

SUBMISSION TO 2009 INQUIRY INTO SUICIDE

DIANNE GADDIN

As I write this Submission, it is just a few days before the 4th anniversary of my daughter Tracy's suicide at The Gap, Sydney. As painful as it is to recall the past, it is my duty to stand up and be counted, for I believe much of what happened to my late daughter, added to the reasons for her suicide – it was not her illness alone, she was diagnosed with Schizoaffective Disorder, but the circumstances in her life, the constant search for work, being informed by The Rehabilitation Team, just a few weeks before her death that she was not deemed to be well enough for retraining, she also had her license taken away from her, through no fault of her own (details later on), her constant struggle to be admitted to hospital when she was not well, and the total disempowerment and disadvantage her illness had placed her, took her to a place where her strength and energy was no more. My husband and I were the last to speak with her and she verbalized just how tired she was and how she was struggling to cope. This was a conversation that we had from time to time, and no alarm bells rang. I am a suicide survivor, and I blame the mental health system for putting the endless pressure on parents by declining admissions for our late daughter, when needed, discharging her too often when still not well enough, and the promise of after-care which never eventuated. Struggling to cope with the mental health system, just became too much for me and I overdosed for I too had no more energy to cope.

Terms of reference:

(a) the personal, social and financial costs of suicide in Australia

The impact of my failed suicide immediately impacted on my husband who was rushed in for heart surgery just days later. He was a fit and healthy man, took good care of himself, but the ongoing stress of dealing with our daughter's mental illness and my sudden suicide attempt was such that his heart was affected needing surgery. The personal impact on our entire family was enormous, first and foremost on Tracy. Although the news was 'hidden' from her, she knew what had happened. She was kept away from me while I was in a clinic and this exacerbated her mental condition. My eldest daughter was to bear the full brunt of it all, emotionally and financially. The burden of my husband's heart surgery, the recovery process after suicide for me, plus the ongoing problems with Tracy was to put so much pressure on her, and I feel this guilt even now. I would imagine the impact on our family would be the same on all other families in Australia who have had to deal with mental illness in their family. Although we did have private health cover, the added financial burden put a huge financial strain on our resources. When Tracy took her life, the strain and stress on our entire family was again taking us to a 'place' we had never been before, and although family and friends were there to support us, the devastation of losing Tracy is indescribable. I always knew at the bottom of my heart that her death would not be by normal means, but when it happens, nothing prepares you for it, and so once more our family was on a roller-coaster to recovery, a long and painful journey, with more downs than ups.

In terms of costs to Government, I cannot say how much, but to cover the costs of Police search and rescue, debriefing for those directly involved in the recovery of the body, transport to the mortuary, autopsy, would be a big cost to Government. For families there would be the added costs of funeral and clearing out personal possessions, Removalist costs etc, counseling and medication to help through the very difficult early days of grieving.

While suicide will never be stopped, it can certainly be minimized. I believe that the lack of resources in Psychiatric Hospitals, including trained Psychiatric nurses and Doctors, lack of beds, and inadequate after-care for those being discharged, in most cases too early, would drive many, like my own daughter, to utter despair, where the only way out would be to end it all. The indignity my daughter always spoke of, broke my heart, for I fully understood what she meant – she felt like she was a third-class citizen, stripped of her independence, prevented from working (having been refused for retraining by the Commonwealth Rehab just a few weeks before her death), being refused a payout for the damage to her unit as a result of the fire (the NRMA had taken ‘expert opinion’ and so Tracy lost everything and had nothing to come back to. I later challenged the NRMA after Tracy had died to prove that had the ‘expert opinion’ admitted her to hospital when she was brought in twice on the same day of the fire, the incident would never have happened. I was the last person to see her just before the fire and managed to photograph what her unit looked like, showing her psychotic she was. She spoke of the fear of not being available for her medication drop, being bound by Community Treatment Orders and on a number of occasions when, through no fault of her own, she did not turn up for her medication, she was threatened with being picked up by the police and charged. She wasn’t a criminal – she had a mental illness! The RTA had cancelled her licence when she had parked her car in a Disabled Parking zone – she was having a panic attack and did the responsible thing and drove into the nearest available parking zone, called an Ambulance and was taken to hospital. No matter how we protested this infringement, and proved that she was hospitalized, and her case manager had written to explain the circumstances the RTA refused to cancel the infringement. She was also fined for parking in Visitor Parking at Prince of Wales when she drove to the Emergency, sitting for many hours before she was hospitalized. I was unaware of this until a few days later when I went to move the car. The fines eventually totaled over \$650 and when she decided to take money from her savings and settle this, unbeknown to her the next \$50 kicked in. What did the RTA do – they cancelled her License. I subsequently challenged the RTA after she died, and the money was reimbursed – too late – she was dead! I believe this all became too much for her, for the last night she spent in our home, she expressed all this, and my husband and I tried in vain to comfort and support her. She went out for a cigarette, after my husband gave her \$5 for a coffee. That was the last time we saw her – what was found in her wallet was \$2 after paying \$3 to cross the Bridge.

