

Ian Holland  
Committee Secretary  
Senate Selection Committee on Mental Health  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

6<sup>TH</sup> May 2005

Dear Mr. Holland,

I hope that you will take the time to read my letter and that some changes will soon occur in the Mental Health area.

I work as the manager of an NGO (not for profit organization) called enVision Support Services. We began in 1996 assisting people to move out of long stay psychiatric institutions to live in the community under the Project 300 funding. A program at the time which was well planned and combining social support, housing, and mental health input. Those people that accessed this program their lives were changed for ever by this initiative and many of whom have not needed to access a psychiatric hospital since this time. A small price compared to the cost of keeping people in long stay institutional care or prison. If the people we support under Project 300 hadn't received these funds to be supported then they too would be still in institutions or in prison instead they live in the community where we all belong.

I have been a social worker in England for 20yrs, most of those years I worked in community mental health teams, where services were in the community and accessible. We worked a patch model which meant that you were able to link into the community and build networks in the local area working with schools, police and General practitioners. This had many benefits but especially for early intervention and suicide prevention.

When I moved to Australia 6yrs ago I was shocked at the lack of Care in the Community and how backward it was in Australia. Not just in services to people suffering from acute symptoms but in the culture of the people working in this area and the lack of dignity and respect it seems to have bred. As an organization enVision support services would not be in existence now if we had continued to support only those people that had solely a psychiatric disability. This is due to the lack of funds that has been made available for mental health. As an organization we now support people who have a psychiatric and intellectual/ or other disability.

Recently I advertised in the paper to recruit staff in the Beenleigh area, shortly after this I received a telephone call from a person who lived in Rockhampton, she rang to ask me whether we would ever be in a position to support people with psychiatric disability in that area? Unfortunately I had to tell her that we struggle with accessing funds for people on the Gold Coast but would hope that services in her area would develop in time. Sadly she went on to tell me that her brother suffered from Schizophrenia and he had come down to the Gold coast for a holiday and had become very unwell, he went to the Gold Coast hospital and was told to go home and work out his goals in his life. He didn't have a home as such and went to stay with his father. Unfortunately shortly after being with his father he stabbed his father and he died of these stab wounds.

Having been in this area of work for many years I am aware that we are unable at times to change the future. However as a Government department I'm surprised you haven't addressed this ongoing lack of care to people with mental illness in the community.


There are people in the community that want to respond to those people that have a psychiatric disability but are unable to do so. enVision have a small amount of block funds from the health department to support families where a parent has a mental illness; with these funds we support 12 families a week, a drop in the ocean!

The telephones constantly ring with people asking for support we can not respond as there are no resources available for us to access. The hospitals are full of people that could have been treated in the community, if services had been accessible. Eventually when people get admitted it takes twice the amount of time to get them well again, by this time they have probably lost the support of their family and friends and any chance of keeping their accommodation. So! Where does one go if you remain unwell? The options are you end up in Robina hospital this could be for years or you get pushed back out into the community. For some people they end up in local hostel but this is rare as many hostels don't want this group of people. Many young people at this point have other addictions plus a mental health problem and will go on to offend. Depending on the offence they may appear in court receive a sentence and end up in the criminal system. What a world we live in!

The cost of keeping people in prison is ridiculous, if you have a mental illness it does very little to assist these people back into the community. If you consider those people lucky to get into Robina hospital, then we need to think again, many people were moved over from Woolston Park hospital in 1999. They may have been offered housing at some point but without support in the community they soon become unwell and end up back in hospital. The focus of Project 300 has recently been on people who will only need approximately 10hrs of support a week and these people have had dual disability, meaning they have a mental illness and an intellectual disability so those people that the program was set up to reach, it has failed in a very cruel way.

In many of the areas that I have touched on Mental Health needs to be looked at from many different angles by people that are open minded. I am not advocating for more hospital beds but just the beds need to be freed up, to do this you need better community resources, better access to mental health professionals and more affordable housing. We don't need mini- institutions in the community. Project 300 is your proof of how things can work without incarceration. We also need flexible funding so that we can respond to peoples fluctuating mental health so that more people can be assisted as the needs of the individual changes.

Yours sincerely

  
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JACKIE DOYLE  
(Manager)