



CANNABIS is a Hard Drug Too!

Why is cannabis still separated out from the so-called 'hard drugs' in Australian statistical data, given that we now have strong evidence of its devastating harms?

In countries such as Sweden, which has the lowest illicit drug use in the OECD, cannabis has NEVER been considered 'soft'. In the UK it has just been re-classified up to a Class B drug – sending a strong message to their community that this drug is definitely NOT soft!

However, the situation may be about to change in Australia. The establishment of the innovative new cannabis research centre (NCPIC) is certainly a step in the right direction. Drug Free Australia welcomed the excellent address given by the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, when she opened the Centre earlier this year. She, along with Professor Alan Budney, a specialist in the field, both emphasised the complexities and harms of cannabis. We were further heartened by meetings with two Federal Ministerial Advisers, both of whom assured us

a preventative approach to illicit drug policy is being taken seriously by Labor.

The most recent, compelling evidence cannot be disregarded. For instance, the Australian Medical Association has issued warnings on the health risks associated with smoking marijuana. Risks of cannabis use include memory loss, psychosis, impaired driving, hallucinations, asthma, and even lung cancer. Moreover, warns the AMA, one third to one half of detained patients admitted to psychiatric units in Australia are there because marijuana use has precipitated their condition. A new scientific study conducted in New Zealand indicates that long term cannabis use increases the risk of lung cancer in young adults. The study recognised that cannabis smoke has been shown to have greater concentrations of carcinogenic hydrocarbons than tobacco.

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

Highly respected medical practitioners in Australia and overseas have confirmed that cannabis use is linked to psychosis. 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'.

So far as cannabis use and birth defects is concerned, a Commonwealth Department of Health publication to medical practitioners warns 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. All of this clearly points to the fact that cannabis should be considered at least as serious as other 'hard' drugs such as heroin or methamphetamines.



Youth Adviser Profile:

Jade's Journey

Jade Lewis has established a highly successful 'Just Say NO' drug prevention program in Australian schools, and works tirelessly with husband, Tristan to communicate health and anti-drug strategies to young people and their families. So far this year Jade has spoken to representatives from and at almost 60 schools and has travelled to nearly every Australian state. As an author, speaker, mentor and mother of two she is more determined than ever to see young people taking a 'NO' stand against drugs.

However, the journey was not always smooth sailing as Jade quotes:

"Despite being a gifted young athlete with Olympic dreams at 15, I wanted to experience a rave party. Always having the attitude that

"addiction would never happen to me", I succumbed to the lure of drugs with the intention of doing it only once..... Years of using drugs eventually led to heroin addiction, a criminal record and a volatile relationship. During this time a destructive lifestyle, negative attitudes and an extremely low self esteem were formed.

In 1999 I became free from my addiction at 22 when I entered the Teen Challenge Program in W.A. I now have a story to tell and many need to hear it. I am an advocate for drug prevention across Australia and my book 'Golden Haze' is now in over 500 Australian schools. In the past 2 months my journey has taken me throughout the metropolitan area, regional Western Australia and interstate. My husband, Tristan, and I are also youth pastors at Airport City Church where we run weekly youth groups teaching life skills, confidence and self esteem. I am the mother of 2 beautiful girls".

Following DFA's International Conference in April 2007, Jade joined Drug Free Australia's Youth Advisory Team and is actively helping DFA educate young people and their families about the harms of alcohol and illicit drugs.

Jade with Rotary President Yvonne Southwell



Jade with a youth group in Perth



New Study Finds Adolescent Drinkers & Drug Users Die Younger

Adolescents who abuse alcohol or drugs are more likely to die in early adulthood, according to a study by University of Pittsburgh researchers published in the current issue of the Journal of Adolescent Health.



The study found that substance abuse disorders (SUDs) in adolescents significantly predicted young adult mortality. These deaths were linked to specific high-risk behaviours in adolescence, including intoxicated driving and drug trafficking.

"The fact that these were, to an extent, predictable deaths raises additional concerns about the hazards of alcohol and drug problems in teens and young adults," said Duncan B. Clark, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor of psychiatry and pharmaceutical sciences at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and director of the Pittsburgh Adolescent Alcohol Research Center at the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic of UPMC.

Among the 870 adolescents studied, researchers noted 21 deaths, or about 2 percent of the group, at an average age of nearly 25 years. Fourteen of those deaths occurred in males with SUDs, or more than 10 percent of that group.

Socioeconomic status was not a significant predictor of survival time. Causes of death for the young adults in the study ranged from homicide and suicide to drug overdose and motor vehicle accidents.

"Effective interventions need to be developed to prevent these predictable deaths in our young adults," said Dr Clark.

2008 – A Critical Year for International Drug Control

This year is one of immense importance to the future of Drug Policy, both in Australia and globally.

In March 2009, governments of the world (including Australia) will meet in Vienna to consider a review of the United Nations Drug Control Conventions. These are agreements between countries to ensure that a high level of cooperation exists to curb drug trafficking and to eliminate illegal production.

