

Party-Goer Sentenced in Downing Centre Local Court

Rebecca Hannibal and her friend Georgina Barttner were two typical teenagers who were planning on attending Sydney's Harbourlife festival last year.

Things changed horribly, when the three ecstasy pills that the girls shared made Georgina sick and she was rushed to hospital. Tragically, she did not survive due to multiple organ failure.

Since then, Rebecca has had to deal with a barrage of public opinion as well as drug charges, all on top of the grief of her friend's death.

Earlier this year, [she pleaded guilty to supplying the ecstasy](#) that ultimately ended in the death of her friend.

The sentencing had been delayed because she was suffering from acute appendicitis, but she was back before the court just recently.

The sentence

Chief Magistrate Henson sat on the case in [Downing Centre Local Court](#).

He expressed concern that drugs had become part of the everyday party scene for many young adults. He noted that the real blame should lie with drug dealers, especially low-level ones who sold drugs to their friends and family, knowing the harm they could do.

In the case of Rebecca and Georgina, it was Rebecca who had bought three pills from a drug dealer to share with Georgina.

She paid \$60 for her share and each girl took one-and-a-half

pills.

Henson acknowledged that Rebecca was not “legally responsible” for her friend’s death, but found that the community expected action to be taken for her illegal conduct in supplying the drugs:

“Two young women, close friends, go out to enjoy a music festival. They make a foolish decision to buy and consume drugs. Only one comes home.”

Because of this, he imposed a criminal conviction upon Rebecca by placing her on a ‘section 9 bond’ for 12 months.

This means that if Rebecca offends within the next year, she will be brought back before the court and re-sentenced for supplying Georgina, and could receive a harsher penalty. And the fact that she would be on a bond will make any additional offence more serious.

Although Rebecca avoided prison, she was upset to find out that she would get a criminal record. She had suffered enormously since her best friend’s death, including constant hounding by the media. She has moved down to Victoria with her boyfriend to start a new life.

This case shows the potentially tragic consequences of taking drugs, especially when we don’t know exactly what’s inside them. It also shows how easy it can be to face serious charges over what many see as a fun night with friends.

What are the penalties for drug supply?

The definition of ‘drug supply’ is very broad, and can include buying pills and sharing them with friends – even if you give them away for free.

The penalty for drug supply depends on a number of factors, including the type of drug, the quantity and whether the case remains in the Local Court.

For small quantity, the maximum penalty is two years imprisonment and/or a \$5,500 fine if the case remains in the Local Court or 15 years and \$220,000 if it goes up to the District Court. A small quantity is defined as not more than 0.25 grams of ecstasy, 30 grams of cannabis, or 1 gram of cocaine, heroin or amphetamines.

If you have been charged with a drug offence, you are certainly not alone. Drug offences are very common in the NSW courts – in fact, drug possession is the [fourth most common offence](#), coming in behind mid-range PCA (drink driving), common assault and low-range PCA (drink driving).

There are a range of defences to drug charges, and an experienced criminal lawyer will be able to advise you about whether they apply in your case.

Alternatively, it may be possible to avoid a criminal record even if you wish to plead guilty.

If you are facing drug charges, the best first step is to contact a specialist criminal lawyer who is experienced in drug cases for advice that is specific to your situation.

There are a number of law firms in Sydney that offer a free first conference, and it might be in your best interest to see several lawyers before making your decision about who will best represent you in court.