

Sent: Wednesday, 27 April 2005 2:23 AM

To: Committee, Mental Health (SEN)

Subject: Senate Select Committee on Mental Health
To Committee Secretary, Senate Select Committee on Mental Health,
Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing concerning the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health.

Our son, who is now 21, had a psychotic episode three years ago and was later diagnosed with schizophrenia. We consider ourselves lucky that we had to call an ambulance, with the police, to help us when he had his first episode, as he is now receiving treatment and support for his illness. We have since heard of so many people whose relatives are not quite seriously ill enough to be admitted to the overworked system and so the mentally ill person and their family hang in limbo between being helped and being well. CATT teams are a wonderful invention, but so many more of them are needed. Likewise, the whole mental health system needs more staff. Why is it that the national mental health budget accounts for only 7% of the total health budget, but 20% of health demand? Surely that is plain illogical? Of course, the fact that the demand is from a section of the community who are often unable to speak out for their rights may be relevant here!

We are very grateful for the help our son has received, but we are now at the stage where we hope he might soon be able to find employment and a safe, comfortable place to live independently from us, like his 'sane' friends. This would appear to be a reasonable expectation for a 21 year old, but it seems we are being very optimistic! As 80% of people with a mental illness in Australia are unemployed and 24% of those living with a psychotic illness in Australia live in marginal housing, he will be an exception if he does achieve what we hope for. The ideal solution would be supported accommodation, but only 4.9% live in purpose-run supported accommodation, so that may, if he is lucky, be possible for a short time. In the meantime, he has to rely on us, his well meaning but untrained family, to look after him. If we were not here, he would very probably end up back in hospital, costing the government a good deal of money, and yet he is not considered ill enough for us to receive carer payments. You see, he can do up his shoe laces! (Centrelink's system is very much geared towards physical disabilities).

I was also interested to read that the new Austin/Mercy hospital, in Heidelberg, has spent \$25 million on the car park and \$9.5 million dollars on mental health! (From page 14 of 'Banner' - the Banyule council newsletter, April 2005). That seems to sum up the general populus' attitude! As I read at a rally recently, "If you had a mental illness, would it change your mind?" How much more than 20% of the population is going to have to suffer from a mental illness before someone's mind is changed who can help this section of the community, as you would hope would happen in a civilised, caring society? I call for a full public inquiry into the state of the mental health services in Australia.