

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
I am a [REDACTED] mother of two boys [REDACTED], and grandmother of 3, one boy [REDACTED], and two girls, aged [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I was born in [REDACTED], and attended my junior school years in [REDACTED].

My children grew up in [REDACTED], [REDACTED]. They had a fabulous childhood in the safety of a close knit community.

[REDACTED] started using marijuana in Year 7, at about 13 years old. He became a very heavy user over time, and by the time he was 16 yrs. He smoked a bong every day.

He became very depressed when using. He would sleep a lot, and go out for extended periods of time. He had a stint in the Adolescent Mental Health in [REDACTED] when he was 15 yrs. He was taken to [REDACTED] in the back of a police van with adults for 1 night, then spent a further 6 weeks in [REDACTED]. This didn't really help, as he was determined to use drugs, no matter what.

During this time, I tried to find help for him and myself. I was so desperate I even rang [REDACTED], to see if he could help me. Luckily he didn't follow through for us. I rang so many places to get help, and got absolutely nowhere.

[REDACTED] had many attempts at suicide [REDACTED]. Each time he attended hospital, was given [REDACTED]. This became my life. I would never know what I would come home to find.

When my marriage broke up, we relocated to [REDACTED]. My younger son moved into a unit on his own for a short time. His drug taking came to a bit of a head at this time. On one of his straight times, he moved into a house with me.

My other son moved in with his partner, who was pregnant with my grandson. Things were ok during this time.

However, my younger son regressed, and had another stint in the [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] Hospital. This didn't help much and nothing was followed up. After two weeks, the discharged him, telling me there was nothing wrong. I lived in fear of what he might do to me and my home.

[REDACTED] was in psychosis as a result of drug use. He regularly stole and sold things from my home. I would go and pay for them, and take them home, only to find this repeated over and over. In the end I put these things at my parents for safe keeping. Life was a nightmare.

Once I came home from work to find every window in my rental property smashed from the outside. The mess of glass in every room was horrific. [REDACTED] didn't have any idea what he had done.

There was another time I went into the bathroom to do my teeth before bed and found the bathroom walls and floor covered in faeces.

He also lit my green bin on fire and it was a melted mess in the backyard, he had burnt all of his things in it.

He started coming to my workplace demanding money, the first time I gave it to him to get rid of him from the office [REDACTED]. Then he came again, when I said 'no', he began yelling and swearing at me. I was embarrassed and ashamed at his behaviour.

In [REDACTED], when my younger son was [REDACTED] yrs old, he was a passenger in a car accident. The result of this was a serious brain injury. Life changed dramatically for us. He spent over a year in hospital, rehabilitating. He came home in [REDACTED], and we settled in our current home in [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] now has full time care, he is in a wheelchair, and unable to look after himself. He has very little short term memory, and as he gets older his condition deteriorates.

In more recent years my older son began using all types of drugs and alcohol. He sank into deep depression, crying all the time never having enough money. He hit rock bottom and pulled himself out of it all with sheer determination. I sought help with [REDACTED] Mental Health services, but nothing much resulted from this.

Life continued on with my older son in and out of relationships. [REDACTED]

My older son lived with his partner in [REDACTED]. Every 2nd weekend my older son would come and stay with me and my younger son. Sometimes the weekends in between as well.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

One of the grandchildren moved in with me, and now suffers depression and is currently taking medication. He won't attend school, and is isolated from his friends. He says most are trying drugs and alcohol, and doesn't want to be around that. We're enrolling him in a virtual Year [REDACTED].

I have now done my Enrolled Nursing and have just started a new career as a Psychiatric Nurse at [REDACTED] Hospital. Mental Health is going through reform at the moment and I wish to be a part of this. My new job is challenging, but rewarding as well.

We need Rehabilitation and Mental Health care in the [REDACTED], many people are suffering dual diagnosis and have nowhere to go for treatment. They end up in our prisons with little, or no education and assistance with drug or alcohol withdrawal.

Things need to change and we need to offer a more holistic model of care for all Australians.

I am also a peer lead for ACSO parent support group. This is an amazing group of people with lived experience of living and have lived with children, parents or siblings in the various stages of addiction and mental health. The support and growth continue in this dedicated and educated group of people. This is a much needed direction for people in despair to go to. If we do not address these issues we will end up with more people suffering mental illness in our society.

Where the system has failed:

- Inclusion in my son's care. A range of medical professionals and services have made things more difficult by failing to communicate adequately with me and my family. As a result, my son may be discharged in the middle of the night, without my knowledge.
- There's no adequate place for someone with drug issues and mental health issues to get the treatment they need. The mental health services in the hospital are either too short, make people worse because of the environment or simply medicate him so much that it just masks the issue. Other times, they would agree with him that he didn't need medication.
- He needs somewhere he can stay long term and get treatment. Living in the community and being responsible for his own medication is just not working, and at times, it's led to me fearing for my safety.
- Housing and accomodation: it's been incredibly difficult to get my son accomodation he needs.

- No support for me. I have just felt like I am left holding the bag.

For me as a carer, the impacts have been profound. I now take anti-depression medication daily. But, I have also trained to become a mental health nurse, as I deeply care about improving the system. I have now done five shifts in this role, and am proud to be helping others.

I have found the carer groups at ACSO to be deeply helpful too.