



WITNESS STATEMENT OF ADWIN TOWN

I, Adwin Town, say as follows:

- 1 I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.
- 2 I was born in Shanghai and educated in Hong Kong. I migrated to Australia in 1985. I now volunteer as a senior migration consultant at the Australia for Christ Church in Rowville, where I provide pro bono migration services. In this role I help refugees, students and other migrants settle in Australia. At the Church, I also manage the praise dance group.
- 3 I am a committee member and the public relations officer of the Chinese Association of Victoria. The Chinese Association of Victoria has over 1,200 members, who are mostly situated in the Wantirna area in Victoria. The Association plans and hosts activities and community gatherings throughout the year, as well as runs a Chinese language school with over 600 students. The Association's facility in Wantirna is a place where many members of the Chinese community in Melbourne gather to socialise.
- 4 I am also a voluntary committee member of the Knox City Multicultural Commission.
- 5 I am expressing my personal views throughout this statement. The organisations that I am associated with are not in a position to endorse and do not necessarily endorse my views in this statement.

Knowledge of and attitudes towards mental health in the Chinese community

- 6 I believe that many people in the Chinese community do not have enough knowledge about issues of mental health due to our conservative culture. Many members of the Chinese community do not even know what mental health problems are and could not recognise the early signs and symptoms of mental illness until a person "explodes" (where their mental health issues become very severe) and it is too late for everyone in their community. In my experience, people in the Chinese community do not seek out this knowledge because it is viewed as not relevant to their lives or their jobs. It is a commonly held view in the community that you should only invest time and money in learning about mental health if you wish to pursue a career in the area. Education and knowledge about mental health in the Chinese community needs to improve.

- 7 Many Asian cultures, including Chinese culture, can be very conservative and inward looking when it comes to mental health. In my experience, Chinese people often do not want to talk about mental health problems, as they do not want to be seen as abnormal. I believe that people in the Chinese community are much less open about mental health than people in Western communities. This conservative culture often means that when Chinese people have issues with their mental health they do not disclose them to their friends and family or reach out to help-lines or other available services. People in the Chinese community are much more likely to seek advice about their uneasiness and stress from community leaders that they trust, such as pastors, youth leaders and teachers. I refer to these community leaders as the “front-line soldiers” when it comes to mental health.

Differences between Chinese and Western approaches to health

- 8 The Chinese approach to health is to tackle the cause of the health problem rather than to just suppress its symptoms. I believe that Western approaches to treating mental health issues often focus too much on suppressing symptoms rather than seeking to sense and understand the cause of the problems. I believe we need a balanced approach where “West meets East”. This balanced approach should draw from the knowledge of the Chinese community as well as approaches taken by practitioners of Chinese medicine and healing.

Mental health issues in the Chinese community

- 9 I believe that mental health issues are becoming more and more serious and that more and more people are not aware that they have issues. In my work as a migration consultant, I often see that new migrants (from China and other countries) experience anxiety about their finances, language difficulties and living in a new country. They tell me that they feel that there is no way out. Their feelings of anxiety are often not talked about and are suppressed. Being afraid to talk about these feelings and let others help can lead to family violence, abuse, arguments and even more problems. Often this is complicated by gender privilege.
- 10 Community and church leaders in the Chinese community sense that there is a problem with mental health, but do not know what to do. Community leaders can build love, care, hope, confidence, trust and prayers, as well as provide community activities, skills training and financial support to help improve the mental health of people in their community. For example, I know that a pastor can give love, hope and smooth over issues together with families. However, leaders in the Chinese community don't currently have the expertise or skills to understand mental health. They are not trained to provide specialised support for mental health issues, nor do they have the funding or

the connections to learn about the importance of mental health and understand the complex causes and symptoms.

- 11 We need to train these people to better understand mental health and to better sense the causes of poor mental health. Because ordinary people in the community turn to community leaders when they have issues with their mental health, these front-line soldiers cannot turn away from talking and learning about mental health.

Solutions to improve knowledge of mental health in the community

- 12 One solution is to provide mental health first aid training to leaders in the Chinese community. This training could help community leaders to better recognise the early signs and symptoms of mental health issues. Because the training appears to be like physical first aid training it might be more appealing to people in the community who normally think that learning about mental health is too complex, or should only be learnt about if you want to pursue a career in mental health. I know that many Chinese people believe that if you go too deep into learning about mental health you will end up with poor mental health as well. Because the concept of “first-aid” is easily recognisable and not overly complex, mental health first aid can help overcome this barrier to learning about mental health.
- 13 Another benefit of mental health first aid is that the training appears to be accessible, affordable and not time consuming. This may address views held in the community that learning about mental health is unappealing and a waste of time and money.
- 14 Mental health first aid training could also improve knowledge about mental health for ordinary members of the Chinese community and Church communities. Many people have approached me for help who don’t know how to talk about the mental health issues that they or their family members are experiencing. People also tell me that they would like to learn more about mental health but they aren’t able to afford the training fees. Affordable mental health first aid training could assist these people to recognise the causes of mental illness and also increase their ability to help family members who may have mental health issues.
- 15 In addition to mental health first aid training courses, community leaders need to be educated about who to contact when people come to them with mental health issues. This could be in the form of a flow chart or another referral document that lists which services are available. When I have previously tried to look for support that is available, I have been unable to find services that deal holistically with mental health problems. Rather, I have only found services that specifically deal with single issues, for example, counselling services for drugs, alcohol, smoking and gambling.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adwin Town', is written over a horizontal line.

sign here ▶

print name Adwin Town

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