



Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

Newsletter November 2016

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Hi Everyone,

- **AGM November 25 (Friday) at 7:30 pm at Peter's house. Vegetarian dinner from 6:00 pm onwards. Please let me know if you are coming and can bring a dish to share. Address supplied on reply.**

Editorial

Hello everyone – last meeting of the year coming up, and then Christmas.

A sad year in many ways with the passing away of Brian – it feels like the end of an era for our organisation losing half the McConnell team. The great contribution Brian and Marion made together over the years will never be forgotten. It is so important that the legacy Brian left us is not lost and his great work continues.

We have not yet won the battle against the injustice of the current laws, as is underscored by the additions of names read out at the Remembrance Ceremony and a current editorial in the Canberra Times regarding the drug use in the jail here. News from the US is not looking good. However, there are some positives – a promise by the ACT Labor/Greens leaders to talk about drug law reform and an investigation of drug laws next year in Victoria (see below)

Christmas – a time for reflection.. I am afraid that the pretty candy coatings portrayed in our centres for consumerism are somewhat lacking conviction. For me, family gatherings during the festive season bring both joy and sadness– and I am sure many of you share that experience..

Remembrance Ceremony

The 21st annual Remembrance Ceremony was held on a glorious day at the end of October. Jon Stanhope generously stepped in to help us out as Gai Brodtman was called away overseas on Parliamentary duties.

Our first speaker – Sione Crawford – talked fearlessly about the stigma that is attached to drug use – and how it directly leads to deaths. His honest account of his experiences and the deaths of so many of his friends resonated strongly within the gathering.

Jon Stanhope words were consoling as well as apposite in the context of drug law reform. He said that the deaths that we were remembering will continue to happen into the future if the inflexible adherence to prohibition is not overcome – something we would like everyone to hear. He commented that without changes to laws then the harmful culture of drug use described by Sione will simply continue.

The remembered names were read by the Dr Reverend Jeanette Mathews followed by her address. Jeanette shared some of her experiences with grief. She showed that grief is a universal experience throughout the ages and its expression is poignantly captured in the words of some of the psalms which she read to us.

We are very grateful to all who helped with the organisation of the ceremony and I would particularly like to thank Carolyn Wallace and friends for their musical interludes.

When anyone takes action to attempt to make something happen, that something becomes more likely

ACT Election

Following on from the ACT Election a Parliamentary Agreement has been released between Labor and the Greens. Key aspects for FFDLR are:

- *Establish the Office for Mental Health to roll out and oversee mental health services and provider funding, develop a strategy that sets targets for suicide reduction, and provide more support for young people.*
- *Establish a Drug and Alcohol Court and associated support programs as part of a goal to reduce recidivism by 25% by 2025, continue existing funding of justice reinvestment programs and assess the need for any additional funding as part of the budget process*
- *Establish an ACT medicinal cannabis program in 2017, to allow sick and dying people timely and efficient access to medicinal cannabis products, on prescription; and establish appropriate regulations, administration and education and training to ensure the programme is effective .*

There are also a number of initiatives described to make the Assembly more accountable to the populace and to take into account the views of all constituents. We hope to be able to work with the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD) to develop strategies in this area as well.

ACT Death in custody

This year we met with MLA Shane Rattenbury. Discussion was wide ranging but did include a possible needle and syringe program for the Alexander Maconochie Centre that was under consideration. Whilst this initiative has stalled at the moment, the use of drugs was once more referred to in a solid Canberra Times editorial about the death of Steven Freeman¹.

¹ <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/ct-editorial/alexander-maconochie-deserves-a-nobler-legacy-than-a-broken-prison-20161113-gso6g2.html>

US Election

Below is an email sent from Ethan Nadelmann Executive Director of the Drug Policy Alliance providing commentary on the state of play in the US.

Tuesday was a watershed moment in our movement to end marijuana prohibition.

California, Maine, Massachusetts and Nevada voted to legalize marijuana. Only Arizona failed to follow suit.

In addition, Florida, Arkansas and North Dakota voted to legalize medical marijuana, and Montana approved an initiative to reinvigorate their existing medical marijuana law.

Now more than half the country has legalized marijuana for medical use, and more than sixty million Americans live in states where marijuana prohibition is history.

Here is the new state of marijuana reform:



The results of the Presidential Election, however, leave many of these victories in a tenuous situation.

The Obama Administration gave a pivotal green light in 2013 to allow Colorado and Washington, and other states thereafter, the flexibility to implement their legalization initiatives notwithstanding federal prohibition. While Donald Trump repeatedly pledged during the campaign to respect state marijuana laws, we have no idea what to expect in the months and years to come.

