

Christianne Andonovski

From: [REDACTED] <wordpress@wp.greens.org.au>
Sent: Thursday, 23 February 2017 9:50 AM
To: LRRCS
Subject: Drugs need to be treated as a health problem, not a criminal offense

RE: INQUIRY INTO DRUG LAW REFORM

Drugs need to be treated as a health problem, not a criminal offense

The evidence is in that the war on drugs is not working. The fact that Melbourne still doesn't have a safe injecting room is a clear message to addicts and those who have an addict in their life - you are worthless. My mother died last year from her addictions - in her case it was cigarettes, alcohol and anti-depressants. This came from a life of struggle after my father left her with three tiny children and a broken spirit. She was never able to overcome her addictions and in the years leading up to her death - lung cancer - I watched her battle with the shame she had from years of people like our government telling her that she was to blame. Even as she was in the hospital bed, in and out of consciousness, she still sat bolt upright one day and yelled out for someone to get her a bedpan, because this small, fragile woman, was also a kind, nurturing and incredibly loving mother. Even as she was dying she didn't want to leave a stain or a mess for anybody else to clean up. Her addictions killed her, and they killed her silently. She never asked us, her three children, for help. We didn't know the extent to which she was hooked. We saw the cigarettes and the alcohol but the anti-depressants and the gambling remained secret. It wasn't until after she died that I rummaged through her belongings and little by little my mother's story came to life. The addicts we have on the street have it worse off, because they are so beaten down by life that they often don't even have a safe place to go to use their drugs. My mother would sit in front of the computer screen, drunk off her face, cigarette in hand, spending hours trying to write up one email. After my father left her she almost lost the house, and my life could have been dramatically different. I am so lucky that my grandparents had the money and the capacity to step in and save the house for my family - otherwise I could very well be a drug user myself, living on the streets or in accommodation that provides no permanence or safety. The very least we can do for those who are using and don't have a space to go to, is to provide them with the most basic level of care - and that means somebody to watch over them whilst they inject the drug that will provide them with momentary relief from whatever pain they live with. The science tells us why addicts become addicts - it's an inability to create meaningful social bonds to people that turns us towards a substance instead. If we don't have people in our lives who love us and who we can turn to, then we will turn to whatever we need to get by. Addicts are traumatised, often from childhood and from growing up without any loving connections, then they grow up and we cast them out onto the street and tell them that the system hates that and that they are illegal and abusing and they just need to stop making bad choices. We don't offer them housing or adequate support, and then we scold them for not being able to pull themselves up by their boot-laces. It just isn't fair. Safe injecting rooms is the first step. It stops people who could easily be my mother, from crawling into a dumpster to hide away and inject. I imagine her there, alone, scared, and with an unregulated drug that could potentially kill her. If she has an overdose or something goes horribly wrong there is nobody there to save her. She is hiding away from all that shame instilled by our government and law enforcement agencies telling her she is a criminal. We need to start treating drug-addiction for what it actually is, and that's a health issue. And the most basic thing we can do is to provide our addicts with some compassion and healthcare. With connections to people who can offer them support and friendship and something to bond to other than the drug in their hand. We can do better. We need to.

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I'm happy for my submission and details to be made public.

