

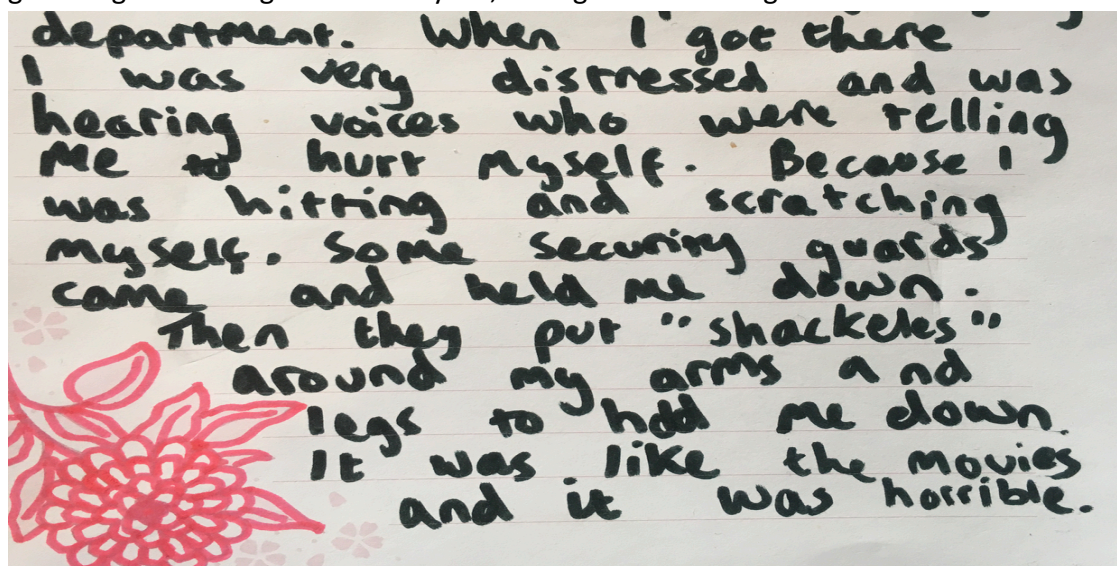
## Submission to Victoria's mental health Royal Commission

Preface: I am a 17-year-old girl who has experienced Victoria's mental health system first hand. In this submission I want to share my experience, and in particular my experience with being hospitalised in Victoria. Through my submission I hope to help change our system and perhaps provide a voice for others who have had similar experiences and for many reasons cannot share their story or aren't here to share it today.

I am going to share my story chronologically. In 2018 I was admitted in to the [REDACTED] children's High Dependency unit over 10 times and fortunately I documented every admission and emergency department visit in my diary. In this document I will include shots of my personal diary that was kept last year to illustrate my points and story.

Here goes nothing:

Everything started on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April when I was transferred from [REDACTED] Clinic to the [REDACTED] children's ED because they "couldn't keep me safe there". Upon arrival at the ED I was taken to a small room which was more like a cupboard, somewhere that I later learned, was where they put people like me. Just me and my suicidal thoughts. What could possibly go wrong? I then began to hurt myself, hitting and scratching etc.



Diary entry from 28<sup>th</sup> April 2018: "When I got there I was distressed and was hearing voices who were telling me to hurt myself. Because I was hitting and scratching myself, Some security guards came and held me down. Then they put "shackles" around my arms and legs and held me down. It was like the movies and it was horrible."

They then gave me some medication which made me fall asleep.

As soon as I woke up the voices started again and they tied me down again and gave me an injection which made me fall asleep.

