



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

RECEPTION FOR DRUG AND ALCOHOL RECOVERY PROFESSIONALS

Thursday 8th August 2019

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this afternoon.

Tony and I welcome you all to Government House.

One of the many joys of this role is that, in addition to responding to requests to support various worthy institutions and organisations, we ourselves are able to identify groups who, although they seek little recognition, nevertheless thoroughly deserve it.

You are such a group.

It is no surprise that with our backgrounds in the courts – a terrifying period of more than 80 years between us in criminal and family law – we have some understanding of just how much drug and alcohol addiction underpin so many of the community's health, family and justice issues.

We are well aware too of the complexities surrounding addiction, conjecture as to the most effective legal framework and responses and of the many challenges of treatment.

It follows that we are definitely well aware of, and grateful for your professional skills and expertise, your care and kindness and your commitment in all that you do in your various roles.

We know of how many people you help, and the positive ripple effect of your help on those around them – and indeed on the broader community as well.

But we also know of the toll on professionals who work in such a difficult, and at times heart-breaking area.

I say ‘heart-breaking’, knowing that it is not a word often used when we don our professional armour. But I also know how hard it can be to work with people who are in pain. How disappointing it can be when things do not go well for them. How sad it is when the outcome is particularly bad.

We felt it keenly as barristers and as judges. But we were still not as close to the ‘coal-face’ as you.

Earlier in my judicial career, in the criminal courts, I sentenced those found guilty of drug offences and saw the huge amount of criminal charges attributable to or coloured by the abuse of alcohol.

In my last 18 years on the bench, I saw the havoc wreaked in families as a result of substance abuse – often mixed with mental health issues – all of which contributed to family breakdown, disfunction and, sometimes, worse.

For his part, Tony both prosecuted and defended in drug cases as a barrister and Queen’s Counsel. He then spent 10 years in the State’s major criminal court. No-one in this room would be left wondering as to how many drug cases that Court deals with, or how often drug or alcohol addiction is a feature of the cases before the judges.

Of course that experience makes us reflect on how we as a community deal with and respond to addiction and abuse.

Well, policy and politics are not for us in this role. But recognising the impact of drug and alcohol abuse in the community, and the work done by those assisting people affected by addiction is very much for us, and is one of our priorities for our time here at Government House.

So thank you for joining us today, and for giving us this opportunity to express our appreciation to you. We look forward to chatting.