

## Association of Participating Service Users (APSU)

APSU believes that individuals who use alcohol and other drug treatment services are the reason the system exists; their needs, strengths and expertise should drive the system. APSU is run by and for people who use or have used services.

We invite you to join us in having a say. We need your help to give us all a fair go. If you would like to become a member, (at no cost), please fill out the form below.

### Membership Application

I wish to become a member of APSU. I would like to:

- Receive the quarterly FLIPSIDE newsletter  
 Be sent information about how to become involved.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Are you:  service provider  service user  family member  other \_\_\_\_\_

#### CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

*All personal details obtained by APSU will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes outlined above. Personal details will not be given out by APSU to other members.*

Mail to:  
The Association of Participating Service Users,  
140 Grange Road, Carnegie 3163.

# FLIPSIDE

The Association of Participating Service Users

SPRING NEWSLETTER 07



# PISSED

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Check out our new website  
at [www.sharc.org.au](http://www.sharc.org.au)  
and click on APSU

Editing: Miriam and Regina. Front cover: John T  
Thanks to all those who contributed, especially our  
friends at Port Phillip and Mehmet for the artwork.

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in the articles contained  
in the Newsletter do not necessarily represent the views and  
opinions of APSU.

Please send any articles you would  
like to see in Flipside via email to  
[apsu.sharc.org.au](mailto:apsu.sharc.org.au) or by mail to  
140 Grange Road, Carnegie, 3163  
Telephone: 9573 1736 ABN: 18052525948

## DEAR ALCOHOL

### IT'S HARD FOR ME TO WRITE THIS LETTER TO YOU BECAUSE I HAVE SO MANY MIXED FEELINGS TOWARDS YOU.

Since we met when I was a teenager, you have been a constant companion, always there for me through the good times and the bad. And many times I relied on you to get me through. When I was sad and lonely, you took hold of me and for the night or a few days, you dulled my pain and helped me forget why I was so sad or lonely. But when I woke up you were gone and I came looking for you again to help me. I was selfish really, I wanted you to help me feel better and you did, but only until you were gone again. There were times when I thought I couldn't live without you, so for the love of you I abandoned my friends and my family. I remember one night I even chose you over my own daughter, and at the time, I let you convince me that 'It's all right, she'll never know', but she did, and the next day I felt terrible, sick to the pit of my stomach. How could I miss the joy, the excitement, of her first Christmas and become so blinded by you? I let you steal a precious memory that I'll never ever get back. Alcohol, I hated you for that and I hated myself more. I felt so bad that I came looking for you again and as usual, you made me forget how bad I felt and I did it again.

Alcohol, I let you into my life and I know it's my fault that I let you do the things you did to me, but I was naive and gullible; I didn't know you were stealing from me my dignity, my health, my money, my self esteem; you even stole some

of my intelligence, and what's worse, I let you! For God's sake, what was I thinking?

My friends and my family warned me about you, but I didn't listen. They said 'Alcohol is dangerous.' and 'be careful, you'll get led astray.' But I didn't listen; I was in love with you.

You were everywhere I went. You were on TV., in the newspapers, at every BBQ or party I went to. Everything revolved around alcohol, at the footy, at the cricket, every wedding, you were even at funerals, helping people celebrate and forget. You are an icon, an ethos, a cultural experience, and I let you seduce me.

You have hurt me so much. Do you remember when I went to get you, after spending hours with you already and I wrote my car off? I could have killed myself or someone else, but we didn't care. Or what about the time I let you confuse me about what was being said and I picked a fight with some poor bastard who broke my arm. I lost my job because of that. Do you remember the night you and I stayed at my mate's place and I fell asleep on a cushion in front of the heater? It caught fire and filled the house with smoke and if it wasn't for my mate dragging me outside, we both would have died, him and I. Fuck! Alcohol, how many times have you nearly killed me? How many jobs have I lost because of you? You nearly destroyed my life.

