

## From The Chair

We are pleased to introduce Drug Free Australia's inaugural newsletter. Drug Free Australia is a community based charity with no religious or political affiliations. Our vision is that **"Communities are well-informed about the harms of illicit drugs and empowered with anti-drug strategies"**.

This communiqué is a key part of the process of bringing a balanced and informative position on the harms of illicit drugs in our community. We expect in the next, and subsequent newsletters, to have even more comprehensive articles of research, with community feedback on critical issues.

We are all too familiar with the devastating results of drug use – crime, destruction of physical and mental health, family violence and people at risk. All of these are glaringly reported in our newspapers and perhaps, less obviously, witnessed in the long term devastation of family and community life.

In seeing our vision become a reality, I am privileged to be part of a Board of dedicated people, who bring with them a wide range of expertise.

They are:

- Hon Ann Bressington MLC, SA Parliament, SA
- Mr Gary Christian, National Director, Adventist Development & Relief Agency, NSW
- Major Brian Watters AO, Advisor, UN International Narcotics Control Board, NSW
- Mr John Barich, Australian Family Association, WA
- Mr Herschel Mills-Baker, President, Australian Parents for Drug Reform, Qld
- Mr Graeme Rule, Executive Director, COADE, Vic
- Ms Isobel Gawler, Registered Nurse/Manager, NT
- Major General Peter R. Phillips AO, Mc, (Retd), FAICD

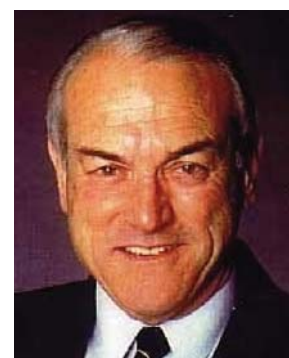
We hope you enjoy reading the newsletter. With each article being referenced, you will be able to find further information about a topic that particularly interests you.



Mr Craig Thompson  
Chair, Drug Free Australia

**Mr Craig Thompson**, is a Barrister at Law, with 23 years' experience as a magistrate in Local Courts of NSW, four years' experience in the Children's Court and has served briefly in the Coroner's Court. He has been actively involved in the community and is a former District Governor in Lions Clubs International as well as the liaison officer for Lions in the former Lions AFADD Foundation, the District Drug Awareness Chairman for three years and President of PRYDE (Parents Reaching Youth through Drug Education). Mr Thompson was a board member of the Ted Noffs Foundation for seven years.

## Board Member Profile



Major General Peter R. Phillips  
AO, Mc, (Retd), FAICD

Peter Phillips was a soldier for 40 years, who was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry during the Vietnam War - and he has not given up fighting for just causes in retirement.

As National President of the RSL from, 1997 to 2003, he

came into prominence particularly for his mission of reconciliation to Japan in 2000 and later to Vietnam. He has a special interest in aged care for veterans and war widows and chairs the National Ex-Service Round Table on Aged Care. For this work, he was selected as a finalist in the Senior Australian of the Year Awards in 2004 and 2005.

Among other many and varied interests, he is a member (and former president) of Canberra Legacy and a long-time member of the Australian Families Association. He has served as chairman or board member of numerous organizations and is patron of the Haemophilia Foundation of Australia (ACT).

He says that he was pleased to accept the position of Director for the ACT on the Board of Drug Free Australia because of his concern that apathy in the community was losing the battle against illicit drugs. In 1999, he led the RSL in its "War on Drugs" campaign, launched by entertainer, Normie Rowe. "Today, Australia's guard is down," he says. "As the number of deaths from overdose has declined and the supply of heroin temporarily reduced, society has grown less concerned. Yet, illicit drugs, alcohol abuse and cigarette smoking are costing us dearly and remain an enormous threat to our well-being".

As a father of five and grandfather, Peter Phillips is a proud fourth generation Australian, who says, "I want to see us bring up the next generation with the guts to say no to illicit drugs ... and to provide genuine compassion to those who falter along the way or become addicts by helping them to regain a normal life".



## Have Your Say... Or Tell Us Your Story...

Are you tired of your comments falling on deaf ears? Do you have story to share about drug abuse? Are you concerned about the accuracy in what the media is saying about drug issues? Are you worried about your child's future?

Then contact DFA. We value your feedback and invite your comments and questions. You will help us to gauge the level community concern and current attitudes to illicit drug use in Australia.

### Hot topic:

### Should we drug test in schools. What are the pros and cons?

You may email your letters, articles or comments to: [admin@drugfree.org.au](mailto:admin@drugfree.org.au) or mail to: Editor, Drug Free Australia, PO Box 497, Elizabeth, SA 5112. (All correspondence should contain the name and address of the writer, to enable consideration for publication in future newsletters).

