

Re: Senate Inquiry Terms of Reference 1e & 1m.

80% of People with a Mental Illness in Australia are unemployed

I am writing to you to tell you our story of our daughter in the hope that, should you be elected, you will increase funding in the health budget, for a substantial section of our society, those suffering a mental illness, and their families.

She is a 22year old who has a remarkable story in terms of her suffering schizophrenia and subsequent journey on to the road of "normality".

At age 17, she suffered a severe psychotic episode that was non-drug related, but, we believe, an inherited characteristic. After weeks of non- recognition of us and lost use of her whole self, she started to slowly re-emerge into a state of mind and body that a parent could almost recognise. She under took a great deal of rehabilitation and 5 months later she was back at school. She then successfully repeated year 11 and then gained her VCE, with not a day lost in year 12 and every piece of required work was submitted for assessment. Her school sport requirements were fulfilled, she rejoined the school choir and recommenced her piano lessons. All of her school reports were outstanding and she was one of the most conscientious students at the school.

The next phase of her life was to study for a Diploma of Library and Information Services and her results and work habits reflected those at school. She works for two organizations on a voluntary basis for three days per week, receiving excellent reports in her "feed back" sessions. She now runs Cross Country each weekend in the Winter season for two clubs, barely missing a race and never missing a training session. Her newly found Anglican Church commitments are treated with similar attitude. All of these attributes demonstrate her reliability and dedication to the task at hand.

She has been to several job interviews, each time looking professionally dressed and arriving ahead of time. Each time she has been unsuccessful, only to be told that she has been the "best external applicant". In desperation, her designated employment worker/support person attended an interview with She, mainly to see if She needed to sharpen her interview skills. However this person told She that if she didn't get the job after that particular interview, it would not be because of She's interview skills.

So, here we have a very capable person, with tertiary qualifications, having never spent one day in a hospital, attending her Employment agency on a weekly basis, with nothing but a Disability Pension and hopes for employment fading quickly. My theory is that as soon as the interview panel see her slight, glassy stare, their minds are made up instantly.