Alcohol you were the reason my mum lived in a violent house and it was because of you, alcohol, that she was abused. You ruined my Grandfather's life, my mum's, her mother's and her brothers' and sisters'. Even my father could not escape you. He was so ashamed by you that he could never reach his full potential and hid with you, yes you alcohol, so that no one would know how much he loved you. How dysfunctional has our family become because of you? Mum hates you because of what you did to her dad and to my dad and there's me, extolling your virtues and defending you. I was drunk with you alcohol and although I love you, you are poison to me. Your insidious nature tricks me into believing 'It'll be different this time', but it never is.

Alcohol, I had to give you up and get you out of my life. It hasn't been easy, but I'm better off without you. We abused each other for so long that I forgot who I was before you, and I'm not bad, I know that now. It's only been six months, but already I'm making plans for the future. It took a lot of courage to call some of the people I've hurt with you, but you know what, they don't hate me, they hate you. I have some money now and I buy myself all the things you denied me and it feels good. I feel good. It'll take a while to repair the damage I did, but that's ok, I've got time. I know I'll see you around, and others might be able to tolerate you, but I know now, I cannot. So for the first time, and for me, for my father and my grandfather and for my daughter. Its time to say goodbye.

**B.J.E.**

*P.S. Alcohol, I finally figured it out – it's not me, it's you.*

### I AM YOUR WORST ENEMY

I am more powerful than the  
combined armies of the world.

I have destroyed more men than  
all the wars of the nations.

I have caused more accidents  
and wrecked more homes  
than all the floods, tornadoes and  
hurricanes put together.

I am the world's slickest thief,  
I steal millions of dollars  
each year.

I find my victims among  
the rich and the poor alike,  
the young and the old,  
the strong and the weak.

I loom up to such proportions  
that I cast a shadow  
over every field of labour.

I am relentless, insidious,  
unpredictable.

I am everywhere – in the home,  
on the street, in the factory,  
in the office, on the sea,  
in the air.

I bring sickness, poverty  
and death.

I give nothing and take all.

I am your worst enemy –  
I am alcohol.

# Alcoholics Anonymous

THERE ARE NUMEROUS SOURCES OF HELP FOR PEOPLE WITH A DRINKING PROBLEM. THEY CAN SEEK TREATMENT FROM THEIR GP, WHO MAY SUGGEST A PSYCHIATRIST, A PSYCHOLOGIST OR A SPECIALIST COUNSELLOR, ANY ONE OF WHOM WILL OFFER PSYCHOTHERAPY ON VARYING LEVELS AT VARYING COST. THIS MAY WELL BE SUCCESSFUL FOR PEOPLE WITH A PHYSICAL ADDICTION, WHO AFTERWARDS MAY BE ABLE TO DRINK SOCIALLY WITHOUT ILL EFFECT.

Help is also available from organisations such as Alcoholics Anonymous. This group draws a distinction between a physical addiction and alcoholism, which it defines as a disease with two components – physical addiction/allergy coupled with a mental obsession/compulsion. This means a sufferer feels the need to drink in order to deal with his/her life. Once they start to drink, the allergy takes over and they quickly become a “hopeless drunk”. Their’s is a thirst which all the alcohol in the world will not satisfy.

While it is a condition that can be compared with other types of allergies, there are considerable differences. Whereas a person who is allergic to, say, mushrooms, can easily control the problem by not eating them, an alcoholic finds him or herself unable to avoid drinking. Such people may have tried to give up, promised themselves or others that they will give up, had all sorts of treatment – and still been unable to give up successfully. They may have lost jobs, relationships and friends. This leads to low self-esteem, which in turn leads to depression and, in some cases, suicide. The problem is usually rooted in resentments, fears and guilt feelings that the alcoholic seeks to avoid or ameliorate by drinking.