# Dealing With Drugs

## Abstinence must be the goal ...

When Tony Abbott (Minister for Health and Ageing) recently responded to the results of a Parliamentary Inquiry into Substance Abuse – *Road to Recovery*, he indicated that there was scope to do so much more for those people whose lives have been devastated by the impact of drug abuse.

In particular, Mr Abbott said that: 'The government is committed to the premise that there is 'no safe way to take illicit drugs, and that the most desirable goal is abstinence'.

And ... DFA Chair, Craig Thompson agrees: "Drug Free Australia stands on these exact principles and Mr Abbott's response indicates that the government is now prepared to **take the next step**, in order to achieve a significant reduction in overall numbers of illicit drug users".

"We congratulate Mr Abbott's initiative and advocate strongly that state governments follow his lead and look at the recommendations made in the report, particularly with regard to funding treatment programs based on **abstinent outcomes**. In line with this, there is an urgent need to look seriously into the efficacy of **Harm Minimisation Policy** in its current form. This policy has been operating for years, but it has become obvious, with increased

drug abuse and associated crime and family breakdown, that something is just not working", said Mr Thompson.

"According to recent research by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, Australia's drug addiction rates are exceeding those of the United States. When we hear that over 30% of Australians admitted to having a drug problem compared to 6.5% of Americans we should be alarmed! Would we persist with a policy on diphtheria, if more people were contracting it, after 20 years?"

Drug Free Australia advocates that State and Federal governments, work through the Ministerial Council on Drugs Strategy (MCDS) to:

- **Re-focus policy away from Harm Minimisation**

As recommended in Rec. 122 of the Road to Recovery Report – to a compassionate policy which prioritises prevention and the earliest attainment of drug-free lives.

- **Simultaneously phase back drug maintenance programs**

Such as the 'safe' injecting room in Kings Cross, which serve only to prolong addiction and broken lives.

- **Revise drug terminology**

There is no such thing as 'recreational' illicit drugs. Terms like this have become synonymous with the so-called 'soft' drugs (ie. Cannabis, 'Ice' or the 'party drug' Ecstasy). These have all been identified in current research as being linked to cause serious mental and physical disorders, many of them chronic or fatal in nature.

- **Increase community education and awareness programs**

Where people are given effective consistent, accurate information related to prevention strategies, and informed about the devastation caused by illicit drugs – such as the road carnage caused by drug-driving, the birth defects and psychosis caused by cannabis, the rapid destruction of brain and body caused by methamphetamine use and the lost, irrecoverable years caused by heroin addiction.

Yes, we agree with Tony Abbott when he says: 'Good progress has been made, but **more work is needed** to reduce the damage that drug abuse does to individuals and society".

*Reference: ADCA Update 11 August 2006*

## Marijuana can no longer be called a 'soft' drug..

I was talking to a young girl the other day, who said in no uncertain terms that she smokes 'dope' and takes ecstasy at parties, because 'there is less chance of getting busted like with alcohol when driving'. She quite freely continued to say - 'Yeah, they're party drugs aren't they – for recreation? So what's the problem?'

Yes, we should be very alarmed at this misconception held by too many of our young people. And ... we should also take the responsibility. It is our generation who has allowed the term 'recreational drugs' to become a catch phrase, commonly used to describe the so-call 'fun' drugs of cannabis and ecstasy. But, far from fun, safe and recreational, they are quite lethal.

"Just a few issues of major enormous concern are the road fatalities caused by cannabis-intoxicated drivers, links to cannabis and psychosis, increased potency and birth defects" said Mr Craig Thompson, Chair of DFA.

"Firstly, many national and international studies have found that drivers intoxicated with cannabis, pose a high risk of road accidents. For example a 10 year Victorian study found a 7 times risk of a

fatal accident. Other studies clearly show that cannabis impairs car control, including the ability to stay in one lane, as well as slowing reaction time". (ANCD Report, Dec 2004).

"Secondly, highly respected medical practitioners in Australia and overseas have confirmed that cannabis use is linked to psychosis. For example, Dr Brian Boettcher, Consulting Psychiatrist in the UK reports that 'Cannabis is capable of precipitating psychosis, going on to the chronic cases in people who have had no family and personal history of psychiatric illness. There have been suggestions that such people may be the ones who have started cannabis in their teens'.



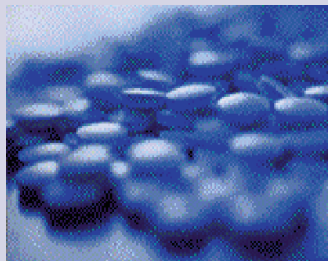
"A third concern is the fact that many in the pro-cannabis lobby deny that there has been an increase in potency over the past 20 years. This is quite erroneous, as there is definite

evidence of stronger plants in more recent times. Indeed, increased potency is the very reason why the South Australian Government legislated to

reduce the number of plants subject to expiation fee notices, from 10 to 1 hydroponically grown plant".

