



WITNESS STATEMENT OF KIBA REEVES

I, Kiba Reeves, say as follows:

My first experiences with the mental health system

- 1 I am currently 21 years old. My first contact with the mental health system was when I was little; I think I was around five years old. That's when I first saw a psychiatrist, and I am pretty sure it was when I was first diagnosed with ADHD. My mum had a big fit because she couldn't deal with me; she couldn't handle my behaviour and she knew something was wrong and no one was listening to her, she was saying, *"I don't give a damn what you give her, just give my kid something so I can get help."*
- 2 I was around 11 years old when I first started going to the psychiatric ward at the local hospital. One of the first things that I was repeatedly in hospital for was when I went psychotic; I grabbed a knife and ran around town trying to kill people. I was taken to the police station first because I was very violent at the time and it wasn't really safe for me where I was.
- 3 The police called someone from the local hospital – I can't remember what their role was – and they came and talked to me. But before they arrived, one cop got really pissed at me and had a bit of a go at me when I was in the middle of finally calming down enough to be unsupervised in the room. That sent me back into psychosis and then I had to be supervised and someone had to be in the room again with me. From what I remember, the person who came from the local hospital was not happy that they had been told I had calmed down and I wasn't calm when they got there.
- 4 Then I think an ambulance came and I was taken with a police escort to the hospital. I was put in an isolation room. I was a kid and it was an adult psychiatric facility. It wasn't the best place for me to be but I had to be put somewhere so they could transport me to a psychiatric ward in a hospital in Melbourne. I was transported there and stayed there for about three or four days.
- 5 From what I remember of the hospital and the police experience, some of the police were alright but others weren't. The mental health system wasn't bad, but it wasn't good

either; I felt they were kind of very cold about it and not very nice. The nurses and the psychiatrists, apart from a couple, were very unfriendly and unapproachable.

Emergency Department

- 6 From around the ages of 13 and 17, I attempted suicide several times. I tried several times, in vain, to admit myself to the local hospital so that I wouldn't hurt myself.
- 7 I have tried a few times to voluntarily go into the emergency department and say: *'look I'm really not okay right now, I need to be admitted.'* Most times I got told that there were no beds, or that they thought I could deal with the issues at home. There have been several times when I have looked the emergency department staff in the eye and told them that I was going to "off myself" if they sent me home. Once or twice when they sent me home saying I was fine and I ended up trying to commit suicide. I then kind of gave up because, what was the point, if you're just going to be sent home.
- 8 I felt like they were saying there was nothing wrong with me. When someone is telling me that, I kind of think *'okay nothing's wrong, so it's gotta be me'*. It made me feel like maybe I was making it up. I was beginning to believe that I had somehow made all this up in my head and that there really was nothing wrong with me – perhaps my mind is playing tricks on me – and then I kind of go into self-destruct mode and spiral out of control and attempt to self-harm or suicide again. So I guess the more I got dismissed, the more vicious the cycle became.
- 9 I later discovered I wasn't making it up. I have borderline personality disorder. They should have helped me. It wasn't my fault that I tried to commit suicide. It could have been prevented had I been admitted into hospital. Things could be done better by actually listening when someone says that, rather than sending them home. They're not saying it for attention and even if they are, it can't be for the good kind, they obviously need help if they're going to that extreme.
- 10 For me, an overnight admission would have been good – so I could be watched until my mood sort of stabilised. Usually it would stabilise after a day. Most times, as long as someone was home with me, I was okay. But the couple of times I was sent home and I was alone, that's when I did try something.

Adult mental health system

- 11 I have struggled dealing with the adult mental health system. In the paediatric system, they treat you like a kid and you have to be protected. The second you turn 18 you get treated like crap, like you are nuts, like you are a monster, like there is something seriously wrong with you. I felt the system was fine up until I came to the adult mental health system and then I felt I'm not worth anything because I'm an adult now. But I am

not worth any less just because I am an adult. I may be 21 years old but most times I don't feel it. I am very much a child in my mindset. I still go to my dad for help, I still call my mum.