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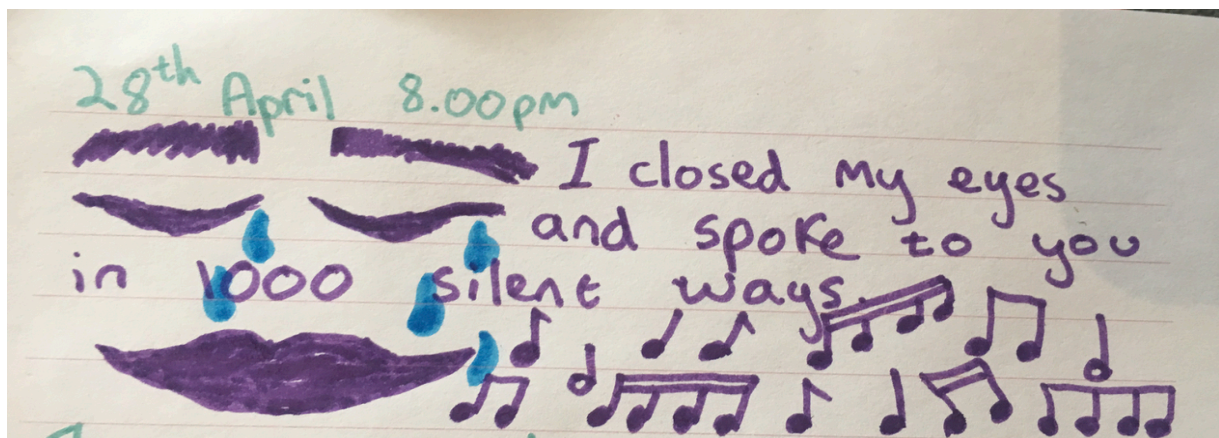
So there it is, my first experience in Victoria's public mental health system, a nightmare or in my words at the time: "like the movies and it was horrible."

My questions here are:

Why did I get restrained and medicated immediately after every time I started to become stressed? Why did nobody try to talk to me? I came for help, and me... a non-violent 17 year old girl was heavily medicated and restrained.

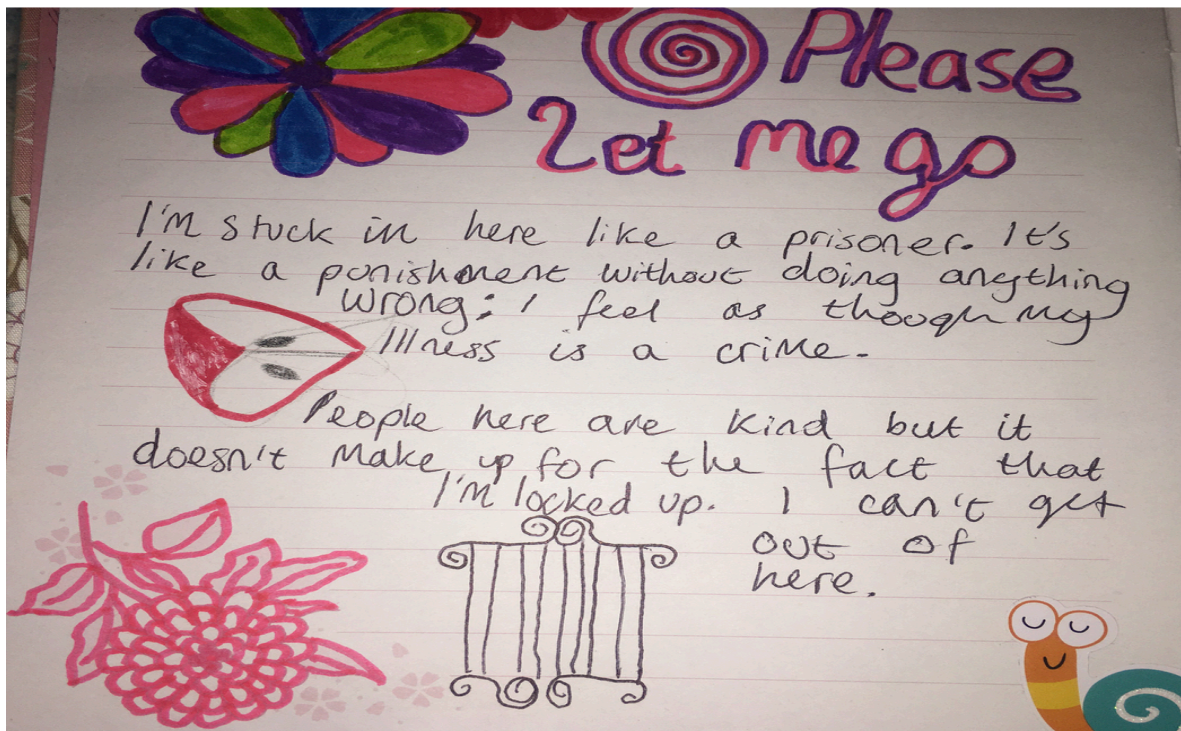
From the ED I was transferred to the High Dependency unit (HDU).