Some of those apparently closest to Trump, like Rudy Giuliani, Chris Christie and Mike Pence, are openly hostile to marijuana legalization and many other drug policy reforms.

You helped us pass amendments protecting medical

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marijuana states from federal interference the last two years, and we came close to protecting non-medical marijuana states as well. We did all that in a Republican controlled Congress.

It's pivotal that we re-authorize those amendments and expand their protections next year, and fight to stop any and all attempts to expand the war on drugs.

We'll likely be fighting tooth and nail to protect our hard fought victories over these next four years, and we'll need your support more than ever.

Even with an uncertain future ahead of us, we must continue to do everything in our power to end the prohibition of marijuana and dismantle the entire war on drugs.

A valuable commentary on the US use of Marijuana can be found in a Canberra Times article entitled US leading the way in legalisation of marijuana by Ross Fitzgerald ² An interesting fact from the article is that California allowed medical use of cannabis in 1997!

Victorian Inquiry

Victoria is holding an inquiry into drug law reform. The terms of reference are as follows:

LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference 58th Parliament Received from the Legislative Council on 11 November 2015

Inquiry into Illicit and Synthetic Drugs and Prescription Medicine

- 1. reviewing the effectiveness of drug treatment programs in Victoria with recommendations on how treatment and harm minimisation strategies could be used as an alternative to criminal penalties;*
- 2. reviewing the effectiveness of Victorian government investment into illicit drug supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction strategies and programs;*

- 3. reviewing effectiveness of drug detection programs including roadside testing and procedures for deploying drug detection activities at events;*
- 4. assessing the impact of prescription medication on road safety;*
- 5. reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of laws and regulations relating to illicit and synthetic drugs; and*
- 6. assessing practices of other Australian states and territories and overseas jurisdictions and their approach to drug law reform and how other positive reforms could be adopted to Victorian law.*

FFDLR will write a submission to this inquiry.

Rationalist Society of Australia

Meredith Doig, who is president of the Rationalist Society of Australia, advised of the Victorian Inquiry.

The RSA have organised a forum for the evening of Monday 21 November from 6pm to which all FFDLR members are invited

The venue is the upstairs function room at the 505 Wine Room, 505 Malvern Road, Hawksburn 3142.

Speakers are:

Greg Denham, formerly of Vic Police, who will talk about the police attitudes to drug law reform, then and now.

Nick Wallis, who runs a radio program called Enpsychodelia, about drugs and drug law reform, who will talk about pill testing at festivals.

Robbie van Dijk, who will speak about what reforms recreational drug users in the club scene in Melbourne would welcome.

Meredith Doig comments:

By the end of the forum, I am hoping the RSA will have a clearer idea of what we can practically do to help 'move the action forward' on this intractable issue.

² <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/us-leading-the-way-in-legalisation-of-marijuana-20161115-gspn3g.html>

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How do we get change?

Picking up on the last point – what is the best way to get change? I asked Meredith Doig what her thoughts were. She was kind enough to let me put her reply in this newsletter:

Hi Peter,

We certainly don't claim to know any sure fire way of changing the public's mind re controversial issues like drug law reform but there are some lessons from the voluntary assisted dying campaigns ... Andrew Denton spoke at the Dying with Dignity Vic AGM over the weekend and among other things, recommended:

- 1. getting together stories of the harm and damage that is caused by the status quo, possibly into a smallish, very readable book, and then getting people to physically hand one of them to each politician*
- 2. using the services of a professional PR person*
- 3. having a high profile champion (like Denton!)*
- 4. developing relationships with certain journalists who can advocate the case*
- 5. going into the detail of any law reform proposal and making sure the objections that make politicians nervous are neutralised by the wording.*

This is all on top of the usual conferences, seminars, papers, submissions, surveys, letters etc etc.

What Denton was saying, I think, is that progress on these sort of issues is necessarily slow because politicians are wary of losing votes -- but "don't let the ideal be the enemy of the good". So go for change you can achieve rather than change you possibly want.

We are still learning about all this, so your experience is invaluable to us!

Letters to the Newspaper

Bill has been his usual hive of activity writing to the newspaper. Here is a recently published letter:

Our organisation made a submission to the enquiry earlier this year into youth suicide, pointing out that illicit drug users are many times more likely to commit suicide than the general population. Indeed, polydrug users are a fearful 16 to 17 times more likely to do so.

