

To Whom It May Concern (November 2016)

As a member of Mental Health Matters 2 (MHM2), in Western Australia, I have been asked to write a brief letter with regards the Indefinite Detention of People with Cognitive and Psychiatric Impairment in Australia. I am aware this is to be brief and that it is required as soon as possible and greatly appreciate that those of us with 'lived experience' have been asked to contribute. I have asked someone who is currently incarcerated under the act if he would kindly write to you as well, as this would truly be the voice of someone with 'lived experience'. He is obviously nervous about how to write this, in his words, "without it sounding like he is complaining". There is so much fear of retribution and hope of change is not something he can muster often, as he says, "remaining numb is the way he has learnt to survive".

The person I refer to killed his mother and young sister over a decade ago. I am curious now as to the reader's decision and possible judgement with regards what this young man's future should be?

His mother was my best friend and his sister played with my youngest child, who happens to have ASD and would also be eligible to come under this act. This young man was one of the few people who would actually get down on the floor and play with my son; something no one has been interested in since "the event" that changed all of our lives, none more so than his.

This person was incredibly close to his mother and sister and his grieving process was done in a maximum-security prison! Visiting him in the Frankland Centre (forensic psychiatric unit) he would continually ask me where 'mum' was. I was instructed not to discuss his mother or sister. We would simply sit and cry together.

The events leading up to his 'psychotic break' included being taken off his antipsychotic injection 'cold turkey' and he had previously not shown any tendency towards harming or being violent towards others; quite the opposite. Four years ago, and again this year, the Psychiatric Review Board recommended his release and both times the Attorney General said 'no'. I query the point of putting public funds into such a review board? During his time in prison he has not been in trouble and has managed to complete several study courses, having also been a peer support worker. Although he is under the mental health act he has only seen a mental health nurse twice this year and a psychiatrist once!

The mental health support prior to and during his incarceration has been, in my opinion, dismal and certainly does not contribute to the concept of 'recovery'. I am incredibly grateful he did not suicide, a concern that had me ask for his placement, when transferred from the Frankland Centre to Hakea Remand Centre, into protective custody. This request was also made as the threatening calls, I received, with regards his and my own safety were quite concerning and distressful.

Once the media has had its say and the court has completed its ruling this journey is still ongoing for those closely involved. I miss my friend and her daughter every day and for this reason I intend to continue supporting this person as I know it would be their greatest wish. I hope to sponsor him, with the greatest level of respect and kindness, through his journey reintegrating back into society. I must continue to believe that some justice will occur and he will have the chance, after twelve years, to recover and be given the opportunity to be treated as the wonderful human being he is.

I also work in the field of mental health and have been supporting an individual who has a dual diagnosis of schizophrenia and autism and is on a Community Treatment Order (CTO). I have worked closely with the Mental Health Commission, psychiatrists and other clinicians on ceasing what they term the 'misdiagnosis and harmful medication' of those suffering mental health distress; in particular, this confusing dual diagnosis. The person I work closely with was deemed by a head psychiatrist at a government mental health clinic as, 'the most dangerous person in the state'. His recovery has been remarkable and yet when brought before a court, numerous times over the last decade, his plea was always guilty to avoid the possibility of Indefinite Detention.

Complex? It does not have to be! I want to offer answers to the seriously dysfunctional state of our mental health and disability services and their interactions, or lack of, with the justice system. Had I not been personally involved, not by my own choosing, in this world of Indefinite Incarceration then I may be living in blissful ignorance of what is happening. "Lock them up and throw away the key", God forbid, may have been my response!

Too little time to be terribly articulate, much emotion (thank God I still have the capacity to acknowledge and express my feelings), and an attempt to respect that this letter is to be brief. All I can do is hope that those, such as yourselves, in positions of power can be granted great compassion, insight and 'new' eyes to look at doing things differently in the future. I would love to spend time to explain more clearly what my own and other's journeys have been like and whole heartedly welcome any questions, at any time. I cannot truly apologise for the messiness of this letter as it has needed to be written quickly, to meet someone's? deadline – and life, especially when involved in this topic is 'messy'. Perhaps Leunig can best express my thoughts – a poem I read in a psychologist's waiting room yesterday. This clinician is working with me to change the way people suffering ASD are supported, viewed by others and can be truly valued in our world. Everyone's story/experience/journey is unique and needs to be treated with care and respect. There is always a 'whole' story and it would seem there is a serious lack of understanding as to why a person's circumstances may lead them to being Indefinitely Incarcerated. Can we, together, change this for those who are disenfranchised and in great need of our support.

Leunig - from his book "A Common Prayer"

God help us. With great skill and energy, we have ignored the state of the human heart. With politics and economics, we have denied the heart's needs. With eloquence, wit and reason we have belittled the heart's wisdom. With sophistication and style, with science and technology, we have drowned out the voice of the soul. The primitive voice, the innocent voice. The truth. We cannot hear our heart's truth and thus we have betrayed and belittled ourselves and pledged madness to our children. With skill and pride we have made for ourselves an unhappy society. God be with us.

Amen

*Most kindly and gratefully at your service,*