

Lived Experience Story Submission – SUB.0002.0016.0033
Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System
By Paul Walton, 41 years of age. May 2019

- Attended first community consultation session in Whittlesea, April 2019.
- Attended face to face meeting with Royal Commission 30/5/2019
With [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] – staff at Royal Commission, who helped prepare this lived experience story.

Summary: “My story is about Housing and lack of support available for men around my age and ethnicity. It was also around the wellbeing of my husky and how I was not going to move somewhere that was not good for him as well as for me. It all revolves around Housing. I feel the battle is not over even though I am now not living where I was and I feel like there is some things I can do and just need the right people to help me in doing it.”

Paul was totally independent and now dependent due to change in housing circumstances, which made him homeless. Paul lost a case in VCAT against a Housing agency around his eviction and repairs and has no support from NDIS or any mental health providers, despite being heavily impacted by mental health issues and other medical issues. He wants to highlight discrimination based on sex, age, education.

Current situation:

- Homeless, couch surfing at the moment (No Fixed Address)
- Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) diagnosis in last 12 months (additional to mental health and other health issues)
- Financial trouble occasionally.
- Become withdrawn and unable to interact with people.
- No supports currently, only a GP.
- Family has been helping, with accommodation and other supports.
- Not working. Completed Bachelor Degree in Agricultural Science.

Housing Issues:

Was in stable housing with housing agency in Reservoir, which was supposed to come with support but he feels he had little to no support there, and was evicted as they decided to demolish the house after failing to maintain it. They did offer alternatives, but they did not suit Paul with his circumstances. Repairs would not be completed despite going to landlord, consumer affairs. The house was really bad, and they failed to keep up maintenance.

What was the grounds for eviction?

Notice to Vacate (demolition). They offered assisted living with older people. Neither of which would cater for me and my dog, huskie, Diesel. No Compensation for losing property. Tenants Union didn’t help.

What was your experience of the MH System?

Diagnosed at a young age, Depression at 14 years of age. Suicidal, depressed. Bullied. Headspace did not exist, no services. No kids-helpline in those days. Diagnosed with Depression, Anxiety, FMS: Pain in joints, fingers, toes, back. Other health issues.

High functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (diagnosed at an older age), Cognitive functioning issues, “Autism feels right, I don’t understand the world. Black and White thinking. I don’t understand abstracts. Learn things one way. Get frustrated with things. Anger. Break a wall when angry. Got into fights. Had to get held down. Headphones usually help with this. Dad said ‘boys don’t get hugs’; ‘boys don’t cry’. I’m a sensitive person.”

Went to a number of different support workers and programs but they always changed and got funding cut. Sometimes I had to go to a support worker at a centre and sometimes Nurses came to my home and provided support. But the funding was cut, forced to do centre based counselling. Not admitted to Inpatient unit. Had PHaMS service but when I moved from Epping to Reservoir they’re was no transfer to another PHaMs (12 months of service only, 10 years ago). MHNIP support for 3-4 years, but discharged because they ran out of

funding. Referred to Darebin Counselling, 2 sessions. Didn't help. Was only talking therapy, not practical. NDIS access requested 3 months ago, no news yet; Doctor assisted with report.

"There was a lack of understanding from services about my condition. Need somewhere to go straight away. Last place you want to go is Emergency. I'm afraid of Police in uniform coming to my door if I can ask for help from mental health services." "Cutting the CAT team was the biggest mistake." "Last thing you want to see is the Police in uniform with guns. I would not go to a Police Officer if I was unwell."

What has been helpful?

Reclink - Collingwood Knights Football club has been helpful. Community Connection.

Collingwood Knights (Reclink) – started 8 years ago. Great support. Started with 4 players, with a cop in Yarra area. Gap for 16-25 year **(All ages not just 16-25 most services they focus on is 14-25 though not much for older people)**. olds. 5 years went to having 125 players. Couldn't get enough support workers to help run the program. Linked with VAHS, Headspace, etc.

They should link this community footy club with support services, such as cooking, budgeting, centrelink, family, housing, hub of services. Victoria Park.

What about substance use?

Alcohol, and I only used Marijuana when I was younger. I was hearing voices when using Marijuana, so I stopped.

Medication?

Pain killers mostly. Plus Diazepam and sleeping tablets PRN (on demand). Make sure I can drive ok, and wary of what medication to use when driving.

Homelessness?

Couch surfing at the moment. Identify as 'homeless'. NFA. No Fixed Address. Epping at the moment, with my parents, but also needed to stay in Geelong at a friend's place.

What is needed?

Continuity of support – Need more streamlined services. Continuous. Need a database that of services available. Having to re-tell your story every time is exhausting.

What would you recommend for MHS in Vic:?

Being able to contact someone who knows how to navigate the system. With consistency and honesty. Need a case manager to work holistically.

Need someone to help with basic chores.

Need Supported Housing. Not just a house. Would like compensation for this, but acknowledge that it's not for this Royal Commission to solve individual issues.

So many houses are vacant, they mismanage the properties, at Housing Choices etc.

Question about Early Intervention.

Young people need early treatment, and more services.

Question about suicide

Need services around Christmas, but services are closed.

What about Carers?

Lack of information for Carers – they did not share information with my Mum.

Workforce Question:

Need to recruit people with lived experience in the mental health services. Peer workers. Need people who care about the work, not just doing it for the money. Can tell straight away if someone is genuine.

Recovery?

"I hate the term 'recovery'. 'Managing better' with Depression, Not recovered; that's a better way to describe it."

What helps/works well in the MHS?

LaTrobe University – Equality and Access Unit – they helped when I was studying. Minister Brendan Nelson – established scholarships for university. Did get support at University. 'Looking after myself'. Then the government changed parties, and they scrapped the mental health support in Universities.

Employment?

Done part-time work in Agricultural. Can't work more than part-time due to FMS.

"I can't hold down a job. Need part time work. Supported employment? Attitudes of employers – discrimination. Companies are discriminating. More flexibility with hours, i.e. 7am to 2pm. I already have Truck driving license, forklift license. But no job"

"First time I went for DSP, they said I didn't qualify. Too presentable. Second time I was dishevelled, and they gave it to me."

Priorities for system reform?

- Housing with Support needed.
- Need continuity of services across catchments.
 - Regardless of local council postcodes. Get rid of catchments.
- Age restrictions, no support when you hit 30 years of age.
 - Remove discrimination: Age, Sex, Color,
- Broaden the scope of services.
- University mental health support required.
- Support ReLink Community Footy Clubs and promote connections to services for initiatives like this
- Need to protect Men's Shed – to be just for Men.
 - Space for men only is important

Paul's other comments:

Need "multi age services where it is ok for older and younger to mix together so we can all learn from each other"

"Being able to help getting my next dog as a support dog for me so I can take him/her everywhere with me in case I start to freak out (shopping centres etc) and not have to have one specifically trained just the one I get that can help me."

"The other is I am also playing Footy at La Trobe Uni football Club and having someone or a way to access funds for playing and fees so that they can help with the financial side of things. I have found even joining the club my social has gone up and I am mixing more with all ages at the same time, struggling to pay for the fees almost couldn't play cause of the 350 dollars needed for the year plus the shorts and socks prices."