There are many misconceptions about AA, and the only way for people to find out what it really is about is to go along and see for themselves. However, it can be said that members of AA are people from all walks of life and all social situations and backgrounds who have discovered and conceded that they cannot control alcohol. They have learned that they must live without it if they are to avoid disaster for themselves and those close to them. With local groups in thousands

of communities, they are part of an international fellowship with members in 110 countries. They have one primary purpose – to stay sober and assist others who seek help to achieve sobriety.

They are not reformers and are not allied with any group, cause or religion. There is no requirement for membership except a desire to stop drinking, and membership is informal – people are not proposed or seconded, they simply decide to join. There are no dues or fees. The fellowship does not accept outside contributions, but is self-supporting through contributions from members. Such contributions are voluntary and there is even an annual limit to how much any individual can contribute.

The focus of AA is on staying sober – which is achieved through a 12-step program that helps people to lead healthy lives and overcome the obsession with alcohol as an avoidance mechanism or substitute for dealing with their problems.

The twelve step fellowships suggest that their members undertake the following 12 steps to achieve and maintain abstinence.

## **The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous**

- 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.**
- 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**
- 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.**
- 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**
- 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

**6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.**

**7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.**

**8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.**

**9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.**

**10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.**

**11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.**

**12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

It is important to note that the steps are suggested as a means of recovery. However, this is generally taken to mean that anyone who suffers from the disease/illness/condition of alcoholism is unlikely to recover unless they follow the program or do something very similar.

The first three steps concentrate on getting things right with the “higher power” – establishing a relationship with something an individual can be comfortable with and deciding to hand over the controls of his/her life to it, after first admitting that he/she can’t do it by themselves.

The references to God are a problem for many people. It’s important to bear in mind that the steps were formulated in the United States of the 1930s-40s, when this terminology was normal and accepted by virtually everyone. While the program is unashamedly spiritual in nature, religion plays no part unless a member chooses a particular religious path. The spiritual nature is simply a belief that, as alcoholics cannot control their drinking under their own power, they need help from a higher power. This can be anything from God to nature, from a life force to the fellowship as a whole or the members of a local or “home” group.

Steps 4 to 9 involve making things right with others. The theory is often expressed as follows:

An alcoholic/addict can’t afford the luxury of “baggage” that other people might be able to manage without trouble. If they don’t get rid of it,

by facing up to it and admitting where they were at fault – usually be being selfish/self-centred/self-seeking, dishonest, or inconsiderate of others – they are almost certain to drink again.

While some people find it possible to stay sober without taking these steps, they are often unhappy about their situation, ie:

- still fearful of meeting certain people;
- unable to stand up straight and look the world in the eye.

This makes it particularly difficult to stay sober. Steps 10 to 12 involve consolidation – continuing to get rid of baggage as it accumulates (no one is perfect, after all) and working to help others, which has been demonstrated to have a beneficial effect on the helper.

AA meetings come in a variety of forms, from discussion groups where members try to help each other with their problems, to ID meetings, where members identify themselves as alcoholic and talk about their lives, their drinking, how they changed their behaviour and what life is like for them since changing. The one thing everyone who attends notices is the sense of welcoming understanding.

Many people who have remained with AA for long periods say this program has been the reason they have been able to lead successful, fulfilling lives in sobriety.

**Graham B**

For more information or to find out about meetings, call AA in Melbourne on 03 9600 4511 or look up [www.aa.org.au](http://www.aa.org.au)

# The ugly death of a drunken motorist

ONE OF US WILL DIE TONIGHT. IT WILL BE AN UGLY DEATH. IT WILL BE A USELESS DEATH. YOU PROBABLY WON'T GIVE A DAMN. HOW CAN I MAKE THE DEATH OF AN ACCIDENT VICTIM MEAN ANYTHING MORE THAN A STATISTIC OR NEWSPAPER HEADLINE TO YOU?

