



Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

PO Box 36, HIGGINS ACT 2615

Telephone (02) 6254 2961

Email mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au

Web www.ffdlr.org.au

31 July, 2005

Senator Lyn Allison
Chair
Senate Inquiry into Mental Health
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Allison,

At the end of our evidence last Wednesday you expressed an interest in receiving information on the Wraparound approach as a means of supporting those with a mental illness or disorder and their carers.

Our submission (no. 319) was directed at the overarching issue of the need to integrate thoroughly mental health and drug strategies. The absence of that integration frustrates many attempts at treatment at the acute end and, of even more importance, contributes at the other end of the spectrum to the recruitment of large numbers of people with mental illness or disorders. Indeed it is not an overstatement that the increasing flow of people with mental health conditions aggravated or otherwise associated with substance abuse has put the mental health system under great stress and that any serious attempt to rectify the situation at the acute end without reduction of that flow is beyond the financial capacity of government. And it should be emphasised again that current approaches and even when they are strengthened at the expense of freedoms we enjoy will not stop the flow of drugs but will serve to maintain that flow. Unfortunately, there was not time on Wednesday to go into those crucial economic aspects.

It became clear to us from the Committee's questioning of other witnesses that you are also interested in what might be termed practical treatment and other strategies that will best support mental health consumers and carers. Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform addressed these issues in the submission Mr Bush mentioned that we made in September 2003 to an inquiry by a committee of the ACT Assembly into support services for families of people in custody.

After much consultation with our members and others we identified on pp. 34-35 the following principles or propositions:

- (a) Remand centres and prison are no place for people with serious mental disorders.
- (b) The existence or otherwise of a serious mental illness warranting urgent psychiatric treatment should not be the determinant of whether support is provided.
- (c) The needs of those with a mental disorder and their families should not be defined or limited by reference to the professional competences of those involved in providing some support.

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- (d) Concern for some interests of those with mental disorders should not undermine the capacity of those willing to provide support.
- (e) Concern to provide requisite professional support for those with a mental disorder should not be done in a way that diminishes the capacity of the family to provide appropriate longer term support.
- (f) Interventions should not focus on blame and separation of someone with a mental disorder from his or her family but should focus on enhancing the capacity of the family to provide support.
- (g) Provision of adequate treatment and services for those with a mental disorder and substance dependence.
- (h) Support for families seeking to support a member who has a mental disorder.
- (i) Support should be available to head off a crisis rather than be available only when a crisis arises.
- (j) Provision of facilities where the mentally ill can be cared for when a crisis is looming or to provide relief for family and other carers.
- (k) Provision of a facility outside remand centres and prison where those with a mental disorder who become caught up in the criminal law may be cared for.
- (l) Integrate mental health services with other support for those with a mental disorder and their family.

The Wraparound discussed at p. 45 is a successful program to give effect to that last principle: the need to integrate mental health services with other support for those with a mental disorder and their family. Further information on the program is available at Bruce Kamradt, "Wraparound Milwaukee: aiding youth with mental health needs" in *Juvenile Justice Journal*, vol. VII, no. 1 (April 2000) at http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjjnl_2000_4/wrap.html and [wrap_2.html](#).

We noted too that the Committee has questioned witnesses on a number of occasions about confidentiality. That too is covered in our attached submission under principle (d): Concern for some interests of those with mental disorders should not undermine the capacity of those willing to provide support (pp. 37-39). Confidentiality can be a serious obstacle to the provision of support.

If it would assist the Committee we would be pleased to have this letter and the attached submission of September 2003, regarded as a supplementary submission from Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform to your inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Brian McConnell
President