Already feeling hopeless and helpless, my first day in the HDU was tough, isolating and confronting. I, however in comparison to my fellow patients, was lucky enough to have a family who visited me every day. Even with the support from my family I felt so incredibly lost, I felt guilty and ashamed as though I had done something wrong.



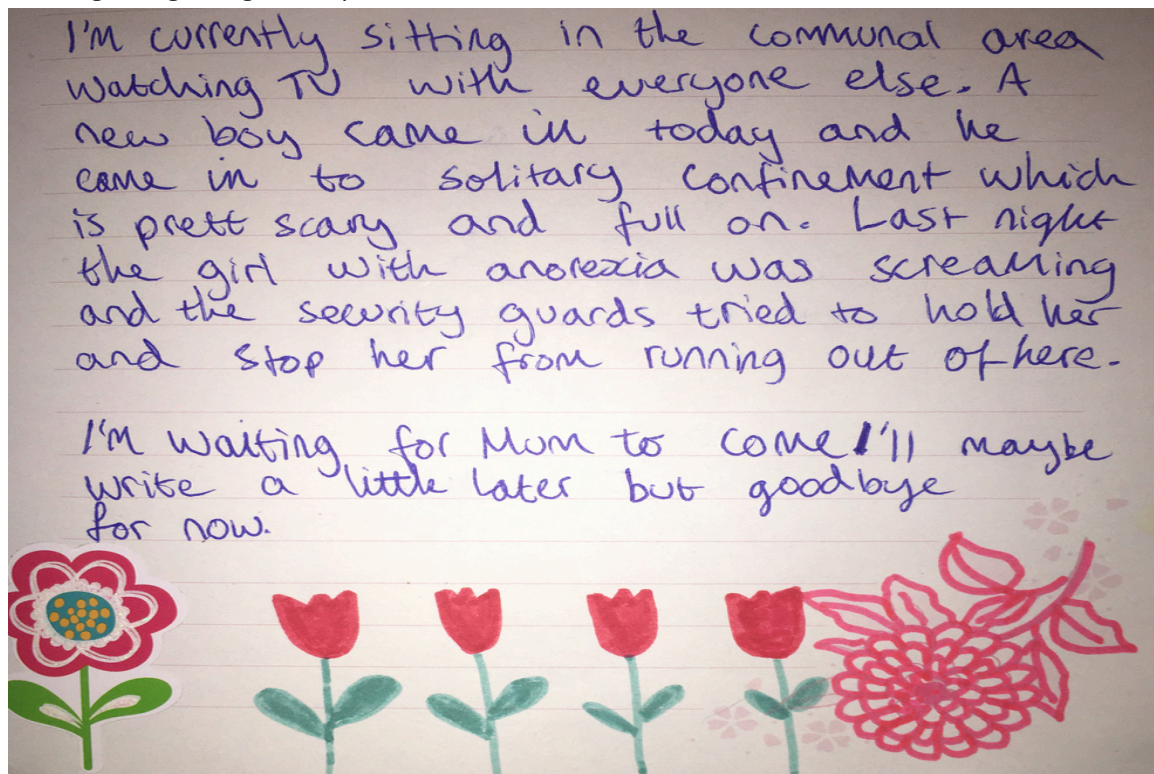
Diary entry 28<sup>th</sup> April 2018: "I closed my eyes and spoke to you in 1000 silent ways."





q2sdwDiary entry 29<sup>th</sup> of April (Just three days in to my experience in the public system): "I'm stuck in here like a prisoner. It's like a punishment without doing anything wrong: I feel as though my illness is a crime. People here are kind but it doesn't make up for the fact that I'm locked up. I can't get out of here."

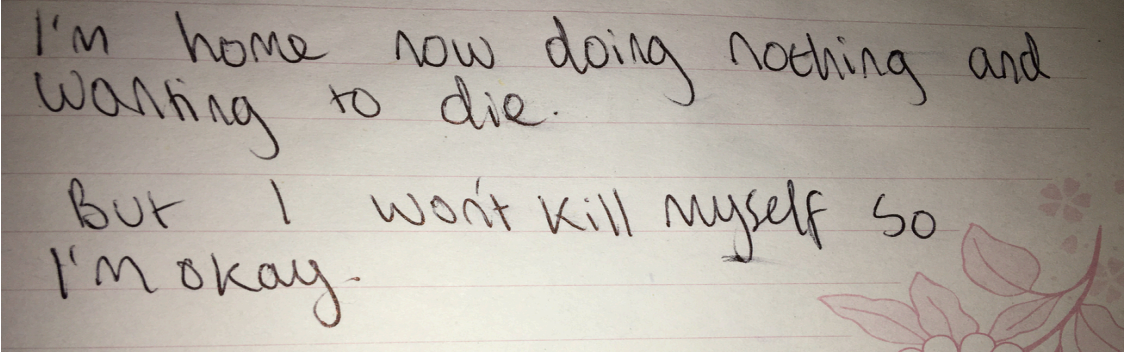
The HDU was intense and it was scary. One of the hardest parts was watching other kids suffering and getting no help:



Diary entry 29<sup>th</sup> April: "I'm currently sitting in the communal area and watching Tv with everyone else. A new boy came in today and he came in to solitary confinement which is pretty scary and full on. Last night the girl with anorexia was screaming and the security guards tries to hold her and stop her from running out of here. I'm waiting for mum to come I'll maybe write a little later but goodbye for now."



The rest of my time in my first admission was in a word: boring. After my week long admission at [REDACTED] I was discharged and sent back to my regular psych and supports. Three weeks later... I overdosed. My brother found out and took me to the [REDACTED], where I was assessed both physically and psychologically and sent home in no less than 24 hours.

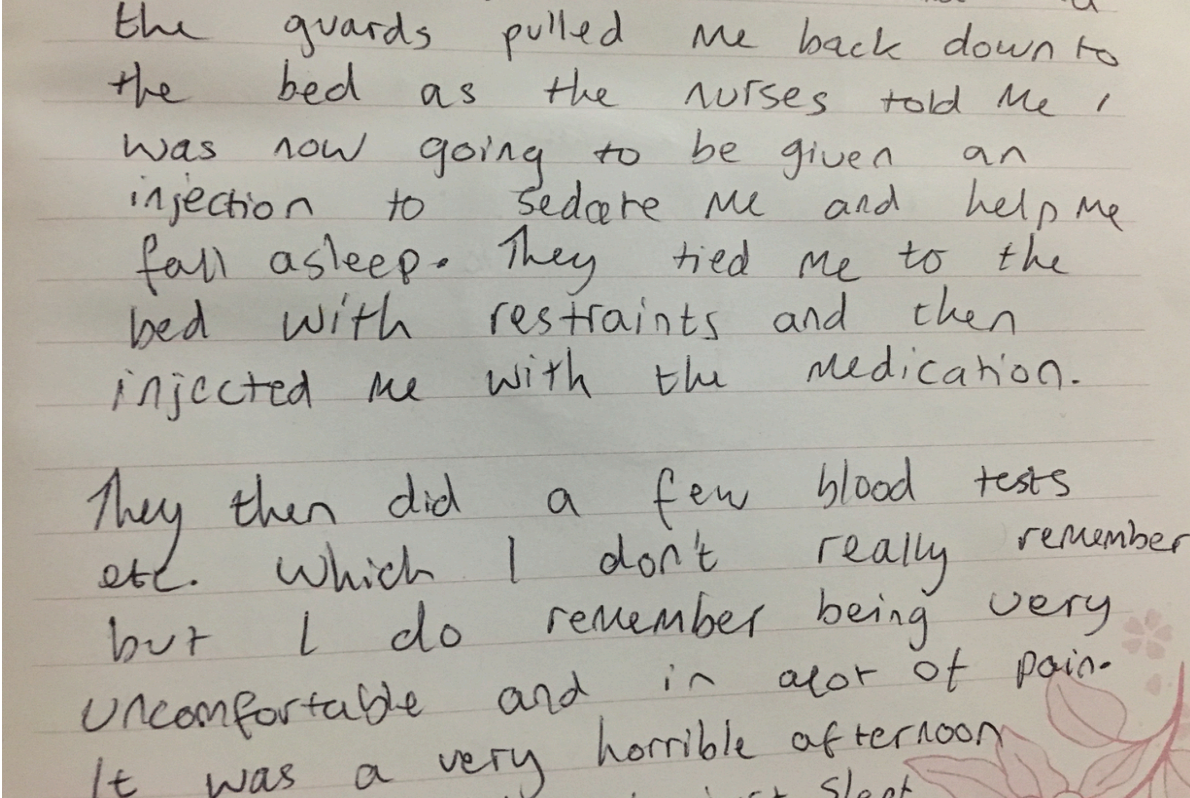


I'm home now doing nothing and  
wanting to die.  
But I won't kill myself so  
I'm okay.