"However, most of us will agree that the link between cannabis use and birth defects is one of the most horrendous issues of all", Mr. Thompson said. "A Commonwealth Department of Health publication to medical practitioners warns about health risks such as impairment of foetal brain development, relative prematurity, smaller length and head circumference, malformations, higher rate of miscarriage and perinatal death. A US study found a 10 times greater risk of non-lymphoblastic cancer to infants of marijuana-using mothers. Other effects in the new born are lethargy, slow to gain weight, increased startle reflexes, tremors and possible long-term developmental and behavioural effects. These defects, with recent knowledge about cannabis induced psychosis and other matters, paint a damning picture of the drug as being much worse than those who advocate its legalisation would purport.

**We cannot continue to call Cannabis 'soft'!**



# Kings Cross Injecting Room Sets Dangerous Precedent

For most Australian's Kings Cross has long had a reputation for some of its less desirable tourist 'attractions'. So it was of little surprise that five years ago it was the site selected for a 'Medically Supervised' Heroin Injecting Centre (MSIC). Since that time, funded through taxpayers dollars, the Centre has strategically put together a campaign to keep itself in existence – a campaign that is flawed, misleading and downright dishonest. For what purpose we ask, has such a campaign been mounted? More importantly, what influence is such a campaign having on the decision-making abilities of our politicians and the likelihood of similar centres being introduced into other states?

Drug Free Australia has done some investigating, because of a recent survey conducted by MISC proponents and found it to be misleading, particularly when local residents and businesses were, to say the least, upset at the original establishment of the centre. As **Gary Christian**, DFA's secretary says: "We have found evidence to support the fact that MISC has consistently misled the public about its purported 'success' in saving lives. If you were constantly told that the injecting room was saving hundreds of lives each year, how would you vote?"

"Undoubtedly, injecting room staff knew from experience, as well as National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre data in 2001, that only one in 25 overdoses is ever fatal. Not once do we see them correcting the myth repeated in Parliament and the

media. Not once did they draw attention to the inordinately high numbers of overdoses in their centre. Now we see a survey report which seeks to further reinforce popular support already acquired via a constant stream of misinformation".

Other concerns about misinformation surround the injecting room taking credit for decreased sightings of public injection in the Kings Cross area, as found in the NSW University survey. Sightings by residents decreased from 55% in 2000 to 34% in 2005, and for businesses from 61% in 2000 to 47% in 2005. Many Australians will not realise that a heroin drought hit the country in November 2000, and that numbers of dependent heroin users plummeted from 75,000 to a current 25,000. It is only a statistical given that public injections would decrease yet why would the injecting room take credit for it?"

"And what of the conduct of the survey? Who were the residents and business consulted? We know that several high profile businesses have closed down because of the injecting room, while others such as strip clubs, brothels and massage parlours remain. We know that 1100 of the local residents are actually drug users, which would easily distort a statistical survey".

Our policy makers need to be aware that current 'harm minimisation' policies such as the injecting room are not successful. They need to re-focus, and divert more funds into prevention and early

intervention strategies. It is not acceptable, in fact it is quite dangerous to tell people – particularly those of school age - how to 'use safely', or to give the erroneous impression that a 'safe' injecting room is more acceptable than a properly administered rehabilitation centre, where it has been shown that people can actually rebuild their lives.

Simultaneously, we need a much greater focus on education and community awareness campaigns. The long term impact on our quality of life in Australia will be contingent on decisions made by our politicians and policy makers in 2006.

"We are at the crossroads", Mr Christian said.

*Reference: For further information, email Gary Christian at [admin@drugfree.org.au](mailto:admin@drugfree.org.au)*



# School Drug Test Debate

Following positive parental and community support in a national poll, South Australian Independent MP, Ann Bressington proposes to put forward legislation for drug testing in schools in her state. The concept received 86% support in SA and 57% nationally. In a recent interview, Ms Bressington said:

"We are concerned with evidence that indicates the development of an increasing 'drug culture' in Australian schools."

For example:

- The World Health Organisation reports that Australia has the highest rate of drug use when compared to other developed countries.
- The 2004 National Household Survey showed that 341,000 adolescents had admitted to using cannabis and amphetamines and a further 17% stated that they had used drugs such as heroin and ecstasy.
- Over 50% of Year 12 students are experimenting with cannabis.
- More schools having to deal with illicit drug using students (including alcohol).

With 'Schoolies Week' fast approaching, there are

already aggressive campaigns in the press and within school communities, to openly promote alcohol. From past experience, we know that there is a strong chance that this will encourage further illicit drug use (ecstasy, amphetamines and cannabis) into the mix.