How can I make you understand what it's like to pull a lifeless but warm corpse reeking of grog from a car that has bulldozed into a telegraph pole? How can I show you the bits of vomit that drip off dead passengers, ejected from their bellies as their last act of consciousness? How dare I speak of the mire that stains the clothes of the dead? Because that is the way we humans die. Urinating in fear, blood, mire, vomit and grog – these are the last rites of the average accident victim.

Then there are the screams, the song of the wounded, dying and the dead. My own mind is scarred with such horror. Do not suppose it's melodrama. It is a perversity committed on life that can never be captured ruthlessly and honestly enough on paper.

I remember working one New Year's night, the police radio cracked into life. A car had rammed into a tree. Two passengers, one male, one female. The male was dead, the female thought to be dying. What confronted me is to this day a recurring nightmare. I cannot even share it easily with myself. The car had been concertinaed into half its normal size. The occupants were still trapped inside. The girl slumped on her dead companion's chest. He had his arm around her; his arm was raised and pinned up by the deformed metal. The arm was thus in drinking position and the dead hand held a beer bottle. The bottle was rammed down his throat. Slivers of glass had sliced through his throat. The neck of the bottle protruded from the base of his own neck. His eyes were open. They were white with fear, and they were

white with death. They were white with the eyes of an animal shot in the head at point blank range. I vomited. I could smell their blood and I could smell the alcohol. The night destroyed me.

I had thought we were all invincible. I had thought death crept only into upstairs bedrooms to close the eyes of the aged. I never stopped to think it hurtled into trees at 100 km/h. I never stopped to think of mothers drowning in hysteria, being brought to identify their dead children, beating their chests and pulling their hair. The mother of this boy did. The car had crashed only a couple of hundred metres from his home. She came running down the street like a woman possessed. She bit and fought with the ambulance men, she wanted to tear the bottle from his throat. She was screaming. And screaming. She couldn't understand why her son wouldn't answer her. 'Take the bottle out of him!' She seemed not to notice that his throat was cut and that he was dead. Her mother's heart had punctured her mother's eyes. He was buried with most of the bottle buried in his throat. The night destroyed her. But her night will last a lifetime.

This is a pantomime of death we repeat nightly. The longest running show on earth with a willing cast of thousands. Like drunken lemmings, we drink and drive; drink and drive. Sometimes the guilty kill themselves. More often they kill the innocent. We are impervious to death, because we are protected from it's obscenities. We don't see the casualty sections of our hospitals that sometimes look like the inside of abattoirs. We don't see the contents of the cranium spilling

out on to pillows. We don't see the accident victims twitching in the throes of death, life force diminishing. We are happy to be our own butchers, our own murderers, are happy to premeditate the killing of innocent people. We are happy to drink to excess and jump behind the wheel of a car, as potent a weapon as a machine-gun. And if we survive the evening, we are happy to sit down to dinner the next evening and tat-tat over the carnage of Northern Ireland.

So long as we don't see the torn flesh and the severed limbs bleeding in their twisted, steel tombs, we're right. So long as we don't see the bodies being pulled like broken puppets from the car wrecks or shoveled off the asphalt, we're right. Leave it to the ambulance men to handle those thankless, lifeless corpses. They, the men who weep anger as well as tears for this senseless killing.

It's not tasteful for television newsreels to record the moans and screams of the injured and its not tasteful for newspaper photographs to feature corpses at accidents. It's not tasteful to write about it because, who wants to read about it? We all

know it goes on. What we need is some bloody tastelessness. You need to hear the screams. You need to see the dead sprawled open-legged, open-mouthed and without dignity on our roads. You need to see the blood spurting, broken children who will never be mended, who will never grow up, cut down by drunkards. You need to visit the abattoirs that we call casualty. You need to understand that it COULD and WILL happen to you if you don't take care. You need to understand that you have no right to jeopardize yourself or anyone else and that if you do, you are as culpable as anyone who lies in wait to kill.

If you must go out and drink, leave your car keys at home.

