

Supporting Document

It all began about 20 years ago when my son was 17. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia many years ago, and was in and out of different mental health facilities. It was difficult, as the psychiatric unit was a long distance away.

As a family we tried to fix it, but over the years we realised we weren't making much ground. I've been looking after him for all of this time, and it has been a great stress. His father died in 2005, which made things worse, and I moved to Victoria, and he's been unsettled ever since.

Doctors don't always understand mental health issues. Some of the medication they don't put them on makes things worse for the family. **My second marriage failed because of the ongoing stress.**

He's been in and out of [REDACTED] Ward, seven times, and we've had some terrible experiences with it. One of the recent times he was admitted to [REDACTED], **he was released without informing the family.**

He called me, on a train, saying he was on his way to the Gold Coast. He said I've got a number to ring when the phone stops. He didn't know where he was, he was in [REDACTED], and he had to get someone to bring him to me in [REDACTED]. **He was clearly mentally unwell when he was released.**

Four months ago, he was in [REDACTED] again. I was trying to have family meetings, and because of the privacy act, I kept being rebuffed. It was very difficult. I was trying to get a meeting so I could get him back to my local area, so he could get the slower release treatment. **I couldn't get a meeting, and I was shut out, but I was still expected to take him home.**

He was given scripts and we were unable to get them filled at home. They should have been given to me, but the turn around with [REDACTED] was too fast. **I would like to advocate for somewhere intermediate from [REDACTED] unit, where they could go to get more services before going home.**

He only lasted here at home with me for five hours. He phoned a taxi, then told me he was going to Melbourne to move in with a woman who he had met in [REDACTED]. At that time, because of an assault, he had both hands in plaster. He went to Melbourne, but the woman he had met in [REDACTED] was also very ill. He soon called me saying he had some terrible experiences and was coming home. He got off the train at [REDACTED], so once again I drove to get him. **The hospital failed us. They should not have let him out, the early discharge was irresponsible.**

When I went and got him, he was quite drunk. I had to try and stabilise him before I could get him home. On the way home, he stopped to pee, and he fell into the irrigation ditch. It was incredibly difficult. I eventually got him home, and I have organised for him to see a doctor here. He's wonderful, and he's really caring.

We've had to find our help the hard way. The referral pathway from [REDACTED] is terrible. Clients are being referred into other mental health services, who have 72 hours to make contact. If the client says no, then

these services close the books on them, and that's it. If they say yes, they will take them on, to only go through the system again.

Because Mental Health Services have no solution, they just try to take people off the books. They can't do anything - they can visit or suggest medication, but their hands are tied. **It's impossible to find consistent help, as a caring mother.**

We are back doing it by ourselves. My son lives with me permanently. I have applied to be his carer. I gave up work last year, after 12 years. I just couldn't deal with not being able to look after my son. I've worked with [REDACTED] for many years, and they have been fantastic. They have a passion for their work with families.

It would be a blessing to receive a caring pension. My son applied to the NDIS, but we have put it on hold while we are working with another good doctor.

My biggest concern is that most people who are trying to help someone with mental health issues are prevented by the [REDACTED] Unit staff and the privacy provisions of the mental health act. Unless you go to a tribunal, it's hard to get a treatment order or proper treatment, so families are just doing it themselves. As they get older, they just believe they don't need it anyway.

The problem is going to get worse, with the ice epidemic, making it harder to get NewStart, and with jobs drying up. People need to be on NewStart to be able to survive while they are trying to get work.

Politicians need to understand that people are in real need.

It's shocking that we don't have a facility for people to go after they have been discharged from hospital, to allow them to recover. This way people could be stable when they come out of hospital. Families need this too. One day you're visiting someone in hospital and the next day they're home.

We've had a lot of family violence and court cases, but we're not doing that any more. I have a police file an inch thick, so I am going to try something different. I will never have anything to do with [REDACTED] ward again.

Ways in which the system has failed us:

- **The hospital system's discharge process is abysmal.** They don't listen, and I don't feel as though I have been heard. Families aren't supported to take the person back into their care.
- **The privacy issue is dreadful.** It gags parents and families. It prevents people getting well. I really find that the [REDACTED] hospital has no duty of care in their discharge of patients. They have failed me and my son.
- **When someone goes into the hospital, there's no information as to what's going to happen in the future.**
- **As a result of the poor treatment, I have made a promise to my son that I will never admit him to a psych ward or call the police, it only makes things worse.** The experience of police ties up too many services that should be used for other issues.

Recommendations:

- The work of Derrick Amos, in particular his submission to the Royal Commission, has a lot of information about what needs to be done to improve the system. I urge the Commissioners to read this and implement its recommendations.