2019 Submission - Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

Organisation Name
N/A

Name
Mr Lachlan Harris

What are your suggestions to improve the Victorian communitys understanding of mental illness and reduce stigma and discrimination?
"Television ads are very effective, especially when they have a clear slogan or theme. I highly suggest education surrounding mental health be available to parents and Carers at public high schools. "

What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent mental illness and to support people to get early treatment and support?
Visibility in the media and acknowledgement of mental illness by government leaders.

What is already working well and what can be done better to prevent suicide?
Social workers or counsels available for students at all public high schools.

What makes it hard for people to experience good mental health and what can be done to improve this? This may include how people find, access and experience mental health treatment and support and how services link with each other.
"Accessibility to mental health treatment and support depends on the public knowing that help is out there. Lifelines, websites, etc are very beneficial, I think help centres' in the cbd and major cities that are open 24/7 for anyone to walk into would decrease the amount of people waiting in public hospitals and suicide among the disadvantaged. The centres could have information about accessing healthcare, community events, housing, and can be somewhere the public can go to if they feel unsafe or unstable. "

What are the drivers behind some communities in Victoria experiencing poorer mental health outcomes and what needs to be done to address this?
"Poor mental health is often caused in youth by a feeling of suppression. Campaigns surrounding acceptance, community and support would help. Also increased resources for government initiatives for disadvantaged groups such as LGBT would help prevent mental ill health. "

What are the needs of family members and carers and what can be done better to support them?
Community groups for parents of ill children to share stories and feel connected with others who understand what they are going through. If a child knows their parent is supported they will not feel guilty or ashamed to ask them for help.

What can be done to attract, retain and better support the mental health workforce, including peer support workers?
"Increased recognition of exceptional work, awards like on Australia Day for people working in the mental health workforce. Perhaps when police are walking through the city, especially at night,

there could also be an uniformed mental health worker. Uniforms, awards and public recognition would help raise the status of mental health workers. "

What are the opportunities in the Victorian community for people living with mental illness to improve their social and economic participation, and what needs to be done to realise these opportunities?
This really relies on local governments to provide opportunities for their community to improve their quality of life. I think a sponsor program that they use for recovering addicts would work as well.

Thinking about what Victorias mental health system should ideally look like, tell us what areas and reform ideas you would like the Royal Commission to prioritise for change?
"I would like them to include all stages of life, especially retirees and teenagers in media campaigns and reform. "

What can be done now to prepare for changes to Victorias mental health system and support improvements to last?
Increased funding and public acknowledgement.

Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?
N/A

Being Herd - Second Draft

Hello, my name is Lachlan and I am 19 years old, and this is my story. In primary school at the age of nine, I started noticing that I was different. When Mum was late picking me up after school, I would panic. All logic would fly out the window and I would feel paralysed. I knew she was on her way, but the knot in my stomach didn't believe it. In our weekly music class I would start crying and feel dizzyingly lost, so alone and scared because I didn't understand why I was so upset. I loved singing, why did my body react like this? In the classroom I would often react to a challenging maths problem with crying, fast breathing and that same sense of disorientation. I remember having a debate with my classmates about which sex was better, girls or boys. I was the only kid arguing for the opposite sex. I knew I wanted to be a boy, more than anything in the world, but I didn't know what that meant.

I'm now 15, in an all girls high school, and watching everyone around me shift and morph into their grown-up selves. All the feelings of being lost, alone, isolated and confused were still there, but now I had to face puberty. I started exploring the internet, discovering youtube and the magical world of google. I watched and listened to American teenagers and young adults talk about themselves. They used words I'd never heard of before and opened my eyes to the LGBT+ community. I was beginning to understand sexual and gender orientation, but I wasn't prepared to acknowledge that these words applied to me. As I decreased my food intake to minimise the affects of puberty my energy levels dropped. I would often find myself lost within myself, struggling with my identity and numb to the world. I was too tired and empty to make friends, follow my passions, and ask for help.

I'm now 16, and tired from my Year 10 formal the night before. My parents sit me down and tell me that a family friend, not older than 25, passed away the night before. She had secretly been living in hospital for a few months, had struggled with mental illness, and, with no-one at her side, had died of suicide. Shaken and in mourning, the reality of mental ill-health and fighting it alone hit me. I told my parents I needed to see a psychologist. With the help of my school's counsellor, I connected with a local psychologist and started seeing her weekly. With her support I felt valid and reassured. I got diagnosed with chronic depression, anxiety and an eating disorder. I cut my hair, because who needs hair anyway? I started taking medication, eating more often and talking.

Talking to peers, teachers and my parents. I came out as a lesbian, then as a transgender boy, and finally, as Lachlan. Lachlan, a name my mother chose for a hypothetically male baby. I was accepted for who I am, and felt connected and understood. Now when a stranger asked the all important question, What's your name?, my answer could reflect who I am. I am Lachlan. Lachlan, who had already faced so much and didn't know that all his strength, bravery and resilience was about to be tested to his limits.

In Year 11 I went on an overseas music tour to Europe, including locations such as Copenhagen and St Petersburg. During this trip I learned that mental ill-health follows you everywhere. The irregular meal times, separation from my support system and unhelpful actions from teachers struck me like soccer balls to my stomach. Winded, and with the lost and disorientated feeling at the front of my mind, I became suicidal. Travelling may be a great experience, but I don't remember much of the sight seeing. With emails to my psych and determination, I survived and made it home.

I continued see my psychologist, coming out to strangers every day and dreading meals. As the only boy in my school, the isolation and disconnection between me and my peers weighted on me like a bad of rocks. Yet somehow, I was blind to my own situation. It took a hospital trip and a panic attack in front of my mum to slap me to my senses. This had to get better. I cut down on my co-curricular activities and prioritised my mental health above school and social appearances for the very first time. By admitting to myself I wasn't okay, I was able to communicate and act on it. And I got better. Through asking for help, accepting my limits and not keeping any secrets, I got better. My connections with the people around my strengthened, and so did I.

Today, I am still Lachlan. I still have depression, anxiety and an eating disorder. But I'm now in a place where I can help myself. I know how to ask for help, to recognise unhealthy thoughts and behaviour, and slow my mind. I still see my trusty psychologist, and I continue to step closer and closer to my healthiest self. Everyday I am reminded why I want to be here. To laugh at the T.V, to play my violin and to love and be loved. I am empowered by my experiences, it has given me strength, and I now know I am brave. I am brave because I am Lachlan.