

28 April 2011

Committee Secretary

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To the Committee Secretary

RE: Inquiry into Mental Health and the Workforce Participation

The Mental Illness Fellowship South Australia (MIFSA) is the largest specialist mental health non government organisation in South Australia. MIFSA offers a diverse range of programs and services for people living with mental illness, carers and the community. MIFSA services include: Activity Programs, Community Education, Carer programs, Training, Counselling, Support groups, one-to-one Support (PHaMs programs) and Respite. MIFSA is part of a national body, the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia, with branches across states and territories in Australia.

Team members of our Education, Awareness and Training team considered the terms of reference and have noted the following points under the Inquiry questions:

1 Barriers to participation in education, training and employment of people with mental ill health

People living with Mental illness characteristically have or face:

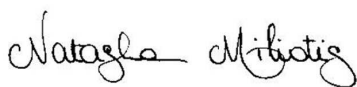
- Obvious and negative symptoms of their illness
- Lack of motivation and initiative
- Poor social skills
- Poor financial resources, ie: from lower socio economic strata
- Symptoms of the illness which can prevent use of public transport
- Lack of Confidence
- Employers and trainers have limited understanding of challenges faced by people living with mental illness
- Lack of flexibility in employment and training arrangements
- Inconsistent employment history – gaps in resume due to periods of ill health

2. Ways to enhance access to and participation in education, training and employment of people with mental ill health through improved collaboration between government, health, community education, training and employment and other services

- Psychosocial rehabilitation training specific to work related skills
- Form peer to peer support groups with community and government speakers about supports, training and opportunities

- Specific employment training
 - Allow and encourage job sharing
 - Peer work training
 - Provide workplace mental health awareness training for all staff as part of building supportive workplace cultures for people living with mental illness
 - Employ workplace peer workers in both support/mentor and advisory roles to supervisors
 - Provide community mental health education sessions
3. **Strategies to improve the capacity of individuals, families, community members, co-workers and employers to respond to the needs of people with mental ill health**
- Make mental illness awareness a part of the education system both primary and secondary
 - Training for journalists and other members of the media
 - Promote positive stories about employment of people living with mental illness– more awareness sessions to make people aware and informed
 - Provide workplace mental health awareness & education training for all staff
 - Provide community mental health education sessions

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.
Yours sincerely



Natasha Miliotis
Chief Executive Officer