

Committee Secretary

Senate Community Affairs References Committee

I wish to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Suicide in Australia.

I feel that my 26 year old daughter, Heather Bradley was let down by the mental health services in Victoria. One Friday evening in November 2005, she was concerned for her own safety and fearing that she would harm herself, she sought help from the Victorian Police. The police took her to hospital where she was kept overnight. The following morning they discharged her with a bottle of pills and informed her that they would call her. Call her they did, the following morning about 10am, the last people to speak with her as she hanged herself within the hour, the pill bottle was empty. My daughter had an ongoing problem with addictions and was known to the mental health system.

The policy of harm minimisation is one that is in need of review, the idea that people who are addicted to mind altering drugs can modify their behaviour seems to be misguided. Total abstinence would appear to be the more helpful course of action, the mental health authority just glossed over her period of abstinence stating that for 18 months they had not heard from her. This was during a period where she was clean and free and of course she did not come under their notice. Once she 'picked up' again she seemed to be put into the too hard basket and indeed they said in their report to the coroner that 'it was inevitable' that she would take her own life. Can you imagine how distressing it was for me to read this in the coroners report? As there was not an inquest I was unaware of all the circumstances until well after she had died. Further shock was to come when I read that the investigating police did not even talk with the chap, Mr Dillon who was present at the time. Incredible! Heather had previously taken out an intervention order against Mr Dillon, the only person who was present when she hanged herself and the police did not even talk with him. Four years later, I 'm yet to come to grips with that. It strikes me as though they must think 'why bother' as she took her own life. Even the coroners report had obvious mistakes like 'Mr Dillon cut Mr Dillon's body down' when they were referring to my daughter. This hit me hard as though even the coroner's office were not caring sufficiently to ensure that such mistakes were corrected before it became an official record of her death.

I find it somewhat distressing to go into much more detail now but I plead with you to do all in your power to assist people who are showing signs of suicide. It may be too late to help my

daughter but maybe it will make a difference for others. I have found that belonging to an organisation called 'The Compassionate Friends' has helped me tremendously in dealing with the death of my daughter. To be able to talk with others who have also suffered the loss of a child has been a great comfort as 'we understand as few others can' Already widowed, I experienced my life being turned upside down when Heather died. Thankfully I was able to tap into such support and receive great comfort from an organisation composed entirely of bereaved parents and siblings. Initiatives such as the Salvation Army's 'Hope for Life Programme' need encouragement and indeed any programme that highlights the need to support not only those in danger of taking their own life, but also caring for the survivors of a loved one's suicide.

Governments, welfare, police and other services need to do more for people at risk of suicide, and for those who are survivors after a family member has taken their own life. I again plead with you to do all in your power to prevent suicide and to support those who are bereaved. I'm willing to provide further information should it be required and if necessary I will travel to Canberra to present my thoughts and experiences in person.

John Bradley

18th November 2009