- 12 In the adult mental health system, I was made to feel like I was a burden to deal with. Psychiatrists looked at me like I was absolutely out of my mind and I could tell by the way they were looking at me that they didn't believe a word I was saying. They were condescending and dismissive. A couple of the psychiatrists said, "*Really, you're here again?*" And it contributes to a vicious cycle of beating myself up, saying I am not worthy. I still don't have any self-confidence, any self-worth and a lot of it came from everyone - not just the police, psychologists and psychiatrists - but everyone saying I was fine, that I was over-reacting. It's the worst feeling in the world when it comes from a psychiatrist, someone who is supposed to know what they are talking about. It's not how they should treat someone living with a mental illness. I thought, I'm obviously not going to get any help, so I might as well just end it all.
- 13 My experience with the hospitals in the adult mental health system was that it was a revolving door and that their focus was not on helping me recover. It was like they wanted me gone, and wanted me gone quickly. And I would get out, but some stuff I had to deal with remained unresolved. I also found that they would have a dismissive or hostile attitude towards me. I felt ignored. I sometimes used to say "*yeah I am fine*" just to get out of their hair because I felt they didn't care that I was struggling; that they didn't care that I was in crisis. I felt like I was a number, and that they just wanted me out of there.
- 14 I understand that hospitals don't have many resources and that they cannot keep me if there are no beds available. But it would have made a huge difference for me if the staff had listened to me and acted a bit more compassionately and were more sympathetic. I often felt like they didn't realise they were talking to a person who was hurting and not just a number or an attention-seeker. There are easier ways to get attention.
- 15 When I was discharged from hospital, I was sent home with a temporary plan. The temporary plan usually involved altering my medication slightly and telling me to practice techniques such as deep breathing and talking to people. However, these temporary plans did not work for very long because there was nothing long term in them that I could cling to and work towards.
- 16 I am a lot better now, but going through those times made me realise that the hospital system is garbage. People who want to kill themselves are reaching out trying to get help and no one is listening. It's frustrating, because I don't want what happened to me to happen to others.

MIND Australia

- 17 It was hard to find support in the community but eventually it did come around and when I was around 17 years old, I became involved with MIND Australia (**MIND**). I remember that Kids Helpline recommended that I get in touch with MIND since I was around 17 years at the time and MIND is an adult mental health support service.
- 18 MIND provides one on one support and group sessions, and they teach life skills like cooking. Having a MIND support coordinator has been the best thing that has ever happened to me because I can't find these resources on my own. She has helped me find a psychiatrist, psychologist, occupational therapist and she has helped me get back into the community when I had become a recluse from the way the hospital treated me.
- 19 Since I've been with MIND, I've become more outgoing, I'm out of the house and socialising. I barely attended any groups with MIND in the beginning, but they've pulled me out of my shell and they've done so in a way that hasn't hurt or damaged me. They offered me a few options and I got to choose the activities I was interested in. I am in a Dungeons and Dragons group at the moment and there hasn't been a better thing that happened to me. It has led me to meeting like-minded people who I can laugh with and socialise with, without being scared out of my mind. The workers are present at the group sessions and are reassuring and supportive. And if I do get scared out of my mind, the workers are there to comfort me and tell me I'm doing okay and that I'll be fine. Having that constant reassurance and support has led me to attend three groups a week.
- 20 I wouldn't be where I am now without MIND. I was drowning for a long time and they threw me a life line and pulled me back aboard. Mental health services should take a page out of their book because they're doing something right. It is an all-round mental health service and I find the way they treat their clients is fantastic. I feel like they care about me and they want to work with me. They have taken the time to talk to me and ask *'okay, you tell me what's wrong and we'll help you fix it.'* They took all my information and they developed a plan with me – and it's worked. They are willing to work with me, they're very accommodating, the staff are very friendly, they make me feel involved and treat me like a person, like I have a choice. When I call them up when I am not feeling great, they help me by giving me choices – they may say *'Kiba, you should try and self-admit or maybe we can kind of talk about it ourselves and get this dealt with.'* They make me feel like I'm a person, like my opinion matters and they understand me. It's lovely. I can't talk them up enough.

Recommendations

- 21 Psychiatrists and nurses should be trained to be sensitive and compassionate. They need to take the patient a little more seriously. If consumers are telling them something is wrong, they should give them a second glance and not just go, '*oh, they've got something wrong in their head, they're wrong. They don't know what they're talking about because they are sick.*' The nurses are overworked but they don't seem to understand that we're there because we're not well and need to be cared for.
- 22 There should be more beds. There not being enough beds was a massive issue because there have been a couple of times when I have gone to an emergency department and the staff have agreed that I needed to be admitted but there weren't any beds. It's unfortunate because even when the mental health system has been willing to help, they didn't have enough room to help me.
- 23 They should get rid of all the white in the hospital because it is so sterile. Make it a little bit more colourful and brighter, a little bit more friendly. Make it so it doesn't feel like we're in prison because that's what it felt like when I was there.
- 24 Having some beanbags and a sensory room would do wonders. The paediatric ward at one of the hospitals had a sensory room. It was a nice colourful place where you can dim or brighten the lights depending upon the sensory need of the person. They have weighted blankets, sensory tools like fidget spinners and there was a tunnel. It was a dark tunnel you could curl up in and see heaps and heaps of stars and I could just lay there and fall asleep. and it was a godsend because it provided me somewhere where I could go, "*Okay, I'm overwhelmed. I can come in here and I can talk to the staff. I can pull a blanket over myself. I can use some sensory tools to help ground myself back into reality a bit more*".

sign here ►



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