



CANEFIELDS CLUBHOUSE

BEENLEIGH INC.

Supporting people with a mental illness

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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment

Inquiry into mental health and workforce participation 2011

Submission by Canefields Clubhouse, April 2011

Canefields Clubhouse is a community intentionally organized to support individuals living with the effects of mental illness. Through participation in a Clubhouse people are given the opportunities to rejoin the worlds of friendships, family, important work, employment, education, housing and to access the services and supports they may individually need. A Clubhouse is a restorative environment for people who have had their lives drastically disrupted, and need the support of others who believe that recovery from mental illness is possible for all.

The following recommendations are based on recent research conducted by the consumers, staff and management committee of Canefields Clubhouse. This research has included lived experience of mental health consumers.

Recommendation 1

Address issues facing people with mental illness in a more holistic way

"The head of the Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness says mentally ill and homeless Australians who want jobs need to be supported by a program designed to suit their complex needs"
(www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2011/04/11)

The Mental Health Council of Australia's report "Home Truths" states:

" Access to income and other support will continue to be limited for people with a mental illness, particularly when they are homeless or unstably housed."

"Services including employment, welfare, health, alcohol and drugs and many others in the community sector must have the capacity to go beyond their specialisations to respond to issues of mental illness and homelessness."

A lack of stable housing due to poor security of tenure is often part of a larger picture of weak social networks, family breakdown and a lack of community participation, all of which have negative impactson mental health. There are many housing programs operating, however we still experience high numbers of people with mental illness who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is widely regarded that the maximum reasonable level of expenditure on housing should be 30 per cent of income. The surveys conducted within Canefields for those who are renting in the privat rental market show that individuals are paying between 50 and 60% of their income in rent and in some case more.

These findings are supported by a recent AHURI report, which found that housing insecurity is linked to insecurities in other aspects of life, including financial, employment, family and health. Housing insecurity appears to reflect, contribute to or exacerbate experiences of anxiety and depression, as well as being linked with other forms of insecurity, such as employment insecurity, that also contribute to feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.

Canefields believes the ability to provide stable secure housing for people with mental illness is an essential first step. From this comes opportunities for further education and/or employment. Housing must remain as one of the top priorities in the COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health.

Access to mental health care for people with mental illness must be increased.

Government support in providing sufficient funding to existing organisations to improve housing options as part of the holistic approach to service provision is required. Our research shows that outsourcing and referrals do not always produce the best results for people with mental illness. A more holistic approach achieves higher positive outcomes.

Recommendation 2

Nation research supporting the links between unstable housing and homelessness for people with mental illness

Mental Health Council of Australia's report "Home Truths" states:

"Our knowledge about mental health, housing and homelessness in Australia will continue to be inadequate due to a lack of data.

National research to build a greater understanding of the connections between mental illness, unstable housing and homelessness must be a priority, with appropriate funding and ongoing support for this research."

Canefields has a data base of 1,000 consumers who are living with mental illness. It is essential that National Research includes a broader data base of statistics. Canefields strongly recommends data bases constructed around national research should be compiled of information taken directly from people who are in unstable housing, homeless, unemployed and mentally ill.

The clubhouse community strongly agrees with the Mental Health Council of Australia's recommendation that "A national strategy on homelessness that includes due recognition of the relationships between mental health and homelessness must be developed and funded."

Recommendation 3

Reduction of Stigma Campaign

Stigma also has a severely negative impact on many people experiencing a mental illness, as explained in the MHCA's *Let's Get to Work* report:

"Australians know that there is stigma associated with mental illness. Perhaps it is not so well understood that this amorphous concept of 'stigma' actually manifests itself as real discrimination. The consequences of this discrimination are most acute in two areas – access to housing and access to employment."

Stigma is a key factor affecting people's ability to find housing, pursuing further education and employment. The introduction of a National reduction of stigma campaign is long over due and would provide improved understanding of, and attitudes towards, mental illness by the community at large, employers and educators.

Recommendation 4

Ongoing support for people with mental illness to achieve long term employment

Canefields provides an employment program for people with mental illness. One of the barriers we face in finding employment for people with mental illness is related to stigma. Improved understanding of mental illness by employers would greatly assist the opportunities for people with mental illness gaining fair and equitable access to employment. This may include more education in the work place in relation to disclosure of mental illness.

On going support in the work place is also another essential part of maintaining employment for people with mental illness. In some cases it is essential that an organisation like Canefields is still accessible for the employed person, ie social recreation, emotional support, friendship etc.

Clubhouse also believes that more incentives for employers would support flexible work arrangements. It is not always possible for individuals to maintain a 40 hour a week job, however, two people could adequately job share. It is essential that financial incentives as well as specific education and training for employers is made available.

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