

Need new approach

Blacktown Alcohol and Other Drugs Family Services (BADFS) will use next week's annual general meeting to try to find new ways to approach the drug and alcohol problem.

It will hold a seminar on the issue of alcohol and other drug use in the context of family and community conflict.

Among the guest speakers will be NSW Health Department director of the Centre for Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Andrew Penman, NSW Council of Social Services director Gary Moore, NSW Family Support Services Association training and resources co-ordinator Louise Mulrone and BADFS coordinator Tirrania Suhood.

Tirrania said that current strategies focused on substance use and the law.

"We need to look at relationship issues," she said. "We need to look at the impact of drug use on the family."

Tirrania said there needed to be a look at the impact drug use had on the family, how the family reacted to the issue, how it affected the family's view of that person and the person's view of themselves.

"If we view things that way we may come up with some different answers instead of just focusing on the law," she said. "It's not about blame, it's about viewing things differently."

Tirrania said that community organisations had already expressed an interest in participating.

Mr Ted Harris, father of a drug addict, agrees.

He started attending the centre several months ago.

"When my son became an addict I didn't know how to handle him and the effects of the drugs," Mr Harris said. "I thought drug addicts were no good and was ready to kick him out."

"Instead, the centre helped me handle the problem and see both sides. It's a case of he has a problem, let's try to help."

Mr Harris said he just kept giving his son the love and support he needed.

He said things were improving and he hoped that his son would be able to get off methadone.

A 16-year-old centre participant and former drug addict, known only as John, also would like to see the issues of the damage done to the family and how the family's reaction could make things worse rather than better.

The former marijuana, butane gas and petrol user said the issue came to a head after he was suspended from school for drug use the second time.

His principal suggested he see a counsellor, so he attended BADFS.

"I was planning on running away from home," he said. "The support of family and friends is important."

"Mom still worries, but that's all in the past. I haven't touched anything."

John said he planned to go to TAFE next year to complete his Higher School Certificate.

Tirrania said that she was sometimes surprised by the reactions of some parents when they found out their children used drugs.

"They want the problem fixed, but don't necessarily want to be involved," she said.

"But they can be part of the problem and can perpetuate it."

"That is why we want to hold a seminar on the issue."

The annual general meeting and seminar will be held at Blacktown Workers Club on Wednesday, December 3, from 2pm.