

WHEN LOVE IS NOT ENOUGH... A parent's perspective

by Thia Walter

When I first discovered that one of my beautiful sons was sticking needles in his arm I thought that I would die. I did not die. I survived and now I watch him and other young men and women like him die a little each day.

He has been addicted to Heroin for the last twelve years. I have retrieved my ancient TV set and other semi-valuable belongings from the pawn shop more often than I can count. I have rejoiced with him in hope after many recovery programs; held him in arms while he wept with despair each time he relapsed; nursed him through suicide attempts that seemed to be the only way to stop the destructive cycle of addiction; written to him in prison and welcomed him when he came out ready to provide what small supports I could with my limited finances. is only one young man among thousands who has been fighting a medical condition for which there is no real treatment in Canada. His addiction and that of thousands of other Canadians has caused untold harm to their families, their communities and themselves.

Drug addiction affects not only the Users but those who care for them. There is no set formula that parents, friends or lovers can apply in dealing with someone they love who takes drugs. It is hard to deal with all of those conflicting feelings. Confusion and a sense of betrayal are all mixed up with feelings of guilt and helplessness and anger. Always there is the anger. I have heard my own questions repeated over and over by many others who have in their lives someone who takes drugs .

***“ How could he be so selfish? “ ”Why would she steal from me?“ ”How could they choose to live in such conditions when they had decent homes and people who love them?“
“Why doesn't she get help?“
“If drugs are making their lives so miserable why don't they just quit?“***

Even the experts do not know why some people can experiment with drugs for years and walk away while others become lifelong addicts. Would any healthy person really choose to risk their lives from disease overdose and violence? Go without food and shelter? Sell everything they own? Commit crimes? Betray family friends and themselves over and over? Feel sick and powerless most of their waking hours? Of course not!

Addiction is not a choice. It is a health problem. Zero abstinence programs simply don't work in the long term for the majority of addicts. Methadone programs such as those offered in my community seem to be designed to control and punish the addict rather than treat the addiction and the results are very disappointing.

Only Heroin and Cocaine Maintenance Trials appear to offer any real solution to long term, hard core, drug addicted people like Steven. It is working in Switzerland and other European countries with amazing results. Unfortunately we are still a very long way from developing, as a nation, the courage it would take to institute such progressive measures. There are however, some emergency responses that would reduce the number of overdose deaths, the drug related diseases and injuries and some of the harm to the communities. Safe Fixing Sites and User Resource and Health Centres have already proven their worth in countries like Germany and Switzerland.

So far the only offering from our governments is to throw a great deal of money into what already exists and doesn't work with the added slow down of special attention to "community process".

This mother has learned a simple lesson in the last twelve years. Today's dead junkies don't need treatment tomorrow. Let's keep them alive now. Get them off the streets and into safe injection sites so that we can immediately begin to reduce the deaths and disease. Start Heroin and Cocaine maintenance trials immediately. Keep our sons and daughters and fathers and best friends alive long enough to benefit by future programs.

If your community is being damaged by the ravages of untreated drug addiction, if someone you care about is trapped in the horrors of drug addiction then join your voice to mine and demand immediate action. Together we can break the back of the international traffickers, and the thousands of hustlers, politicians and experts who are growing rich on our misery. Together we can save lives!

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