

2019 Submission - Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

Organisation Name

Living Legacy Forest

Name

Mr Warren Roberts

What are your suggestions to improve the Victorian community's understanding of mental illness and reduce stigma and discrimination?

"Living Legacy Forest is working with Industry and Government leaders around Australia to connect people in grief to nature to assist them with the healing process. Our suggestion is that Living Legacy Forest works with the Health Department to identify areas which will benefit from our process of offering people in grief a path to healing by being in nature. Living Legacy Forest has developed a treatment which detoxifies cremation ash so it can help trees grow. The results are transformative in that communities all around Australia are creating new urban forests with Living Memorial Trees (The Deakin study shows contributing to community is a strong impact on mental wellness). The other obvious benefit is that people are connecting to the beauty that a person's life created as opposed to only connecting to what they lost. All our customers tell us it is a profound journey from grief to growth. <https://livinglegacyforest.com/2018/12/19/living-legacy-from-grief-to-growth/> The benefits of being in nature are proven and illustrated in the Deakin University study, The benefits of contact with nature for mental health and well being. https://www.deakin.edu.au/__data/.../Beyond-Blue-To-Green-Literature-Review.pdf <https://livinglegacyforest.com/media/> "

What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent mental illness and to support people to get early treatment and support?

"One of our first trees was for a mother that lost her son to suicide. She chose a Flame Tree that flowers on his birthday. She said, If it wasn't for this tree I would spend the rest of my life connecting to what I lost and would continue to experience to hurt as long as I connected to what I lost. Now I visit his tree and I also connect what his life created and the precious life that I still have to live and share. We have already created 3 urban forests in Melbourne with The Greater Metropolitan Cemetery Trust and they are proving to make a great impact as a path from grief to growth but we are limiting the affect to people that want to be memorialised in cemeteries. Because most cemeteries are full there is a real opportunity for people to be memorialised in their own communities for making it a better place with trees. Over 1 million Australians are expected to be cremated in the next 10 years. Death and grief affects the bereaved community well beyond the impact of the initial death. We need to look at the impact of grief over the next 10 years and look at ways to offer integrate this service into the community. "

What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent suicide?

"I was depressed for 7 years when i lost my best friend. In my mind I had decided whats the point of living at all, whats the point of feeling if the more you love the more you hurt. So i cut off from feeling and went into depression. It wasn't until I spent time in nature that it felt good to be alive, the more beauty i looked at the more beautiful I felt, it even felt good to let myself cry for the first time in 7 years. When we connect to what we have lost we continue to experience hurt and pain. But when we can also connect to the beauty life created we can appreciate the preciousness of

life. I was dead inside for 7 years because I didn't have a different way to relate to what I had lost. Many other people will suffer the same consequence of loving and there is a better way for us to deal with death and the result of it is communities creating beautiful parks and forests together that connect them to the beauty life creates."

What makes it hard for people to experience good mental health and what can be done to improve this? This may include how people find, access and experience mental health treatment and support and how services link with each other.

Milton said The mind is its own place it can make heaven out of hell or hell out of heaven. Death is an inevitable impact everyone has to face and our culture is not prepared for it at all. The consequence of losing our relationship to treating life as precious and sacred is that we take it for granted. By treating life as precious because it's finite we can learn to live life as a whole and live more deeply. This kind of journey cannot be done with words it's a personal journey someone experiences by connecting to life and that is done by nature and themselves.

What are the drivers behind some communities in Victoria experiencing poorer mental health outcomes and what needs to be done to address this?

People think human ashes are the same as wood ashes and that they are good for nature. Human ashes have the same pH as bleach and oven cleaner and contain around a cup of salt. A lot of people are going to scatter their ashes in nature because it's beautiful but it's beautiful because the eco system and soil is healthy. Putting untreated ashes in nature is worse than putting cigarette butts in a forest. We want to provide the bereaved community with a path to connecting with the beauty that life creates instead of leaving them connecting to what they lost.

What are the needs of family members and carers and what can be done better to support them?

Family members all need to deal with grief in their own way. What's important is that they are given a different way to relate to life/death beyond connecting to what they lost.

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce, including peer support workers?

Offer a programme that trains mental health people about creating new life from ashes and being a part of a community that is creating a new park or forest.

What are the opportunities in the Victorian community for people living with mental illness to improve their social and economic participation, and what needs to be done to realise these opportunities?

The call to action is for the bereaved families to bring their ashes in to be a part of creating a living legacy tree and be part of creating a new forest.

Thinking about what Victoria's mental health system should ideally look like, tell us what areas and reform ideas you would like the Royal Commission to prioritise for change?

1. Letting people know the benefits of nature during grief. 2. Working with local governments and other land authorities and Parks to integrate living legacy trees as a means to create new urban parks and forests. Living Legacy Trees are a self-funded way to create new parks and forests.

What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victoria's mental health system and

support improvements to last?

Meet with Living Legacy Forest and leading land authorities to look at new way for people to be a part of creating Legacy parks and forests in their own communities.

Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?

"How we treat our dead is central to our humanity. It is not just our relationship to our own life that can be restored it is also our relationship to life as a whole and the eco system and nation we call home. The process restores our sense of belonging in community while also restoring eco systems. WHO, spiritual health refers to that part of the individual which reaches out and strives for meaning and purpose in life. ... Health is a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In the next 10 years over 1.5 Million Australians will die. Due to local cemeteries being full, It is the first time a whole generation wont have a place in their own communities to acknowledge their existence. The impact of losing a loved one is unavoidably devastating but for the first time the impact it is has on the environment and on mental wellbeing and belonging can be restorative."