

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

## Organisation Name

N/A

## Name

Mrs Michelle Miller

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

"I believe that the messaging has improved significantly with advertisements, characters in TV shows etc showing people with mental health concerns being portrayed more positively. I really believe that this is the best way forward to show that people can recover, manage their mental health and live productive and positive lives, rather than as problems to society. I would love to see more portrayals in mass media where people with mental illness trust those who are wanting to help them and to work with the available support, rather than pushing back on the support. Positive messaging of hope rather than foreboding messages have to help. "

### **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?**

"Our school is proud to have Nurture Group for young children who have experienced trauma Aged 5-7. We now include a sensory program into the school, have engaged volunteer mentors and spend significant money from our budget to provide a social worker, chaplain and youth worker. Three of our staff, including myself, have just been to London to work with Nurture UK and we are committed to embedding the principles of Nurture throughout our school. As we have embedded the philosophy of Positive Education across our school this will be a natural step. Each year, however it is a struggle to fund this support and its key success is the individual staff who have the understanding and right disposition to make the support work. This proactive support should be systemised across our schools psychologists and counsellors in schools, a high ratio of support people and those to offer nurture. Not all of these need high level qualification, but the right temperament, values and beliefs. We are a Respectful Relationships Lead school and this is great step towards addressing critical issues around family and domestic violence, but the challenge is messaging the families where there is mental illness (including drug induced) as they feel resentful of schools entering this space. We have long considered having a school based community hub, where the services to support families is based at the school. This can be in proactive areas exercise classes, cooking classes etc, but also counselling support, Centrelink, DHHS at different times through the week etc. We are often in a position to identify issues early in families because of student behaviours. We only have the reporting to DHHS which can break down our positive interactions, whereas if we had services in situ where families could access support before there was a referral we may ward off more serious problems. "

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

"This is not really an area we have much experience of in a primary school, but again, if schools can offer a trusting other' for young people to identify with that is valuable but other than volunteers schools do not have the funds to pay and also finding the right people is often luck."

### **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.**

"Employment, neighbourhood, connection to community, influence of drugs and alcohol, exposure to trauma (from grief, loss, violence, ill health etc), peers, all make an impact on mental health for so many people. Schools can be a safe place for people to find support but we are not always skilled to meet their needs and also address our educative purpose. Community hubs at school and increased qualified mental health staff along with nurturing others employed at schools could be a very positive way forward. Too often the mental health agencies we work with are entrenched with processes and rules, they often have inexperienced staff and so they change frequently due to the stress of working with some families and from our perspective give us rhetorical support. The best support is practical, ongoing, frequent and long term. As a school we are often frustrated by support agencies giving motherhood statements' such as: Develop a safety plan' or have a care team meeting'. These are often generic and little guidance to what the practical actions are for these plans and meetings. We need to move from the rhetoric to the practical action. "

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

"Employment/finance, drugs, alcohol, family and domestic violence, long term physical health, loneliness. I wish I had answers for this but the Respectful Relations strategy in schools is a great start, but we need more practical help for families and students. Schools as community hubs with connections to all supportsone stop shopping idea. "

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

"Parenting skills, budgeting and financial advice, developing independence and resilience in young children, developing routines, knowing the benefit and how to spend genuine time with their children.being present with them, trust in the support offered by schools and agencies. They need to know where they can get help simply and quickly. The NDIS is an example of something which is really difficult for families to navigate. "

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

"A wider range of employment opportunitiessome with lesser qualifications but chosen for personality traits (e.g. nurture group facilitators and youth workers). Counsellors and psychologists in schools and for networks of schools a simple process to access their support. DHHS to have all less experienced workers, always partnered with an experienced partner. DHHS and other agencies to be skilled with practical actions to support families. Better pay, positive recognition for their work, always working with partnersnever working solo. Each worker to have rotation of their work around case work and proactive work so they are not always working in a deficit situation and challenging circumstances. "

**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?**

I don't feel I can comment on this.

**Thinking about what Victorias mental health system should ideally look like, tell us what**

**areas and reform ideas you would like the Royal Commission to prioritise for change?**

"of nurture through schools, being brave enough to fund staff in schools to address the 1:1 needs for some students and genuinely alternative settings where young people can go to repair and restore their health and learn positive ways to live their lives. These should not be bound up in too many regulations to allow the length of time needed at an individual level. I learned of a school in Manchester UK, that had a rural camp, where children went for several weeks, several times a year. They would cook, clean, wash their own clothes, play games have outdoor experiences, develop routines etc. For their final week their parent(s) would come and live with them to see how independent the young people had come and how they as a family could live a healthier and cooperative life getting along well. We need to whatever it takes to help these families to avoid further mental health issues "

**What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system and support improvements to last?**

"Attitude that mental health can improve, a belief in nurture, access to practical supportless theoretical and more action. Not for profit groups have set up to support people to gain employment etc, Can these be given more support from government or be facilitated by government. "

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

N/A