Diary entry 22<sup>nd</sup> of may: "I'm home now doing nothing and wanting to die. But I won't kill myself so I'm ok."

Two experiences in to the system I already knew: if I wasn't going to kill myself and wasn't at immediate risk, nobody cared or "I'm okay". Within the system this is really how it feels. Nobody cares until you're about to do it. Then they take you to a foreign scary place, hold you there until you say you're not suicidal anymore and then you get sent home.

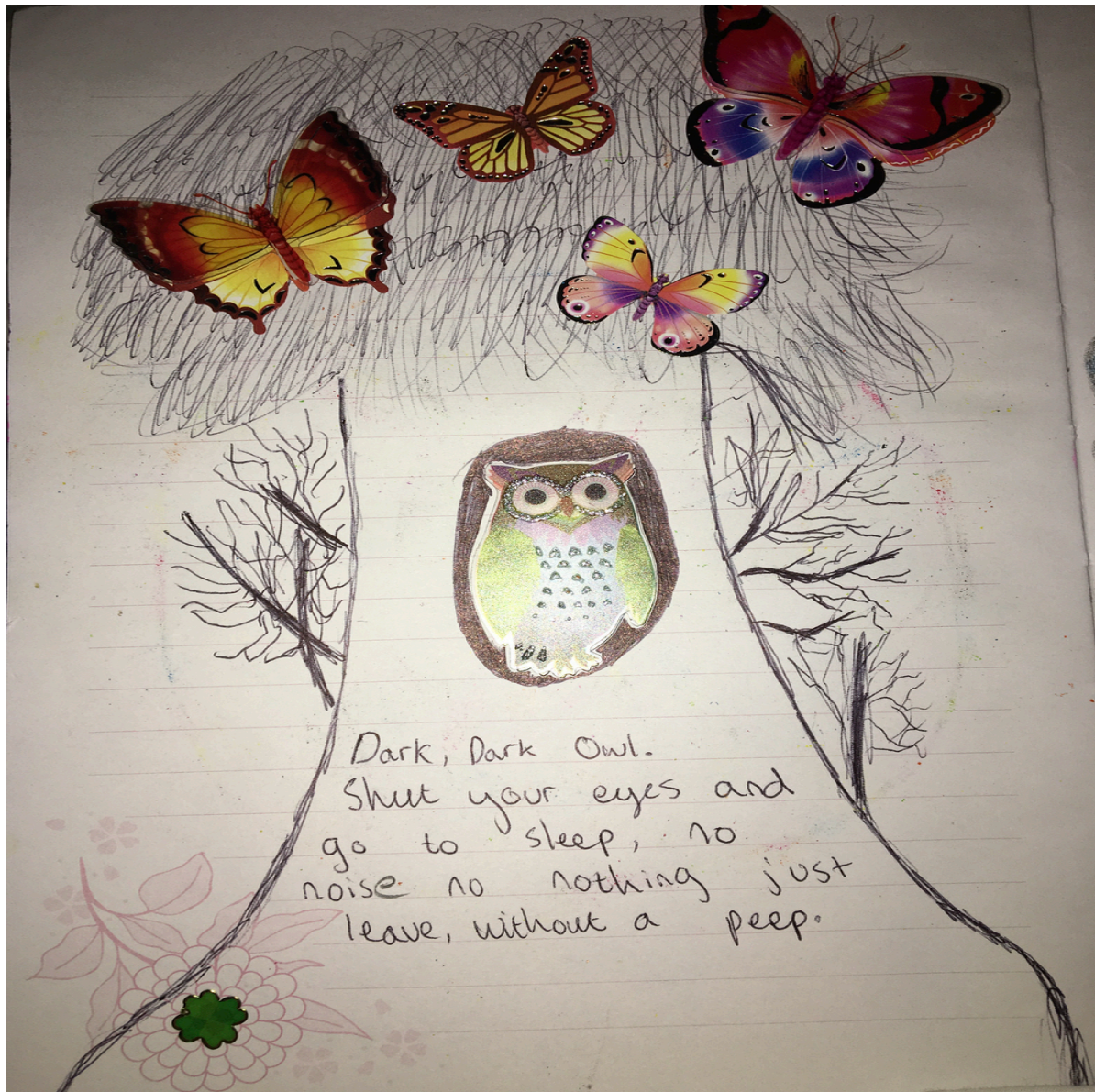
On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May I was back in emergency. Restrained again, sedated again, another horror movie in ED.



the guards pulled me back down to  
the bed as the nurses told me I  
was now going to be given an  
injection to sedate me and help me  
fall asleep. They tied me to the  
bed with restraints and then  
injected me with the medication.  
  