**BJE**

## Dual Diagnosis Self Help Group

A big welcome to everyone who may be interested in attending the DUAL DIAGNOSIS SELF HELP GROUP. Anyone who has accessed alcohol and drug and mental health services or who has or is experiencing substance abuse and mental health issues like depression/ anxiety/ post traumatic Stress/ bi-polar etc is welcome.

So, if you've ever struggled with these issues or are struggling, you don't have to 'go it alone'. Here we provide a non-judgmental, safe forum to help ourselves and each other be heard and heal amongst peers. Good news about The Dual Diagnosis Self Help Group – it has been running for nearly one year! Much thanks to all those who have put in so much time and effort to get it up and running and keep it going.

**Meeting: Monday 10:30am,  
Turning Point, 54-62 Gertrude St, Fitzroy  
Phone: 0400 278 495 or (03) 9573 1710**

# Custodial Nursing – Responding to the Challenge

IN RESPONSE TO THE PRISONS AND POLICE CELLS ISSUE OF FLIPSIDE, THE CUSTODIAL MEDICINE UNIT CONTACTED APSU, CONCERNED ABOUT THE TREATMENT DESCRIBED IN THE ARTICLES. THEY WANTED TO LET US KNOW ABOUT THEIR SERVICE, THAT THINGS HAD IMPROVED. THE UNIT ALSO WANTED TO HEAR ABOUT ANY CONCERNS PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN IN POLICE CUSTODY STILL HAVE AND SO WE ARE SENDING A REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNIT'S TEAM MEETING.

Entering custody is stressful and potentially hazardous for people who use drugs or drink heavily. It can be dangerous if the drug withdrawal is poorly managed. There are nurses at major metropolitan and regional police stations to meet the challenge of keeping people safe.

Nurses in police stations ensure that people in custody get access to appropriate health care when they need it. Historically, police have relied on local medical practitioners to attend police stations when police think a person is ill. Having nurses in the major centres makes the service more pro-active and sensitive to individual needs.

The Department of Human Services provides Victoria Police with additional funding to extend alcohol and drug treatment services to prisoners in police custody. The initiative, called the "Custodial Health and Alcohol & Drug Nurses" (CHAD) Project, arose out of the 2001 Victorian Government Drug Initiative. The steering committee represents drug treatment agencies, health and welfare services, Department of Human Services and Victoria Police.

CHAD Nurses offer a comprehensive health assessment to people held in police custody within 48 hrs. The assessment takes in all aspects of the individual's welfare, medical, psychiatric and/or drug and alcohol issues. The focus is on managing the risks of being in custody, where there is restricted access to health services.

Once the person has been assessed and their issues and needs identified, a care plan is devised in consultation with a Custodial Medical Officer and the police. The CHAD Nurses work closely with the Custodial Medical Officers, who are

often local GP's. The Custodial Medical Officers prescribe medications for people in custody. Often they continue the person's regular prescribed medications, and/or they initiate treatment for alcohol or other drug withdrawal, medical and psychiatric conditions.

If someone is on a legitimate course of treatment, they are entitled to continue it. A local pharmacist will deliver Substitution Pharmacotherapies such as methadone, buprenorphine or suboxone. Whilst in police custody, the person's community doctor continues as the prescriber. We just arrange to change pharmacies. If the prescriber is not available, there can be a delay in getting a new prescription. If the prescriber is unavailable, the person will be treated for drug withdrawal until their medication can be arranged.

CHAD Nurses liaise with community treatment providers to make sure they understand the individual's needs. This may include mental health services, GP's, community drug and alcohol treatment agencies, and any other support services involved with the client. The nurse can also make referrals to external agencies if the person is to be released back into the community. They can help people find methadone prescribers, pharmacies, withdrawal services, or court based services such as CREDIT bail or the Mental Health Court Liaison Service. If the person is going to prison, referral is made to the appropriate services in the gaol.

