



Friday June 3 2005

The Senate Select Committee on Mental Health

To whom it may concern,

I will begin to address you at (b.) in your terms of reference. It became very clear to me that my wife had a serious mental problem in July of 2002. She expelled me from our house in MacKay, QLD., where I then had to find a flat in which to reside. She was convinced through the word of God that our small daughter had a brain tumour, could no longer walk and had to be pushed around in a stroller, she was a dwarf and that she had to die before Christmas of that year. When I went to visit my children every day they would inform me that they had nothing to eat and that Mummy sat around crying most of the day and scream at God and converse with Him continually. I called the Mental Health in MacKay for help. At that time my wife simply gave me the children saying that God didn't want her to be with them any longer. I had an extremely good and well paying job at this time. I had to resign because my hours of work were between 11 p.m. and 10 a.m. I had to sell our house because I could no longer pay the mortgage. My children were in a state of shock and probably carry some form of grief to this day. The Mental Health people would not help me in any form until I had my wife committed to their care by way of a court order at the magistrate's court. I did this and she was taken into custody only to be released the very next morning. My wife then became a street person being occasionally picked up by the police for her own good and taken to the mental health ward. This went on for nearly two years until someone in the mental health system finally had the guts to give her the official assessment of schizophrenia. During this time she had on her pension card the address of "no fixed address". I had no family or friends in Queensland, I could no longer pay my bills and I could get no assistance from the C.E.S, the child assistance people or indeed the Department of Mental Health. I was alone with two small children. No one wanted to know about me. I returned to my native Tasmania where there would be some family ties for my children. I divorced my wife, not out of malice, but to have some legal reason for me keeping my children. As you can see, there was no early intervention, acute care, after hours crisis services and certainly no respite care or any care in general. My wife rang me approximately 2 years ago, informed me that she was "cured" and could we be reconciled as a family. I agreed to this and she flew down from Queensland to be with us. She was not "cured" for very long. She used to scream and shout all night long and act in a most bizarre way during the daylight hours including flagellation and chanting. The children were extremely frightened and confused so I had to contact the Tasmanian Mental Health Authority. This mental health unit in ward One E at the Launceston General Hospital, if humanly possible, is far worse than anything I experienced in the Queensland system. My local G.P. arranged to have her admitted as an involuntary patient to One E and I was

assured that she would be looked after for at least a fortnight until various drugs and therapies were tried to help her. She was released 2 days later as "no longer a management problem". She was driven from One E to the Launceston airport and deposited at the front door because she claimed that she lived in MacKay. Not one person from One E had the decency to inform me or her family of this action. This sounds like a profound neglect of their duty of care. She travelled backwards and forwards to QLD, until all of our meagre savings were squandered.

About a month ago she tried to commit suicide by a massive overdose of various drugs. 2 police cars and an ambulance were tied up for at least 2 hours to attend to the scene and once again she was transported to ward One E. I was given every assurance that she would be well cared for and would need to stay at the facility for a minimum of two weeks. She was released four days later, again termed "no longer a management problem". My 10-year-old son who discovered her on the bed after the overdose salivating and with a tongue twice the normal size considered this a morbid joke. She is at home with us again and we care for her the best we can. There has been no back up from the Department of Mental Health. Not a visit from a nurse, social worker or any one else. Not even a simple telephone call to see how things are going for her. It appears that I am to be her only helper as there is absolutely nothing or nobody to help her in her many times of need. I feel very alone and inadequate in this situation. Nobody even asks how my children and I are coping. I am sure that there are thousands of families in Australia that have a very similar story to relate to you. There is no proper help from the Department of Mental Health. We, the shattered families, have to cop the burden both emotionally and financially of our loved ones illnesses. It is appalling. There is no help, particularly here in the North East of Tasmania.

I refer to (j.) in the terms of reference.

About 2 months ago a friend of mine from the neighbouring township of Winnaleah, North East Tasmania, decided that the monthly injections given to him by the local G.P. were of no further use to him. There were no alarm bells rang when he didn't turn up for his injection. It is a truly a shame because this medication has kept him on an even keel for a couple of years. The inevitable happened. His behaviour became quite strange, his personality changed for the worse and he became to frighten his neighbours and friends of many years. I rang the G.P. and told him that because of the lack of medication, my friend had become quite a danger to himself and the community at large. The doctor told me that if I could keep my friend in the one place long enough he would send an ambulance and the police. I succeeded in doing this and my friend was handcuffed and taken away to One E by the police. It was a shame that the ambulance had a 60km round trip for nothing. Once again I was assured by ward One E that my friend would be well cared for and kept in the facility for 2 weeks or longer until his condition was once again under control. My friend was released after only two days. About a week later a house was burned to the ground in Winnaleah. When the police arrived on the scene, my friend admitted his guilt in the crime, even though he hadn't a clue what day or year it was. He is now in custody in Risdon Prison in Hobart and will not agree to be legally represented. Here is a person who is quite insane with no legal help who is going to go to court to simply plead guilty. Should he have

been kept in Ward One E for the minimum two weeks and his condition stabilised this ridiculous situation would probably never be born. Here is just another example of a person who should not be in jail. I hope this allows you to see why there is an overrepresentation of people with a mental illness in the criminal justice system, particularly here in Tasmania.

I refer to (f.) in terms of reference.

The North East of Tasmania has long suffered from geographical isolation. Whilst there is a reasonable hospital in Scottsdale, it has no provision for the mentally ill, drug and alcohol dependants of which there are many scattered throughout our communities. The Scottsdale hospital has only one social worker to deal with the mentally ill of the entire Northeast. This problem is compounded by the fact that the mentally ill try to ease their inner turmoil by drinking copious amounts of alcohol and the ingestion of various drugs with marijuana and amphetamines being the main choice. My wife for example, suffers from schizophrenia with the added complication of anorexia. One social worker at the Scottsdale hospital is hardly the answer. We of the Northeast need a proper facility with well-trained doctor's and staff. We need properly trained nurses and social workers to travel throughout our communities and visit the ill and their families in their homes to get a realistic look at the various existing problems. We most certainly need a mobile assessment team to intervene when family help is simply just not enough. I have to travel a 220km round trip to visit a Doctor at One E in Launceston. This facility, by the way, has only twenty beds in a city the size of Launceston. What hope is there for the people of the Northeast? The problem appears to me that we don't have the voting numbers to make any political statement. We are simply ignored. We are in desperate need of proper Mental Health Services. Please help us!

Sincerely yours,

A large, solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area of the letter.