

ADJOURNMENT (Drugs) – 25th November 2008

Mrs VALE (Hughes) (10:27 PM) —Today, for many for young people across Australia, illicit drug use is a deadly problem. While we are all well aware of the devastation that drugs can cause individuals, their families and our community, many including myself fear that their use has become endemic. We must send young Australians the clear message that illegal drug use is deadly and dangerous and that it endangers their future careers and their future happiness. We must also offer our young people a positive direction and educate them appropriately about the real dangers of drug use and especially inform them of the nature of addiction.

The story in yesterday's *Daily Telegraph* about teenage students being given access to a brochure called *A User's Guide to Speed* while attending a New South Wales state government promoted antidrug and alcohol program is not helpful. The brochure includes tips like, 'If you don't already have a reliable dealer, try to find one and stick with them' and, further, 'When you're using a new batch of speed, only try a little at first—you can always use the rest later if you need to'. This is a shocking demonstration of how a completely misguided harm-minimisation approach by the Labor government in New South Wales is failing our young people and their families.

This is not the first case in New South Wales. Former New South Wales Labor health minister, Reba Meagher, ordered the pulping of another controversial brochure in June this year. Six months later, Reba Meagher is gone but that very same brochure is still in circulation, along with this new material already mentioned. The person who found this material and brought it to the attention of the public through the media is the highly respected drug campaigner, Darren Marton. Darren is the founder of the No-Way Campaign and will be coming to Parliament House tomorrow to encourage the federal government to commit to the war on drugs. He will also be meeting with Senator Cormann, shadow parliamentary secretary for health administration; the member for Mackellar, who chaired a House of Representatives inquiry into illicit drugs last year; and the member for Riverina, who chaired a parliamentary inquiry into drug abuse a few years ago.

Darren Marton is no ordinary antidrugs campaigner. He is well placed to comment on substance abuse, having succumbed at an early age to the addiction of illicit drugs, which gradually ruined his promising career in the sports of rugby league and water polo. As a rising young sports star, Darren began smoking cannabis in high school but, as so often happens, progressed to heavier drugs and by his early 20s was addicted to heroin. After experiencing a living hell over the next 20 years, which included stints in jail and psychiatric wards, Darren finally experienced the terrors of crystal methamphetamine, more commonly known as ice. However, in 2004, after a great personal struggle, enduring loneliness and great unhappiness in his life, Darren found an inner strength and managed to turn his life around. He then vowed to use his own life experience to share with young people the dangers he personally found were the consequences of illicit drug use.

I was privileged to attend the launch of Darren Marton's No-Way Campaign at the Cronulla Sharks about three years ago and heard him give a deep and moving account of the impact of drugs on his life. Darren was a gifted young athlete who had the world at his feet. He was champion at shot-put, water polo and butterfly. He played junior representative football with the Cronulla Sharks in New South Wales and accepted a scholarship with the Sharks at the age of 16. Before that he had been a state rep player and, over a period of nine years, had captained his junior rugby league football team, the GyMEA Gorillas, to a record nine premierships, all before losing it to drugs. However, Darren will say that he lost more to drugs than just his bright future in sport; he lost his self-esteem, his self-confidence and his opportunity for a good education and the promise of a brilliant career. Worst of all, he almost lost his mother and father.

I would like to pay tribute to the work that Darren is doing, to his courage and determination in giving up drugs and to his commitment to creating a confronting and powerful campaign to warn our precious young Australians of the deadly dangers of drug use. Darren Marton should not be alone in his efforts to encourage young people to fulfil their dreams. We all have a duty to educate our young people about the ramifications of illicit drug use. Just like we would not allow our children to play in the traffic, we should be prepared to take a zero tolerance approach to this insidious curse that wrecks the lives of so many young Australians. I look forward to welcoming Darren Marton of the No-Way Campaign to Parliament House tomorrow.