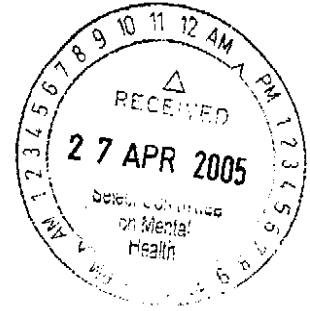


**Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Mental Health**



24-04-2005

As a mother and carer of a son who for the last 7 years has suffered with the debilitating illness of Schizophrenia would like to give you some insight in to what we as family members in the normal course of our lives experience. I for one am grateful for the opportunity to do so. I have found with time comes an all most dulling of the senses in order to cope with the stigma that is attached to this illness. In my case in the beginning my son and I had wonderful support from both family and friends. I was only to happy to let people know at last we had an answer to my sons problems.

How a wonderful young man with a great job, lots of friends and a wonderful partner a new son and his whole life ahead of him could have contracted such an illness was beyond my comprehension. Unfortunately in a perfect world people would not cross the road to avoid him or they would not say he should be out working, or they would ask me how my son was and really mean it. Some of these people I thought understand, I tried very hard to explain as best I could. For these reasons I feel carers of people with mental illness feel very isolated and alone and it is just to hard to keep explaining, why there family member just does not seem to fit into the mould of having an illness and at times not seeming to get better. We know how complex mental illness is and how the stigma attached to it can have such a devastating effect that the person with the illness will suffer by not excepting he has a mental illness. We need to educate people that this is an illness, just like any other illness. ok so it is complex

I was lucky enough to sit on a carer participation project where a number of policies were developed. Several of these were modified according to recommendations made by members of the Clinical Standards committee, These recommendations were approved and are now polices. I ask the questions they were polices for carers about carers but how many carers even know they exists. If changes are to be made polices are being written why not follow up and introduce them. Maybe this would be a wonderful start To educating and de-stigmatising mental illness.

Because of the complexity of mental illness we really need flexibility of services. People who experience mental illness as in my son's case unless they are on a treatment order find it very hard to get help.

My son is on a treatment order because of his lack of insight when he becomes unwell tries to take his life. I have found during his stays in hospital He is treated with respect and I always feel very confident this is for the best and I pray to god it will be the last time. We leave the hospital and unfortunately due to the basic lack of resources we are on our own and I keep thinking my god where is the help. If it were any other medical condition would the discharge from hospital be the same? How many people would be discharged if they did not have family and carers to go to?

People's expectations and the reality of the situation are clouded. I as a carer on occasions have been very disappointed by what I felt was a lack of support. But is it wrong to expect the very best of care for my son when he leaves hospital? Is it wrong to expect he should be able to live independently which from all accounts would be better for him and his illness? Is it wrong to expect he should be able to work so he could regain his self-esteem and confidence again so he can feel he is a normal part of society? I have watched him try and try to just regain his life to just have a small part of what he had back. I am aware of the National Mental Health Policy and again I ask the question how long before better mental health outcomes will be addressed. Supported accommodation, employment, family and social support services.

The issue of a major new player in the field of mental illness the need for people with a mental illness to self medicate and the alarming rate of people who develop a mental illness from drug use. A conservative estimate is that 60% of people with a mental illness also have a drug use issue. My son falls into this group now he self medicates and it is a growing problem for him. The irony for us is he would rather admit he has a drug problem than admit he has schizophrenia. A fresh approach to this major problem must be addressed. Kids must be made aware of the dangers of drugs and mental illness. Schools programs carers of people with mental could relate their experiences. Talk back interviews local groups anywhere you could use your voice to try and stop the carnage our young people face if they continue to take drugs and do not realise how it could effect their mental health.

My son just wants his life back the way it was. We discovered his grandmother had suffered Schizophrenia but nobody talked about it and it was just something that was a deep dark secret never to be discussed never to acknowledged so when I went looking for answers it was like trying to extract teeth that to me was the worst form of stigma. So my son was predisposed and when he started smoking marijuana he developed schizophrenia. Would you like this to happen to you? Could be a wonderful campaign. This is a problem that needs addressing now, right now. Our youth of Australia need our help God forbid that any more family's like ours need to go through what our family has been through in the last 7 years.

7 years ago part of the son that I knew went away I have grieved with him as I watch him struggle with his demons and try to get back what he feels he has lost. I guess at times I also grieve and wonder what if. But I am the lucky one I can do what ever I want I have no restrictions on me. People with mental illness have no voice other than people like us who love and just want the best that life can offer. We have a chance to make these peoples life's better. Medication is improving all the time and with your help quality services and care can be put in place.

WILL YOU HELP

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