For all the blindingly obvious relevance of this to the committee's terms of reference, its report completely ignored our submission. Its Labor chair wrote pleading the short time available to the committee but added, Delphically, that our offer to appear was not taken up because of "the nature of" our submission.

In the light of the Labor/Greens victory on Saturday, may I suggest that this appalling omission of a key factor in suicide be remedied by giving effect to two of its election commitments: firstly, Labor's plan to boost mental health services ("Labor plan to reduce suicide rate" Canberra Times, Thursday, October 13 p. 10), and, secondly, the announced willingness of the Chief Minister and Shane Rattenbury to consider "further decriminalising drugs for personal use in the ACT" ("Labor, Greens would consider drug law reform after election", Canberra Times, Monday, August 29).

Our drug laws marginalise drug users as criminals, driving a wedge between them, their families and society.

Our drug policies are stressors that trigger depression and other mental health conditions. Ironically, they often compound the very factors that predisposed these young people to drug use in the first place.

May these election commitments be the first cab off the rank.

Here is a letter that was published in May this year:

In spite of the appeal of Lorana Bartel's argument that we can cure our prison addiction (Times 2, April 25, 2016) I find much in Roger Dace's letter (April 27 p 3) with which I can agree.

Canberra can flourish only with a safe and secure

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community. That means little or no crime. What does it take to achieve that? I am at one with Dace in resenting the subsidy of a system that makes the problem worse. A Productivity Commission review of the fiscal madness of our corrections policy is long overdue.

I have never met people who do not want to free themselves from their addiction, yet prison, by augmenting the stresses that produced the addiction in the first place and seeking to micromanage people's lives, fosters dependency.

Criminalising the consumption of certain substances, is the most extreme form imaginable of nanny state overreach.

Politicians as well as criminals need to take responsibility. The offhand refusal on 10 March of the Legislative Assembly to consider the recommendations for decriminalisation of the recent drug summit held under the auspices of a multi-party group for drug law and policy reform is a dereliction of their responsibility. Some leadership, please.

Other Activities

FFDLR has been represented at a number of meetings in Canberra.

Comorbidity day

An FFDLR stall was manned at the CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn the 9th Annual Comorbidity Inter-agency Day. The aim of this event was for Alcohol Tobacco & Other Drug and Mental Health Services to network and strengthen interagency partnerships and referrals.

Thanks to Bill Bush and Bruce Munroe and his research student.



Illustration 1: FFDLR Stall being run by Bruce Monroe and his research student

Drug Driving in the ACT

As a follow up to the Drug Driving workshop host by MLA Shane Rattenbury earlier in the year Bill Bush represented us at an Education and Drug driving Working Group. The following is taken from the terms of reference.

The purpose of the Education and Communications Working Group is to provide advice to the Minister for Road Safety about ways in which communications and education activities could be enhanced to support improved road safety outcomes relating to drug driving.

We have been advised by Mr Rattenbury that two

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other working groups are to be formed by the Justice and Community Safety (JACS) Directorate. These are groups which will focus on the areas of:

- research and data; and
- drug driving regulation (including penalties and impairment based approaches to regulation).

We are working a draft policy to present to the group supporting an impairment based approach to regulation. *Anyone wishing to represent FFDLR on these working groups is most welcome to do so.*

Radio Shows

Bill has been providing commentary on the air waves. He appeared on the Tuesday afternoon CAHMA show on 2XXFM – News from the Drug War Front³ - hosted by Geoff Ward and on 2CC Capital Radio ahead of the remembrance ceremony.

Twitter

The up-to date Marion communicates via Twitter ([Twitter@FFDLR](https://twitter.com/FFDLR)). We now have 232 followers (more than our membership) and of course information can be very easily spread by such social media. Perhaps we need to consider a Facebook page?

Blue Mountains Lecture

Bill, Mary and Marion attended a lecture presented by Family Drug Support Australia in honour of Brian McConnell that was recently held in the Blue Mountains.

ABC Radio shows

A very valuable interview with Dr Marianne Jauncey, Medical Director at the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre in Sydney's Kings Cross, was first broadcast on Thu 15 Sep 2016. It is available as a podcast at:

<http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/classic/midday/201609/miv-2016-09-15.mp3>

The ABC gives the following information:

Dr Marianne Jauncey has been Medical Director of the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre and has worked in drugs and alcohol since the late 1990s, including four years at the Kings Cross Kirkeaton Road Centre, which provides specialist health care for injecting drug users, sex workers and youth at risk.

Her research interests include increasing access to hepatitis C treatment for injecting drug users.

³ <http://www.2xxfm.org.au/program/news-from-the-drug-warfront>