There are three conventions being considered, which Australia signed in 1961, 1971 and 1988. These are vital to our future security. For example the **1988 Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances** cautions that the drug trade and related activities *"undermine the legitimate economies and threaten the stability, security and sovereignty of States"*. It discloses that *"Children are used in many parts of the world as an illicit drug consumers market and for purposes of illicit production, distribution and trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, which entails a danger of incalculable gravity"*.



In the last 6 months Drug Free Australia has worked hard at three levels to begin the process of protecting the integrity of these Conventions. These are:

- 1. International Level** – DFA has joined the International Taskforce of Strategic Drug Policy and attended a meeting in Vienna to ensure a balance of non-government organisation's viewpoints was put to the United Nations. By March of 2009, we will be signatories to at least two major international Resolutions that will be submitted to the high level UN meeting of governments.
- 2. Federal Government Level** – we have kept Federal Ministers informed about the global drug legalisation movement – which aims to dismantle the Conventions. The result would be an even greater flow of drugs across our borders into our communities.
- 3. Local Community Level** – DFA has conducted numerous Community Forums and participated in state conferences (via our partnerships with the RSL, CWLA and World Peace Federation). These aim to ensure that Australians understand that they can make a significant difference where drug prevention is concerned.

For more information on the three Conventions go to: <http://www.unodc.un.or.th/convention>



Mr Craig Thompson
Chair, Drug Free Australia

It's a Matter of Supply and Demand

With United Nations figures showing that Australia has one of the highest illicit drug use rates in the OECD, each and every one of us should be VERY concerned.

High levels of illegal drug use usually occur when two factors are present – availability and acceptability. In marketing terms – this equates to Supply and Demand. Our Federal Police and Customs personnel are doing a great job in curbing supply.

For example in August 2008 the AFP made the world's biggest Ecstasy bust after seizing drugs with a street value of \$440 million and carrying out raids across the country.

Five tonnes of Ecstasy were disguised as cans of tomatoes.

But their job is a big one and they are dealing with some of the worst criminal elements in our society – Drug Traffickers who will stop at

nothing, including murder - to build their personal wealth. In this particular haul, some of Australia's alleged leading crime bosses were arrested in a crime network that spans five states and is controlled principally by Australians with Calabrian heritage. Some are linked to Griffith, the NSW town that was the centre of 1970s marijuana trafficking and the focus of the Royal Commission into the disappearance of Donald Mackay, a local businessman who blew the whistle on the illegal trade.

As well as reducing supply – we need to reduce demand. We need to seriously ask: *"Why would such large quantities of drugs like Ecstasy, Ice and Marijuana be flooding our communities?"* We need our young people, their friends and families to take the lead – and choose to say 'NO' to these drugs.

Drug Free Australia is working hard to give young people and families sound



Each and every person in this country has a right to a drug free life and YOU can begin by taking a strong stand against the manipulation

'Adventure' Therapy Works!

A snap-shot of recovery-based rehabilitation programs that enjoy a high success rate

Australia has some of the world's highest rates of at-risk youth behaviour – the United Nations says illicit drug use is more prevalent than in any other developed country, while the World Health Organisation says youth suicide is more prevalent than in two-thirds of other developed countries.

For those who feel despondent about recovering from drug addiction, there is hope – and lots of it, as these living examples show.



Vitae's Bush Camps, Queensland

Vitae came about because of a concern over the despair (without hope) symptoms seen in Australian youth in antisocial behaviour, violence, crime, substance abuse and suicide. These symptoms are seen to be death-centred rather than life-centred.

Vitae provides youth with the environment in which to make life changing decisions. Its successful Bush Camps - known as 'Champ Camps', have developed from the founder, John Guy's 20 plus years of experience in bush based interventions. John and his experienced team work youth at risk at 'Champ Camps' over a nine day period. For details go to <http://www.vitae.org.au/content/view/14/> and for a DVD on a camp see www.youtube.com/bushventure.

A former Participant of a Champ Camp wrote – *"Before I went to the Camp I was suffering from anxiety, depression and other mental health issues but since returning home I was declared mentally healthy and gained a full time job I have gained a better understanding of life, not only the good things but how to overcome the bad, and my own personal goal which I was searching for – happiness. I've become a better person knowing how to approach myself when things don't seem to be going my way. I realised that nothing is all that impossible after all I've accomplished."*

Another former Participant told his girlfriend that *"he would not return to her until she gave up drugs"*, as nothing was going to drag him down again to the misery that he had experienced before.

W.A.S.P. - Wilderness Adventure Survival Program, Delhuntie Park, Victoria

W.A.S.P is a wilderness-based program, based in Delhuntie Park in Victoria. It encompasses the elements of nature, adventure, and teamwork to promote personal growth and the development of life skills. Youth who are 'at risk' spend time in a supervised environment in the wilderness. Help and guidance is offered by caring, experienced staff to help youth amend their negative ways of living, including drug use. Hiking, mountain bike riding, rafting, abseiling, climbing and solo survival activities demonstrate to the youth just how strong they really are and the great strengths that can be attained with the support of others.

W.A.S.P presents a holistic personal experience - mental, physical, spiritual and emotional. As part of this program, youth at risk are challenged to make positive choices in life that will lead them to aim higher. Life principles are taught to the youth to help them cope when they are faced with obstacles in life. WASP challenges youth to step out of their comfort zones and experience personal growth.

