

Mental Health Royal Commission

July 2019

A Carer's story [REDACTED]

6 days ago I buried my husband. He couldn't take any more stress. He had a massive heart attack. I have developed heart problems on top of extreme anxiety on a daily basis. Our stress from caring for our daughter has been has been ongoing for 12 years.

We have been caring for our daughter who has a diagnosed mental illness. We love her dearly and have been very supportive but to no improvement for her. She was a very challenging adolescent as a result of sexual assault at the age of 14 years and 3 days. From then it was down a very steep slope. Vicious bullying and poor behavioural choices added to a very poor self-esteem and no self or social confidence.

We dealt with this on a daily basis and were relieved at the end of year 12. [REDACTED] left [REDACTED] to attend University in Melbourne. This in itself is a traumatic experience for all young adults from regional Victoria. I worked full time to solely support her education and all living expenses with no support. [REDACTED] battled her loneliness and lack of self esteem and no social confidence. Her life fell apart. All those around her engaged in recreational drugs as she did.

I received a horrendous call telling me that my daughter was in the Acute Psychiatric Ward in the [REDACTED] Hospital. I gave up my ongoing teaching position then.

After 3 weeks of visiting travelling to and from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] we were told to take her home or she would be readmitted to the hospital from the [REDACTED] facility.

[REDACTED] came home.

During the next month we had to chase her down and cars sometimes, as she would attempt to hitch in a psychotic state. This included during the night. She would open the car door while in the car with us. [REDACTED] would cut her arms. Knives from the kitchen were grabbed and she would threaten to cut her throat. Rope was hung from the heating vent in her bedroom. [REDACTED] would cry for half a day while being psychotic. [REDACTED] would sit in the middle of a road hoping to be run over.

This was just the start. She was 20 then.

[REDACTED] Psych Services admitted [REDACTED] She was there for almost 3 months. She came home to stay with us. We were terrified every second of the day.

[REDACTED] has since been admitted 4 times for short stays. The hospital says now she cannot be admitted as it would not help her diagnosis. Initially it was Schizophrenia, but now it is Borderline Personality Disorder – of a more extreme serious level.

[REDACTED] has taken 3 overdoses, doused herself in petrol 3 times and held a lighter to herself, applied a hose to her car from the exhaust, cut her wrists, drank bleach, held a large knife pointed into her carotid artery. We have had the ambulance to our house together with the police, maybe 15 times, I've lost count. [REDACTED] has been in intensive care 3 times.

Each day and night is full of fear and dread. [REDACTED] is very moody and emotionally unstable. If I look at her she will take everything in a very negative way and spiral her negative anxiety together with her constant paranoia connected with almost everything. I could not wear certain colours such as brown because she said that it was my message that she was a piece of sh.... Another was anything fabric that had a leopard or cheetah print which was telling her she was a cheater. She is always irrational. She has the police come to arrest myself and her dad because we have placed hidden cameras in the house and we are filming her and selling her as a sex slave. She always insists that her dad and I want her to kill herself. She says we are poisoning her and won't eat the food at home. She changes in her mood and though constantly and it's extreme.

So when she was in hospital her dad and I visited her every day. We love her and wanted her to know she was loved. This was hard. I lost a lot of weight (I am already small). [REDACTED] was on a court order for compulsory hospitalisation.

The [REDACTED] Health Services always sent her home as they knew we were loving parents and also that there was nowhere for her to go. She was still considered youth in the early days. I kept enquiring daily and weekly but there was nowhere for her.

Since she has turned 25, and handed over to the adult area, there apparently is even less available in support and accommodation. She sees a case worker about once every 6 weeks and a psychiatrist about once every 3 months. There is a strong need for services to continue right through. A mentally ill person's needs do not reduce once they turn 25. The hope is still as strong for anyone no matter their age. [REDACTED] struggles to live.

Last year I enquired about supported accommodation and found that there was only 5 beds and these were full. They were waiting for more funding from the government to fill the other 5 beds. There was no accommodation place anywhere.

[REDACTED] is not mentally well enough to look after herself. She is very inconsistent in taking her medication and stockpiles it, then overdoses.

Sadly her dad has been overwhelmed over the years by the build-up of relentless stress. I am 63 years of age and have heart problems. I have taken the most active care of the two of us. I cannot do this anymore. I have lost my team mate.

There is such a lack of support for those mentally ill people between hospital and independent accommodation such as a flat and that is if they can be successful in application as they are hard to get. There are thousands of mentally ill people who would 'recover' give supported accommodation.

NDIS has not really worked at all for [REDACTED] Her illness has worked against her as she believes that she does not need it because she doesn't have a disability. It is difficult for a person with mental illness to form relationships with people they don't know who are arranged to help them organise their lives.

Carers are struggling to exist. I have lost my husband, team mate, work, money strained, my time and energy taken up for [REDACTED] my life is planned around her and this changes daily. Our relationships have all been very edgy with high anxiety and stress due to caring for [REDACTED]

Her older sister has also suffered greatly. She lived with us for several years, but had to leave due to the stress from caring for [REDACTED] This daughter experienced many panic attacks, anxiety and depression and post-traumatic stress disorder from long term living and experiencing her mentally ill sister.

The strain on our families is too much and is crushing our lives. I believe that those who are mentally ill have a much better chance to recover if they weren't living with families, but were in supported accommodation where they can learn to take responsibility, slowly developing their independence.

Currently the system is set up to fail those people who seemingly are the victims of our society. When are we going to have a safety net with no large holes. Many more are falling through into 'where'? Lost on the street.

These people are loved. They are our children, brothers or sisters. They don't want to be rejected by us. We have no right to do this.

It's our humanly duty to care for all and in this case, the mentally ill who need us.

The hospitals are struggling and full, there is nowhere after this to live. Resources and services have been stopped. Many mentally ill are homeless. I don't want my daughter at 25 to be homeless, yet I cannot cope with being a full time carer especially on my own, any more.

What kind of a society do I live in where we treat our most vulnerable loved ones, like lost dogs on the street?