

Launch of the Narcotics Anonymous Survey

24 November 2005

Jim Anderton's Speeches

Speaking about our vices, the brilliant Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung said,

"Every form of addiction is bad, no matter whether the narcotic be alcohol or morphine or idealism."

Well...we all have our share of idealism. We might have an ideal of freeing our world from addiction. But we all have our realism, too. The realist believes in minimising addiction and helping others in recovery from addiction.

The work of the NA fellowship is an example of the realistic and the ideal. The survey we are here to launch today shows the power and potential of the role NA plays. It is a support group for those coming into recovery and wanting to stay off drugs.

The majority of those interviewed got clean at a treatment service or through attending NA. Support makes a difference. The support and understanding of others who have been there makes a difference.

So to those of you who work in recovery, I acknowledge the contribution you make. Many of you have come here from around New Zealand. I acknowledge your commitment to this project and the wider community of NA.

Just as addiction is active everywhere, so too is NA. It is present in sixty countries. There is a worldwide fellowship. It's no surprise the survey has been in a number of other countries.

I read a story from an overseas newspaper about NA's international work. It was a report from Iran, whose people have the misfortune - according to the UN - of the highest rate of heroin and opium addiction per head of population in the world. Twenty percent of the Iranian population aged 15-60 is involved in drug abuse.

This is not to have a go at Iran -- there are other countries, including our own, who have a crisis with addiction. It was just the scene of a fascinating story about the work of NA. **Narcotics Anonymous** there in Iran is the only truly independent NGO. It is so popular it has to hold its meetings in public parks.

This has led to further successes - one addict sleeping in a park saw a meeting underway and wandered over to see what the fuss was about. He ended up joining, cleaned himself up and was restored to his former professional life.

There are many stories we can tell of success here in New Zealand. They are inspiring. For the most part, success simply consists of humble, ordinary people having the courage to rebuild their lives and recover. It consists of the support and fellowship recovering addicts provide each other. If we are going to create more successes, then we need to know as much as we can about addiction.

The harm addiction causes, the people and families it affects, the time it takes for addicts to enter recovery. There is great value in gathering information from the people who actually experience addiction and the associated harm. The data we collect is important - and so too are the personal stories of individuals.

Your survey tells me our treatment systems are not a "cure".

When you hear the personal stories of recovering addicts, you discover treatment is a beginning. The recovery process often requires a commitment for a long, difficult haul.

The cost of addiction can be seen in the health sector, in education, employment, welfare and criminal justice. Over ninety percent of prison inmates have some kind of alcohol or drug addiction. Addiction has a financial cost. It affects individuals, families, communities, companies and employers. So we all have something to learn and to gain from better knowledge, better treatment and better recovery success rates.

We would all do well to understand the inspirational philosophy of the NA fellowship. It is an organisation that accepts people as they come to it. It is a case of ordinary people quietly helping others.

That is a model for New Zealand. Where people can be accepted for who they are. Where we work together to be the best we can be.

I want New Zealand to be a softer place. I want ours to be a caring country. People make mistakes. We shouldn't allow them to be crushed for their mistakes. And if someone is prepared to take responsibility and have the courage to stick out the hard path of recovery, we ought to be doing our bit to stand alongside them.

This Labour-Progressive coalition government is committed to minimising the harm caused by alcohol and other drugs. Around \$80M is spent to provide treatment services and initiatives to improve the workforce and research. In June this year the second mental health and addiction plan, Te Tahuhu, was launched. It identified addiction as one of the ten leading action priorities.

This survey supports the valuable work being done. The survey reinforces the experience of NA over its long history...that recovery is best sustained through commitment to personal recovery and the support of others of a like mind.

Narcotics Anonymous is being proactive in the public arena in the launch of this survey. That is an obviously sensitive role for an organisation that by definition is discreet.

So thank you for your hard work producing the survey. It gives me great pleasure to host this launch and to have the opportunity to congratulate NA on its work.