



THE CUBA
P R E S S

MEDIA RELEASE: 6 September, 2018

DANCING ON A RAZOR'S EDGE:

The mother of a recovering meth addict calls for support for addicts' families to save their kids

Contact: Mary McCallum 04 3844222 • 027 600 3313
hello@thecubapress.nz • www.thecubapress.nz

Author is available for interview. High-res author and cover images are at: www.thecubapress.nz/media-kit

Mandy Whyte started to write the story of her son's long-term meth addiction so she could understand why he became an addict and how she could help him recover from the drugs that had devastated his life.

From Taranaki, both Whyte and her son Hemi (not his real name) were living overseas at the time: Whyte in Indonesia and Hemi on Australia's Sunshine Coast. The book, called *Dancing on a Razor's Edge*, has been published by Wellington's The Cuba Press.

Discovering the true extent of her son's drug problem and that the likely results were permanent psychosis, prison or death, Mandy Whyte launched a rescue mission to save his life. One that saw her take charge of his care and recovery.

'I'd spent much of ten years urging Hemi from the sidelines to get help,' says Whyte, 'but things only got worse. He was wasting away before our eyes. He'd intersected with every possible social service – police, courts, hospitals, prison, employment, housing, drug rehabilitation, mental health – and none of them had been able to stop him injecting crystal meth into his veins.'

Whyte managed to remove her son from his life in Caboolture near Brisbane and took him to rehab in Indonesia, where she kept him off drugs and encouraged a healthier lifestyle. Hemi returned to his old ways for a while, but Whyte got him back on track, with a new life that included competitive mixed martial arts and a lot of love.

Mandy Whyte says so many families in New Zealand and Australia are being devastated by meth addiction with little relief. She says there are better ways to treat the problem than punitive measures through the courts and the conventional approach to rehab, which insists it's up to the addicts to choose to go clean, when they often aren't up to making decisions about their lives.

She believes in empowering families to act on behalf of their loved ones, instead of keeping them out of the picture by invoking privacy laws, and wants to see drug users and their families dealt with through the health system rather than the justice system.

'It's a rights-based issue,' says Whyte. 'My son had a right to live and a right to treatment and support, but no agency was able to give him what he needed so I had to find a way to do it myself.'

Whyte says it took a year of hell to extract her son from his addiction and another year of vigilance to stop him going back, but it's been worth it as Hemi is now drug-free, a father and holds down a job.

Professor Doug Sellman, Director of the National Addiction Centre in Christchurch, has endorsed Mandy Whyte's book. He says: *'Every addiction worker in Australasia would do well to read this book for the descriptions of this mother's determined struggle to do the best for her addicted son, her fraught attempts to access the services she needs, and her criticism of a system that demands people take personal responsibility for their addictions when they are often unable to do so.'*

Dancing on a Razor's Edge launches in New Plymouth, 3pm, 16 September at Puke Ariki. The author will be giving a presentation at Unity Books in Wellington at lunchtime on 19 September and speaking to addiction workers in Christchurch on 20 September, hosted by Doug Sellman.

Mandy Whyte is a New Zealander who has worked for 30 years advising and managing aid and development programmes in New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, Asia and currently in the Solomon Islands. She was brought up in Taranaki but her New Zealand base is now on the Kāpiti Coast.

Ends