Getting to grips with the problem

‘He’s my friend. I don’t know much about drugs but I want to help him. Where do I start and how do I go about it?’

THE FIRST STAGE of helping is to establish rapport, an open channel for discussing the topic. The second is to expose the actual concern fully and, when ready, gradually follow leads and explore other aspects of life that may be relevant. Think, perhaps, of the saying ‘where there is smoke there is fire’, and that the alcohol or drug problem is the smoke signalling that there are burning embers somewhere. Deal with the embers and the smoke problem will subside.

Where might the burning embers be? The section Why do it? (https://liftingthelidondruguse.wordpress.com/why-do-it/) aims to draw attention to possible embers, the multiple factors that may contribute to the impulse and decision to partake of alcohol or other drugs and, if they create problems, the possibility that these same factors may offer ways of being helpful. They are displayed in the various figures, most extensively in the triangle model (see https://liftingthelidondruguse.wordpress.com/why-do-it/influences/) grouped around the three main points of ‘Alcohol, Drugs’, ‘My World’ and ‘Me, A Person’. Our very many influences are heavily weighted towards personal ones in ‘Me’.

Each of the influences mentioned opens up the possibility of it being a smouldering twig in the fire which may be helpfully dealt with. The usage scale (https://liftingthelidondruguse.wordpress.com/why-do-it/usage-factors/) points to such critical factors as availability of the drug and the persuasion (by people or by advertisements, blatant or subtle) to use it, and the positives and negatives associated with its use. The process of identifying these factors and influences can suggest avenues for being helpful for individuals as well as society in general, for prevention of misuse as well as correction.

The jigsaw model of life demonstrates how problems in other aspects of life may be caused by misuse of drugs (https://liftingthelidondruguse.wordpress.com/why-do-it/our-life-choices/). Understanding our jigsaw can encourage us to modify our use and maybe promote a search for a non-troublesome, attractive alternative. The list of basic questions to ask about our decision to take drugs (see Why do it?), if discussed and teased out, may prove helpful in dealing with our awareness and knowledge of what drugs do, and how much we value ourselves and the welfare of others who are affected by our drug taking.

In any case, it is worth keeping in mind that when we try to help a drug user, we are also exerting our influence on the concerned person, by adding another voice to the babble of voices already in their head. Remember too that there is no exactly right way for us to be helpful, no silver bullet, no guarantee that we will see any result. We are entitled to think, ‘Oh well, I did what I did and now it is up to others – and time.’

For some of us, a minority in our community of those drinking and taking drugs, professional expertise might be needed. However, for most of us it is a matter of getting on with life, learning to live in the presence of drugs (and many other hazards), caring as best we can
for ourselves and those close to us and not being backward in asking for help. Self-esteem and self-management are certainly key elements in all of this, both in our susceptibility to getting into trouble and in our ability to get out of it.

At the same time, our civic leaders will inevitably be playing a large part in all these matters, trying to curb misuse by providing education and making regulations about packaging, advertising, exposure in the media, availability, legality, punishment and so on. They will also provide services for those in trouble.