Gary Christian, Research Director, Drug Free Australia supports Delhuntie because he says it is "never too early to begin modifying the behaviour of at-risk young adults. You keep them off drugs, which keeps them out of hospital, which keeps them in a job, which keeps them out of poverty."



And in Tasmania: Specialist Wilderness Program



The **Wilderness Program, (WiP), Specialist Courses** are operated through Sport and Recreation Tasmania and are done in conjunction with a service provider who sees the need to offer a course exclusively for their client target group.

This model allows individual courses to be tailored to suit the identified needs of specific groups and usually includes service provider staff. This value-adds to the client/practitioner relationships and provides valuable insights to assist future case management.

WiP currently provide Specialist Courses as an adjunctive to AOD rehabilitation programs, migrant and mental health services, for Aboriginals, women, diversionary and youth justice, remote/rural and drought affected communities, at risk teenagers and older adults.

Specialist courses vary in cost depending on duration, components and the area of community need being targeted. One example of a Specialist Course is the **'Can-Do'** program, designed for Alcohol and Drug rehabilitation client groups.

Can-Do courses venture into the outdoors from either a residential or remote camp base and undertake activities such as bushwalking, caving, kayaking, abseiling and/or rock climbing.

The course aims to expose internal barriers centring on trying new behaviours, completion and issues associated with feeling pressured. The course explores healthy risk-taking and through group initiative exercises creates opportunity to solve problems in new ways. **Can-Do** courses provide a very real boost to AOD client's self esteem and confidence levels while enabling them to tackle challenges they previously considered beyond their reach.

The Wilderness Program uses proven course plans, qualified and experienced course facilitators and provides all transport, food and specialist equipment as well as risk management and a 24 hr emergency contact.

Participants from previous **Can-Do** courses have testified that the experience assisted them to arrive at more realistic expectations for themselves.

Stop Press!

United Nations Drug Control Conventions Under Threat

This year is one of immense importance to the future of Drug Policy, both in Australia and globally.

Drug Free Australia has identified a very proactive drug legalisation movement, with vested interests, who are working to dismantle the United Nations Drug Control Conventions. These are agreements between countries that have operated since 1961, to ensure that a high level of cooperation exists to curb drug trafficking, protect our borders and to eliminate illegal production.

In March 2009, governments from hundreds of countries (including Australia) will convene at a high level United Nations Meeting in Vienna to review the UN's Drug Control Conventions.

Since most Australians do not want illicit drugs legalised, nor do they support their use, Drug Free Australia is committed to maintaining a strong focus, to ensure that the vital UN Conventions are protected at the March 2009 meeting.

2007 Illicit Drug Strategy Household Survey of Australian attitudes to illicit drug use:

- 99% don't want use of hard drugs accepted
- 95% don't want hard drugs legalised
- 94% don't want use of cannabis accepted
- 79% don't want cannabis legalised
- Most Australians want tougher penalties for drug dealers

We need YOU to assist to take a strong message to the 2009 UN meeting, by

becoming an online signatory to a petition that will really make a difference. It's known as SUNDIAL and to date over 5 million signatures have been obtained.



Just go to: www.ungassdrugs.org to support the United Nations and their drug control efforts.

DFA supporter base is expanding

Two major events have resulted in Drug Free Australia establishing links with individuals, families and anti-drug organisations that want to demonstrate their concern about the level of illicit drug use in Australia.

These are the **'Harm Prevention Supporter'** campaign and **DFA's formal response to the bi-partisan 'Winnable War on Drugs' report and recommendations.**

When combining these two, Drug Free Australia now has direct links with individuals, families totalling **362 individuals, 76 organisations representing 216,805 members.**

To sign up as a Harm Prevention Supporter, just fill in the coupon on below and send it to us. You can **post it** or **email** your support, to the addresses below.

Information about illicit drugs for Parents and Teachers available NOW - online!



RESOURCE LIST

Parent's resources:

<http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/internet/drugs/publishing.nsf/Content/resources-for-parents>

Young People's resources:

<http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/internet/drugs/publishing.nsf/Content/resources-for-young-people>

Other Web References:

Youth page:

<http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/internet/drugs/publishing.nsf/Content/youth-home>

Helplines are located at:

<http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/internet/drugs/publishing.nsf/Content/helping-hands-1>

Ordering multiple resources:

For Posters, CD's booklets etc, go to:

<http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/internet/drugs/publishing.nsf/Content/order-resources-1>

OR Call Toll Free: 1800 250 015

Kids Health:

http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/body/alcohol.html

For the cost of a postage stamp... You can make a difference

Become a Harm Prevention Supporter, simply by filling out the coupon below and mailing it to Drug Free Australia.

Declaration of Support

I/we wish to register my/our support for the campaign to refocus Australia's Illicit Drug Policy from 'harm minimisation to one of 'Harm Prevention'.



To become a Harm Prevention Supporter, go to www.drugfree.org.au or fill in this coupon

Name: Address: Postcode:

Phone: Email:

Number of people represented in your declaration

Signature of authorised person

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