The issue of drug testing in schools must be strongly considered, to ensure safer school communities in Australia. Some fine work has been done with the School Drug Education Strategy but this is obviously not enough. The heavy illicit drug using rate demands that we add effective deterrent mechanisms to ensure that no stone has been left unturned.



School Drug tests would be part of a co-ordinated program comprising:

- A comprehensive community awareness campaign about the dangers of illicit and drug use and the abuse of alcohol.
- Simultaneous implementation of drug testing in schools, as a national program introduced by the Federal Government. This would be via mouth swabs, by Health Department officials twice a year. If a positive result is obtained, the Health official would refer the matter to the school to follow through with the family for counselling and treatment as necessary.
- Provision of a targeted, effective health education program for students, teachers and parents that focuses on strategies to prevent drug use, the social impacts of family violence, increased crime and long term mental health issues.

**Drug Free Australia encourages readers to provide comment and to consider - Is the life of even one student worth the risk of NOT taking this matter seriously?**

*Reference: For further information, email Ann Bressington at [ann.bressington@parliament.sa.gov.au](mailto:ann.bressington@parliament.sa.gov.au)*

# Watch This Space!



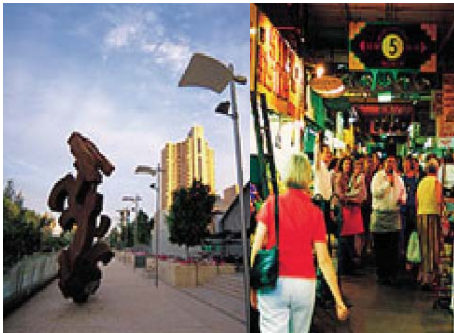
**Forthcoming Conference**

**'Exposing the Reality' – What's happening with Illicit Drugs in Australia?**

A conference towards greater public awareness of the devastation caused by illicit drugs in this country and internationally.



Convened by Drug Free Australia  
April 27-29th 2007  
Stamford Plaza  
Adelaide, South Australia

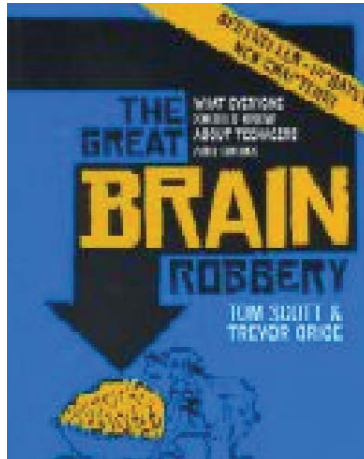


# Recommended Reading...

**'The Great Brain Robbery'**  
A book by Tom Scott & Trevor Grice

'People take mood-altering chemicals because they enjoy altering their moods. But ... for every high there is a low; for every trip, a return journey' from *The Great Brain Robbery*.

A new edition of the very popular book aimed at parents and teenagers, this book is well written and easy to read. Full of personal stories, cartoons and information on a wide range of drugs, this new edition also discusses the effect of a wide range of drugs on a young person's brain in more detail.



**'Vicious Cycle For Pot Smokers'**

**Pot smokers suffering from the early stages of schizophrenia are stuck in a vicious cycle of drug abuse and psychotic attacks, an Australian study has found.**

Research by the University of Melbourne shows that the more marijuana a psychotic person uses, the worse their condition gets. And once they suffer a relapse in delusions and hallucinations they are more likely to turn to marijuana to cope.

**To read more, you can copy and paste this link into your browser:**

<http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,19996465-5006007,00.html>

*Reference:* Herschel Mills-Baker admin@drugfree.org.au

## Drug Free Australia acknowledges funding....

DFA is pleased to acknowledge initial funding from the Department of Health and Ageing to assist in establishing DFA as peak body, to promote the prevention of illicit drug use nationally. DFA is proud to represent the views of the many Australians who want to be free from the devastation caused by illicit drugs in this country.

## You Can Make A Difference.....Support Drug Free Australia!



Drug Free Australia is the voice of the community helping to stop illicit drug use in Australia. If you would like to be part of an organisation that aims to prevent harms to young people and further destruction of family life, you can support **DFA** in one or more ways:

Yes! I do want to make a difference and can help **DFA** in the following ways:

- Send articles, tell us your story
- Attend the 2007 DFA Conference
- Hold an event
- Help distribute our newsletter
- Make a donation

Name: ..... Address: .....

Phone: ..... Email: .....

Please find enclosed, a cheque/postal order to Drug Free Australia Inc for  \$20  \$50  \$100  Other \$ .....

**OR** Debit my Credit Card:  AMEX  Mastercard  Visa  Diners (Tick card type)

Credit Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: ..... Expiry Date: ...../...../.....

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