(d) the effectiveness to date of public awareness programs and their relative success in providing information, encouraging help-seeking and enhancing public discussion of suicide

I am not too sure that the message is reaching the general public. Only now, too late, do I know about the various programs on offer, but during the time my late daughter was ill, I knew nothing. The only organization that I knew of was Lifeline and I know that my daughter made many calls to their Helpline over the years. I never saw informative pamphlets available at any of the Psychiatric Hospitals my daughter was in. Nobody suggested where I would get any relevant information, and I certainly don’t remember seeing or hearing anything in newspapers, or TV where I could find the relevant information I would need. Google was a tool that I used. So there definitely needs to be much more done to inform the community and make them more aware of where to get help. I strongly believe that our children need to be made aware of mental health problems while they are at school, for many mental illness start in the mid-teens. The informative programs would be needed to be graded according to the various age groups.

(e) the efficacy of suicide prevention training and support for front-line health and community workers providing services to people at risk.

At this point, I am well informed, but too late, just like a Pathologist who knows everything, but a day too late. As a survivor of suicide, there was no assistance given me, or suggestion made as to how to get on with my life and deal with the problems that I would have ongoing. After my daughter suicided, there is always a risk of other suicides in the family, and at no point did anyone come forward with suggestions or counseling to suggest just how we deal with this tragedy. As a suicide survivor, I was again at great risk, but I was able to immediately throw myself into the same activities I was involved in during my late daughter's illness, and that was to continue to lobby for the re-opening of Rozelle Psychiatric Hospital, lobby not to have 2 very important mental health centres from either being closed or moved onto the grounds of Royal North Shore Hospital. One of the centres, Cremorne Mental Health, I shall always be indebted to for their assistance on so many occasions, many of which helped keep my daughter out of hospital, and once, just before my daughter died, managed to get my daughter back into a clinic who refused to re-admit her, saying she had discharged herself. I was later to prove this was a lie. About a year after my daughter took her life I started a campaign to upgrade The Gap where she took her life. I have done this in partnership with the Woollahra Council, but kept on pressing them to be pro-active and I was able to then lobby the various Government Departments on my own, as unlike the Council, I had to protocol to follow. In May this year the funding application was turned down and given to upgrade sports ovals and a flea circus instead – this angered me because I could not believe that priorities could be so skewed. After writing to the Prime Minister 5 times, I finally got a response and the whole process of funding application has had to be put in place again. How many more lives are being lost because of this, and will be lost until the funding application is granted and the upgrade completed? I have felt personally responsible and wonder how much more I could have done. These activities have kept me focussed and I am not sure where I would be without this sort of positive activity.

I cannot understand why nothing has ever been done to prevent suicides at any of the hotspots in Australia. There is conclusive evidence from both the UK and New Zealand, showing that when there are steps to make access to hotspots difficult, that the suicide rate drops significantly. There is also anecdotal evidence to show that when this is done, it does not follow that a person would seek somewhere else.

