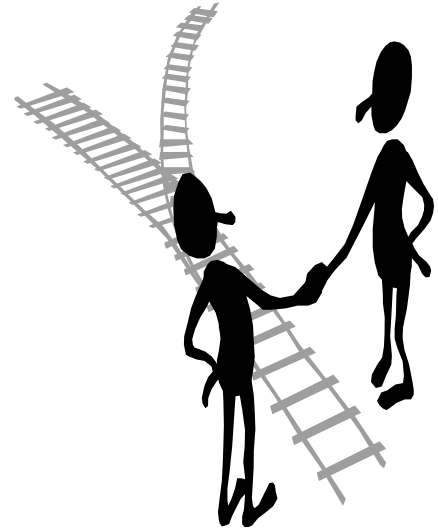
But a strange thing happened, I started learning about what parents wanted and needed and it wasn't such a big deal; information, education and support. It wasn't much to ask and I do know a bit about drugs and alcohol, certainly much more than any parent facing this issue for the first time. It was also okay to be honest, to say "No I can't solve all problems, all the time", and after building a relationship with the family I was

in a position where I could challenge some of the issues within the family.

I was starting to see real benefits. Issues like confidentiality again came up, but you know I really feel this is used more as an excuse than as a real issue. If you have the parent and their child in the same room together you explain what confidentiality means and how it will be dealt with if the issue arises. Other workers may say, "What if a parent rings up to see if client has been to an appointment, or had their methadone?" I say, "Great, at least you

don't have to work on engaging them."

I have learnt through experience that parents are very clued people and know what's going on and know what they should do. It is often more about where the parents are at, discussing options, what *they* feel are good options - what they feel they can and can't do and then giving them support for the choices they make. I can't see how people can work on drug and alcohol issues without including the family and I do feel it is fear from the worker and constraints put on by service agreements that stops workers doing this. It is still a common thing that parents get poor service and do not get their needs met, but take heart, there are more groups starting up with parents who have a lot of experience and knowledge who can not only assist you but can also put you in touch with services that will provide assistance. I feel all drug and alcohol services should work with parents: some may do it well, others may not. Make sure you shop around.



Life's Back Into My Hands

I fought hard to get through the sleeting rain
Of freezing cold, of aches and pains

With the sun starting to shine
No need to run
No need to hide
I returned to take it in my stride

I'm free to float
And free to fly
Free to float and touch the sky



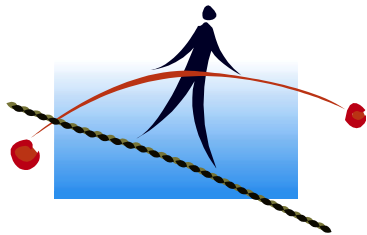
Out of a swan dive
And into a glide
I'll bring it down slowly to touch the land

It finally seems that life's back into my hands.

Anonymous, reprinted with permission from *Our Turn: Voices from Odyssey*.

Upcoming Events

Wednesday 23 May 7.00 pm
 Launch of Port Phillip Families and Friends Support Group
 St Kilda Town Hall, Cnr Carlisle and Brighton Rds, St Kilda
 Contact: Cathy Madigan 9531 0036 or 0425 715 168



Tuesday 19 June 7.45 pm
 Association of Relatives and Friends of the Emotionally and Mentally Ill — Bridging the Gap Forum
 Mental Health, Substance Abuse and the Criminal Justice System
 Box Hill Town Hall, 1022 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill
 Contact: ARAFEMI on 9889 1777

Talking Point Alcohol and Drug Issues Seminar Series

Presented by Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre
 Training room, 54-62 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy

Bookings essential
 Contact: Turning Point on 9254 8061

Friday 20 April 1-2 pm
 'Has the twelve year South Australian cannabis experiment worked? Reflection on South Australia's cannabis expiation notice system'
 Dr Adam Sutton, Department of Criminology, The University of Melbourne

Friday 11 May 1-2 pm
 'State of play in alcohol and drug policy and services'
 Paul McDonald, Assistant Director, Drug and Policy and Services, Department of Human Services

Friday 8 June 1-2 pm
 'Homelessness and drugs'
 Netty Horton, CEO, Council for Homeless Persons, and Chair of Victorian Homeless Strategy



The Family Drug Help Newsletter No. 2 has been sent to a wide range of organisations as well as families who have made contact with our service. We would greatly appreciate drug treatment and other relevant services making copies of this newsletter and passing them on to any family members involved in your service and also placing copies in your waiting area. Thank you.

If you would like to continue to receive the Family Drug Help Newsletter, please complete the form below and return it by mail to 1242 Glenhuntly Road, Glenhuntly 3163, fax (03) 9572 3498 or phone Anne on (03) 9572 2855.

Please put me on the Family Drug Help mailing list

Name: Ms/Mrs/Mr/Dr/Prof _____

Position: _____

Organisation: _____

Address: _____

Suburb: _____ State: _____ Postcode: _____

