



P.L.E.A.S.E.

Parents Lobbying Empowerment Against Systematic Exclusion

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Prime Minister John Howard
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Dear Prime Minister Howard

Parents Lobbying Empowerment Against Systematic Exclusion is a group which was formed in 1998 which has serious concerns about the destruction of many of the lives of our children, as a result of them leaving the family home prematurely, often with encouragement from an outside influence. A large majority of these young people are living in environments which are dangerous to their health and survival in general. Those involved in the illegal drug trade and with criminal backgrounds are the major influences in our children's lives. Sadly, as many parents can attest to, no action can be taken by family members or agency staff to bring these children out of these life-threatening situations.

Prior to the recent election, our group contacted all the candidates of the major political parties in Australia seeking their views in relation to the serious issues which concern us. We did receive some replies, but sadly most were identical to each other, which may be an indication that the depths of despair facing parents are unimportant and of little concern to our elected officials.

P.L.E.A.S.E. fully acknowledges that there are some children living in family homes who face risk on a daily basis and have always supported the maximum levels of protection for them as well as the enforcement of relevant legislation against offenders. It has been the experience of group members and families across Australia who contact us however that increasing numbers of our young people are being exposed to dangerous situations and enticed to leave home while being paid social security benefits.

P.L.E.A.S.E. is now aware of two families who have had to bury their daughters as a result of them being unable to get their message through to public officials. Both these young ladies ran away from home when they were fourteen years of age, and obtained social security benefits which they used to become involved in the illegal drug industry. Families advised Centrelink staff about what was happening to their daughters but no action was taken. Both girls subsequently died from drug overdoses at exceptionally young ages. In an ironic twist, one of the mothers required time away from work to recover from the tragedy and rebuild her life, but was unable to obtain any sickness benefits through Centrelink because she had a small (approximately \$30000) superannuation benefit. This money however was not

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accessible to her. Parents believe they are fighting a battle to save their children against the odds of a welfare system, seemingly determined to destroy young lives.

State laws also play a major role in preventing parents from protecting their precious children. Advice has been received only last week that a mother at Caboolture has been charged with serious criminal offences, i.e. deprivation of liberty and assault. This lady's fifteen-year-old daughter was living in a drug house and information had been received that the daughter was suffering health problems. A friend of the mother went to the house while she waited in her car around the corner. The child left the house voluntarily and hugged and kissed her mother when they met up. The girl was taken to a hospital to be medically checked, but returned to the house she had been living at. The mother was subsequently visited by police who charged her with the offences listed above. She is due to appear in court on 19 November 2001. This is a sad reflection on the state of affairs for parents – a hospital and a medical check do not appear to be threatening in any form.

Mr Howard, on behalf of the parents of Australia, we seek your urgent attention to this growing problem, one which is costing our society dearly. Our young people are precious to their families; our families are the backbone of our community. The current situation cannot be allowed to continue unchecked. Apart from the enormous cost to taxpayers for funding these young people to be away from their family homes, Australia is losing the great potential and contribution these youth could have made to society. Australia and its families deserve much better.

We look forward to your early response.

Yours sincerely

Joan Strohfeldt
President

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