

Committee Secretary
Inquiry into Better Support for Carers
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family,
Community, Housing and Youth
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No. 1114

(Inq into better support for carers)

AOC 29/7/08

Dear Secretary

I wish to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth's Inquiry into Better Support for Carers.

I am submitting to the Inquiry because...

I am a mother and sole carer for my son (25yo) with mental illness and would like to add my comments about what services have helped us, and what could be improved

My comments relate to both myself and my son (carer and consumer) because the state of my wellness and is intertwined with his

More information is attached on a separate sheet

1. The role and contribution of carers in society

As a carer, I feel that my role is...

To find services that provide expertise in medical and social support to enable my son to function to his best capability

To look after my son when he is not coping

More information is attached on a separate sheet

2. The barriers to social and economic participation for carers

As a carer, I face the following problems ...

It has taken 10 years until now, (only within the last 2 months) for my son to receive enough concerted interest from professionals for diagnosis and the start of improvement in my son's mental health. I have tried private and public psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors, however one-hour sessions every one or 2 weeks (in bouts of 1-2 months every couple of years) achieved very little, and meanwhile my son's health has deteriorated. My mental & physical health also deteriorated to the point where I was willing to risk my son taking his chances "out on the street"

Summed up the effect on me as a carer is 1. missing out on developing a part of my life, 2. time poor (including taking part time rather than fulltime work in order to be available during

crises), and 3. financial (not working fulltime will also impact on my superannuation and retirement prospects later on)

More information is attached on a separate sheet

3. The practical measures required to better support carers

As a carer, I need help with ...

More home visitation and assessment available when consumers are not willing to seek medical help. I have spoken to the mental health triage at our hospital at length many times and requested (pleaded) the CAT (Crisis Assessment) team or somebody to assess my son however there were no services for this. Recently we were put into contact with an Early Intervention Program, followed by a (3 hour!) interview with a professional and my son's GP, and co-ordinated CATteam support at home. My son was hospitalised for 2 1/2 weeks, and is now in residential care, and being assigned a case manager. I cry with relief that finally something is happening to help my son. This intense burst of support seems to already be showing results.

A variety of respite opportunities for carers accompanied with support for our "loved one". I attended a "retreat weekend" where about 24 carers of mentally ill people were provided with respite. We were offered mindfulness meditation, time to discuss problems and issues, opportunities to relax and fed beautiful and healthy food. A very important factor was that we were also provided with support for the person for whom we care. This weekend was very, very timely and helpful. It gave me some coping methods (simply meditation exercises) and "time-out". It also feels good to be supported; it acknowledges our value to our community i.e. our role as carers.

More, and appropriate to age and situation, housing of various types: residential, communal and low rent places At present I have refused to have my son return home because I believe that it would be detrimental to his health; he requires some sort of communal living with support to develop social skills, ensure taking of medication etc. The place where my son has been placed is in an elderly residential care facility, because no other was available. This is unsatisfactory on many levels (partly due to the quality of this particular place as I have seen facilities that cater much better for the needs of the elderly): lack of mental stimulation or exercise facilities, social interaction and meals inappropriate to a 25 year old man. However the high fees charged leave my son with little money to supplement meals or for outside entertainment, and he is not yet ready to work. I have asked his case manager to assist my son in finding something more appropriate.

More information is attached on a separate sheet

4. Strategies to assist carers to access opportunities and choices

I think the Government can better help carers by ...

mostly by providing better services for the dependant (as detailed in Q3 above) 1. more *early intervention* services with home visits (at least initially) on request of the carer for assessment when the mentally ill person has difficulty getting to appointments or refuses.

2. Providing respite opportunities: a chance to refresh myself and gain /share knowledge with others

3. more community housing and of various types to suit people with various coping abilities at different stages of their mental health (ie different levels of support required)

Thank you for facilities and services that have already been supplied.

I would also like to state that from my observation many carers (and also some of the consumers) are volunteers who help out in the community. We are not just "takers" but "givers" as well.

More information is attached on a separate sheet

Thank you for taking my views into consideration as part of the Committee's Inquiry. I look forward to reviewing any recommendations you make to improve life for carers in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Alena

Print your name

Date 30.6.2008