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7/6/2005

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Please see below our submission.

Much more needs to be done to assist people with a mental illness. Our daughter was first diagnosed with Schizophrenia in June 2000. She has been hospitalised on four occasions, for at least 6 weeks at a time, and she still does not have insight into her illness, which makes it very difficult. On two occasions she was missing for at least 6 months – once living on the streets. The experiences, not only for her, but for us her parents have been horrendous. I emphasise below where urgent improvements are required:

- **Housing.** Our daughter is 32 years of age and is currently living at home with us. She needs to live independently in pleasant, affordable accommodation near public transport and facilities that she requires.
- **Assistance with Employment.** Our daughter would love to work. Since 2000 she has only been in paid employment for 6 months, when she worked successfully in a café. She almost completed her University degree when things started to go wrong for her. Early intervention is critical and a lot more needs to be done to assist vulnerable young people.
- **Education in de-stigmatising mental illness.** Stigma is a real issue and businesses need to change their attitudes towards employing people with a mental illness. Given the chance, I have no doubt that any employer would find our daughter to be a loyal, hard working employee. Self esteem can be boosted by a person earning money for a living rather than receiving handouts. Our daughter does not like sitting at home, isolated, receiving Government benefits.
- **Assistance after discharge from hospital.** After our daughter's first admission to hospital she suffered from chronic negative symptoms for 18 months. This was at a crucial stage when she needed specialised care and support, not just sent home and left to cope. This meant that our daughter did nothing other than sit in the chair and look out the window. She did however receive some psychotherapy for part of the time.
- **Private Psychiatrists.** Private Psychiatrists need to act more responsibly and there needs to be a system in place to ensure they act in the consumer's best interest. Our daughter was seeing a Private Psychiatrist and he reduced her medication too quickly –

by 1/3 in 7 months. When I questioned him regarding this, he said, "She put pressure on me".

- **Training & support for Primary Carers.** We, her parents and carers also needed support which initially we did not receive. In fact in the beginning it was hard to find any support.

If the appropriate supports for people with a mental illness were in place it would be much more beneficial all around than paying disability pensions to people who would prefer to work in appropriate jobs, if they were given the opportunity with training and encouragement.

Yours sincerely

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