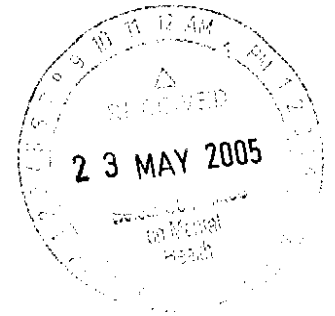


Ian Holland
Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



13 March 2005

Dear Mr Holland

I am writing to tell you the story of one community that typifies the situation generally in Australia, with regard to mental health.

I live in a town in South East Queensland called Caboolture and work for a small community based organisation called Connections also in Caboolture.

For the past ten (10) years Caboolture has been identified as an area of excessively rapid population growth and is currently one of the seventh fastest growth areas in the state. The population is growing at more than twice the state average with more than 3,000 people moving to the Shire each year.

Initially the Shire, which is situated equal distances between the Sunshine Coast to the north and Brisbane to the south, was one of proportionately high low socio-economic demographics. This dynamic is slowly changing however, with an increased number of professional people moving to the area and commuting either north or to the south for work purposes, and also business people seeking to capitalise on the local growth and potential.

Connections is recurrently funded by Disability Services Queensland to provide lifestyle support to adults who experience a mental health issue or psychiatric disability and who live within the Caboolture Shire. Connections is the only mental health specific outreach service in the Shire.

There is no service on the Redcliffe Peninsula, which is a part of the Redcliffe Caboolture Health District catchment area. Most referrals to Connections come from the Caboolture Mental Health Team. People are prioritised according to the number and length of admissions to the Caboolture Hospital Mental Health Unit, lack of natural support networks (family and friends), a history of serious self neglect, risk of relapse, and further disadvantage due to another disability (intellectual, physical etc).

Connections receives the same amount of annual funding that the service was granted upon inception in 1996. This means that a new referral can only be accepted if a current service user develops increased ability to live

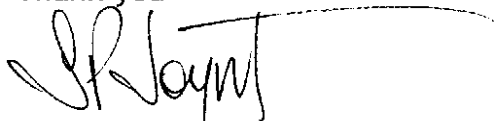
independently and support is substantially reduced or no longer required, or an individual relocates out of the area.

Mr. Holland, people who experience a mental health issue or psychiatric disability are no different from you or I. Not one of them would choose to experience a mental health issue or psychiatric disability. What they would choose is to have positive relationships with family and friends, live in a comfortable house and have a purpose to their lives. People want to work or at least be engaged in meaningful activities and feel and be a part of their community. However, many people who experience mental health issues have little choice about even the most fundamental things in their lives- like with whom and where to live.

I trust that a result of the Senate Select Committee will be that all levels of government are held accountable for their decisions and actions, which currently see health and in particular mental health down the bottom of the funding priority list.

I hope that the Inquiry will be a turning point and give some hope for a brighter future for the people who continue to be some of Australia's most marginalised, through government recognition and funding directed accordingly.

Thank-you



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