They then did a few blood tests  
etc. which I don't really remember  
but I do remember being very  
uncomfortable and in alot of pain.  
It was a very horrible afternoon  
I just slept

Diary entry 29<sup>th</sup> May





Diary entry 29<sup>th</sup> May- Feeling lost, alone and not listened to in the system.

After my second admission to [REDACTED] I was discharged after under a week. Sent back to my regular supports within the community: one appointment a week with a psych who did not understand the circumstances of the public system. No additional support, no outreach, back to before despite my cries for help.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of July I was back at [REDACTED] after an overdose the Monday before. Of course there's the usual horror story of the ED before I made it to the ward. Shackles and guards and injections that made me sleepy. This admission I was in for my birthday. On my birthday eve I was very distressed because I wanted to leave [REDACTED]. I was dragged in to seclusion by security guards and injected in my bum. I remember this moment very distinctly. Why? Because I was treated like an animal. Dragged and thrown. My pants were pulled down, I was injected and they did not even bother to pull my pants back up before they pushed me in to the mattress extra hard so I could not get up and ran out the room and slammed the door. When I was finally allowed out they spoke to me through an intercom and said if I remain calm they will let me out. I was exhausted and disorientated, confused and sedated. All this, the night before my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, something I will unfortunately never forget. On my actual birthday, I was in the room

next to the seclusion room. The day of my birthday was worse than the day before. It was not me this time, but another girl from the [REDACTED] ward. A tiny young girl who was put in seclusion because she, like me the night before, wouldn't calm down. As I remember it, she was in there for ages and was screaming and banging and distraught the entire time. Despite the harm this may have done her, for me, every birthday for the rest of my life, including my 18<sup>th</sup> coming up this month, I will hear the little girls scream and I will feel her fear.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July I was discharged from [REDACTED]. A month later, I was back. I was then admitted to [REDACTED], and after that on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, I was back at [REDACTED]. Each time being discharged with no additional support. This nightmare went on and on, every admission with its struggles and without the 'support' that I so desperately needed. My final admission was earlier this year (January 2019). Why haven't I been back since? Because in my final admission my psychiatrist said to me; I joke not: "What's so bad about your life? Why are you here again?" This for me was the moment where I completely gave up. I gave up on the system, it had let me down time after time and ultimately hurt me more than when I came in. The place that I came to get help was only a place where I was invalidated, secluded, isolated and sedated. The reality is that now, if I need the support of hospital I would never ask for it. Because I feel as though I can't, I feel as though other people have it worse so I don't deserve it, and this I know, is where it can go horribly wrong. When people feel that even if they ask for help, they will not receive genuine help and care. They will be merely kept alive in a jail like environment, the last thing we want. If you're acutely suicidal, the last thing you need is to be locked in a low stimulus environment with your own thoughts, this does not help you recover it just keeps you alive.

I in no way intend to discount the hard work of the nurses. Almost every nurse was passionate, caring, kind and understanding. But how can they properly do their job in a system that is so flawed? I know for a fact that they hate restraining and secluding and doing horrible things of the sort. However unfortunately they do not have the resources in terms of patient to nurse ratio and funding to properly care for those who needed help.

Why do I tell my story? Because I am one of the lucky ones. When I say lucky, I mean that I had visitors, people that bought me food I actually enjoyed, people who would spend time with me and talk to me (all being my family and friends). But being in there, as I said, I know I'm one of the lucky ones. Other patients didn't get visitors, other patients didn't have family and other patients sometimes couldn't even stand up for themselves. So if the public system did this to me: A well-off, not violent, articulate, 17 year old girl. I cannot even imagine what harm it did other people and children less fortunate than me. I was treated like I wasn't human, I was scared and only crying for help.

How everything went so horribly wrong I do not know. But I can only hope that the person reading this has listened and has begun to feel what so many victims of our system have felt. So that we can make a change for the better, and actually help those who cry for it.



