

Supporting Document



I wish for the following document to only be used by the commission under the pseudonym Mila*

As a young child my earliest memory of sensing that something was not quite right was noticing that my father was no longer going to work and spending a lot of time at home alone. Over the years this would progressively become the norm except that my father was now showing signs that he was extremely unwell and as a family we did not know what to do, who to talk to or where to go for help.

As a young person seeing a parent become a shell of a person, reclusive and unresponsive was a devastating experience but equally distressing was the lack of support available to myself, my mother and siblings. Throughout the years of trying everything and anything to ease the burden of mental illness experienced by father, we faced a barrage of questions from professionals in GP practice and specialist mental health services but with very little practical support offered in return that would address the complexity of someone with Schizophrenia, non-English speaking, long-term unemployed, socially isolated and father of 3 children. If the mental health system could not help my father, then it certainly was of no use to any of us.

The mental health system in its current state is not just broken but disconnected from people and what they need. It forces families like my own to struggle for years on end without any clinical follow up. It excludes and demoralises families and carers who don't meet the criteria for high priority care either in hospital or community. It gives up hope on our plight as carers when we feel most helpless and forgets to ask how are the children going?

Somehow and somewhere along the way I've found myself now working in the mental health system and often contemplate what life would be like if I was that young child again, lost and confused, not knowing what to do, who to talk to or where to go for help. I hope that young child would be able to speak to someone at school because mental health support and wellbeing starts from the front gate of the school yard and extends all the way into the home where families are treated with compassion and care from all parts of their local community.

The mental health system can only be improved if it provides families, carers and people living with mental illness with the access and support that they desperately seek. This means having somewhere to go, someone to talk to and knowledge about mental illness and the caring role.

The mental health system needs to shift from the current practice of OPT IN when in crisis to OPT OUT when your needs are met. Access to mental health and wellbeing support should be inclusive and available to all persons living with mental illness, their families, carers, children and community members. A mental health system like this is part of a broader model of community support and care that is integrated with child, youth and family services, primary health care, specialist mental health, early years support and education.

Growing up with a parent that does not fit into any part of the mental health system is an anguish that I continue to carry and hold deeply within but this doesn't have to be the future for my own children or the parent that I have become.

** Names and places have been changed to protect individuals.*