The CHAD Nurses work closely with the police members to develop a management plan for everyone they see. This provides a good opportunity to educate the police about issues affecting people

## SOBER NOW

My name is John T and I'm 48 years old in a couple of weeks. It took me a very long time to accept that I have a problem with alcohol.

I used to think that everything was the problem, that if I drove into the path of the police rotten drunk, it was their fault. I was ok. Landing back in boy's homes and jail on numerous occasions, always being released on dry 'black' paroles, thinking that the system was having a go at me, I didn't realise that most of the time I was drunk or stoned or both when pinched. Before being released, all I thought about was celebrating with a drink and my mates and the same old shit eventuated as in years before. But I never had a problem with alcohol! Hot weather was beer, cold weather, whisky, always for the affect – blotto.

When I first ever drank at 13, I felt part of everything, accepted by my peers, confident. The speed became a big part of my ongoing years. I could drink more and not get too pissed. So now I needed more money and so back to prison. Not a good thief as you can picture. I was in a rehab after being last released from jail ten years previously, and someone said I might need to look at my drinking and drug problem. My reaction was, 'the only problem I have is that I don't get enough of them'.

As years went on I stayed sober via AA and NA meetings for periods of time, and through my experience, having just one drink is nothing,

I quench my thirst but me, that's not enough and I always end up with a fit in my arm by the end of the day. For me, crime goes with that parcel of alcohol and drugs.

I've been sober and clean now for ten months (I've been sober and clean for 2 years twice). This sobriety is so fulfilling and I don't have one of anything. I think about it but I don't entertain the thought. I never want to go back to where I've been. I have a solution which gives me confidence in myself and most of all in my new life away from the one I used to think was normal. It was a dead life, longer prison sentences, constant drama, fear and everyone else's fault. I love my new life today: Single parent for over seven years, I have my finger in three part time jobs, I have a lot of gratitude, I'm a responsible member of society, even pay car insurance. I'm down to vote in my area. I'm finally happy to be sober and clean.

There is always hope. As long as I don't have that first drink or that first drug and keep myself sane, remembering it's not ok to have that first drink, I'm doing ok. Thanks to all who could when I couldn't.

John T

## Re-negotiating Relationships

**This is a service for people coming out of prison and their family and friends. It offers:**

- a two hour group session in which people explore the nature of their relationships with themselves and others
- follow up counselling and peer based support
- helpline support for family members from 9-5 Mon to Fri
- Action for Recovery(ARC) – a six week education program
- Help with getting the help that is needed such as financial, counselling legal and other services.

**Contact:**

SHARC(Self Help Addiction Resource Centre)  
**(03) 9573 1734**

SHARC Family Drug Help  
(program line) **(03) 9573 1770**

Alcohol and Other Drug Family Support Service **(03) 9573 1754**

# A DRUG IS A DRUG IS A DRUG

In an inner city warehouse in Melbourne, a drug is manufactured. The drug will be packaged and delivered to drug dealers all over Melbourne. It will be sold on street corners to adults and to the young. The dealers don't care how much havoc is wreaked. The money hungry drug manufacturers don't care that families are ruined, that young people overdose, that pregnant women give birth to brain damaged babies. The dealers are brazen, even selling their evil substance in broad daylight.

In an office in town, behind a reputable façade, immoral men in expensive suits discuss ways of getting more children hooked on their product.

In a busy hospital emergency department, a team of doctors work on a teenager who has overdosed, while a fight breaks out in the waiting room between two people high on the drug.

What is this drug that terrorizes our community? Ice? Cannabis? Heroin? No, it's one of the oldest drugs known to mankind – alcohol. Yep, alcohol!

