Ms Rushworth,
Chair,
House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee,
Canberra.

Submission – Mental Health and Workplace Participation.

In September 2009 I had the opportunity to address the Economic Development Committee of the Queensland Legislative Assembly. Their report number 2 of November 2009 canvassed hearings into the identification of world's best practice by governments so as to effectively stimulate employment opportunities. I respectfully draw your attention to this report and my submission therein.

As an education, human services and social work qualified person and an advocate for individual and systems mental health environmental reform I would like to submit the following to your committee:

1.   We must examine and challenge employment participation patterns, systems and structures and refine, redesign or modify these so they are more meaningful, relevant and helpful to all persons in terms of fair and equitable access to opportunities and hence social cohesion. Barriers of one size fits all, full time employment as the norm, passive acceptance of old cultures and the reinforcement and reproduction of disadvantage, dependence, stigma and costs rather than investment in people are unhelpful particularly amongst mental health journeys and recovery.

2.   Apart from the ethics of being inclusive and holistic meaningful and relevant access to opportunities is I suggest given statutory support under the principles of commonwealth, state and international law for persons enduring disability inclusive of mental health issues.

3.   I suggest we can and should design, shape, redesign and redefine work systems, structures and practices around people and their perceived and expressed needs.

4.   Investing in our citizens by respecting differences and diversity in this field of capacity, ability and willingness to participate means listening to their journey, their identification of needs, treating them holistically and understanding and respecting the tidal nature of their illness. The

ebb and flow of this journey varies day to day, week to week and person to person.

5. The social disruption of mental illness requires a socially just response and greater awareness in the key social agency of work. Specifically associated barriers of homelessness, housing suitability, transport etc need to be factored in to any working agreements. I suggest a support package of perhaps prioritizing claims for those participating might assist.

6. Skills and knowledge levels may have to be considered on a competency basis with a preparedness to allow time and progress towards becoming competent given that both education and work participation may have been disrupted for some time.

7. Normalisation through adequate housing and rebuilding of social capital through re-connection reduces traditional barriers of stigma, disadvantage and dependence and value adds to individuals and communities. Contactability is essential to accessing work andmaintaining one's participation in same

We should not devalue or discount the value to individual self esteem, confidence and respect of anyone nor their capacity to play a role in their community. The latin inscribed idea of "Civium Industrae Civitas" reminds us that by the industry of its people the state flourishes. Mental health should no longer be allowed to become a matter of social or economic exclusion.

A key response and recommendation might be that funding of mental health be raised to reasonable,relevant and meaningful levels over the next two years with specific money for education around workplace redesign and employment of people beyond the current youth focus alone.

Stephen Graham Brown