Alcohol is a huge business in Australia. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive, or mood-changing, recreational drug in the nation. It is an accepted and often integral part of most social occasions. In a 2004 survey,

over 80 of people had consumed alcohol in the last year, with 11% of males and 6% of females drinking daily (AIHW, 2005)

The Australian bureau of Statistics says about 13 per cent of adult Australians (about two million people) drink at a risky or high-risk level for harm in the long term, while about 34 per cent drink at a risky or high-risk level for harm in the short term. Young people aged 18 to 24 years have the riskiest drinking patterns. Almost two-thirds of these Australians drink at a risky or high-risk level for harm in the short term (ABS, 2006) (The risky level for men is regarded as more than four 100ml glasses of wine, four pots of beer or four nips of spirits a day, no more than five times a week. For women it is half that).

So, what is the problem with drinking at risky levels? In the short term, alcohol can cause overdose, injury or death. Hundreds of young people are admitted to hospital for alcoholic overdoses each year (ADF, 2003). The likelihood of people reporting an injury increases with the risk level of drinking (ABS, 2003) Alcohol is the main cause of death on Australian Roads (ABS, 2006) Drinking heavily over a long period of time can cause harm to a person's brain and liver functioning and contribute to depression, relationship difficulties and hence quality of life. It can also increase the risk of developing cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, cognitive problems, dementia and alcohol dependence (NHMRC, 2001). There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption for pregnant women, with alcohol causing Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, a spectrum of brain damage in the newborn. (Whitehall, 2007).

Risky and high-risk alcohol consumption is estimated to cause more than 3000 deaths each year (AIHW, 2006). Alcohol is responsible for almost five per cent of the total disease burden in Australia and costs the Australian community more than \$7.5 billion each year (ABS, 2006). While the cost is said to be offset by the \$2.5 billion dollars saved because of alcohol's health benefits, a review of the evidence has cast serious doubt on alcohol having any protective effects (Fillmore et al, 2006). Alcohol is a dangerous drug, causing more damage in Australia than all illegal drugs combined, illicit drugs being responsible for only two percent of the disease burden in Australia (AIHW, 2006). We lock up people who use or sell

other drugs, while those that manufacture and sell alcohol are free to make massive amounts of money. We even allow the alcohol industry to advertise to children (DIC, 2006). In fact, in Victoria, it's not even illegal for parents to provide this drug to their own and other people's children.

Alcohol is an enormous problem for individuals, their families and the whole community but, because it is a legal and widely accepted drug, most people discount its impact.

Graham/Miriam

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## LUKE'S STORY

In a recent issue of *Flipside*, Luke told the story of the atrocious treatment he received whilst in a police cell. Although still young (ish), his hands were unable to hold a pen long enough to write this himself and so I was privileged to have Luke relay his story to me while I typed it. It was obvious that the events he described still troubled him, but he knew that telling this story was the beginning of healing. He was determined to change his life, and was well on the way to doing so. He was proud that he hadn't been to jail for over ten years. Luke

wanted to contribute to the world, to pass on his experience in the hope that he might be able to prevent others from making the same mistakes he did. Luke was part of APSU's focus groups for the Charter of Rights for People Who Use Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services and participated in the service user consultations for the Victorian Department of Human Service's Blueprint Discussion Paper. The last time I saw him was in an interview for our Peer Helper training course. Sadly, Luke died shortly before the course began. We at APSU will miss him. May he rest in peace.

Miriam – on behalf of APSU

## YOU LOUSY THIEF

Alcohol you lousy thief,  
First you gave me joy  
Then you gave me grief.  
You took my youth,  
my dreams & more  
You left me retching on the floor.  
You took my money  
& piece by piece my mind.  
You held me up  
& kept me behind.  
While friends moved ahead  
You filled me with dread.  
You kept me in a prison

Inside my head.  
The glamour, the glitz,  
The promise of the good life,  
Were all just lies & illusions  
Masking the trouble & strife.  
I don't want to know you.  
You've taken too much.  
My life is much better without you.  
I don't need you as a crutch.  
Now I'm free to dream  
& make those dreams become real.  
Most of the time I'm happy.  
Today it's more than grief I feel.