Suicides at The Gap, in Sydney, are taking place with regularity, and this is a national disgrace. I have not been able to ascertain true statistics of the number of suicides that have taken place at the Gap over any period of time. Just recently, in the month of September I know of 6 suicides that occurred at The Gap. When I called the Rose Bay Police to confirm one, they would not confirm this because of the Privacy Act. As a citizen it is my right to know this information. I don't have the right to know who, but that it has occurred and when. The citizens of Australia have the right to know the truth about suicide. We have the right to know how many suicides have occurred while in care. There needs to be more transparency when it comes to documenting suicide, and I am hoping that after this Inquiry, this will be so.

The suicide statistics also need to be defined by way of categories – e.g. overdose, self – harm, going before a train or bus etc., because only then can research be undertaken to more fully understand the variance in suicide methods.

There needs to be transparency when it comes to suicides while in care, in hospital, and in our gaols. Unfortunately, it seems there is no mandatory orders to make this public.

Only and until such statistics are acknowledged, can the community and Government, make a difference, and perhaps minimize such tragic events from happening.

ATTACHMENT TO MY SUBMISSION TO THE 2009 INQUIRY INTO SUICIDE:

Because it is extremely painful for me to sit down and draw on my very sad memories, I have decided to collate all the information I am sending you below. I am sure it will illustrate exactly what a difficult, traumatic and frustrating situation I have experienced during all the years my late daughter was unwell and how hard it was for me to get the treatment she so desperately deserved. I give this information to you because it is less painful for me and would clearly illustrate the uphill battle both my husband and I faced during the 10 years that my daughter was diagnosed with mental illness. After migrating to Australia in 1993 our daughter was diagnosed with Bipolar 2 years later. So, for a start, as new migrants we were not only struggling with becoming accustomed to the Australian way of life, but dealing with mental illness of which we knew nothing. We were soon to learn that we had not left APARTHEID behind, for it had followed us to Australia, in terms of health. Nobody is treated with such disrespect and given such a hard time as those who are so mentally unwell and need to get a bed on Psychiatric hospital when it is needed. Then too, the journey continues, from the struggle in Emergency Departments, to gaining admission and then the right to stay until well enough to be discharged. How many times was my daughter placed in the general ward when I believed she was so unwell, and should've been in the acute ward – she was easily able to 'disappear' and on so many occasions, was not found for many days. In this respect she would often be discharged before I believe she was well enough, and I later discovered that this happens with regularity because a bed needs to be found for someone deemed to need a bed urgently. This encourages the revolving door, and in actual fact costs Government more, puts more strain and stress on families, and should never happen in a first-world country like Australia.

February 2002 – sent to State and Federal MP's

VOTERGRAM*(Thank you for reading & acting on this Votergram. To respond please click Reply to Sender. Copy to please so that other voters will appreciate what you & your party do.)*

You may have read (SMH 31.1.02) of my mentally ill daughter who set fire to her Housing Department unit, causing the evacuation of 35 residents.

It is up to the Government to care properly for people who are sick.

Some politicians dream of a bigger city, but it will be a nightmare unless the government can first cope with what it already has in Sydney. Frankly it does not seem to be able to do that.

Would you please ask the Minister for Health to find out & tell you how many times my sick daughter Tracy Gaddin has been turned away from Sydney hospitals when she needed help?

Will you please ask him why the Health Department does not provide adequate long stay accommodation for mentally ill patients.

Will you please ask the Government and the Premier in particular why he is constantly exposing completely innocent people to danger of death or injury at the hands of mentally ill people who have been refused proper hospital accommodation & care.

Would you please ask the Premier why he forces Police, whose job is to fight crime, into dealing with people who are mentally ill – sometimes shooting them dead in the process, leading to loud media condemnation of Police.

It looks like the Health Department is forcing Police to execute mental patients to save money, which is barbaric. It is time all caring MPs took a stand on this issue.

Please let me know whether you can help us get proper care for Tracy.

Dianne Gaddin

24/03.02 – Sent to Federal and State

Sent: Friday, April 26, 2002 12:17 PM

Subject: MENTALLY ILL CAUGHT UP IN THE CRIMINAL SYSTEM

I have just received an adjournment notification from the clerk of the Waverley Court, notifying my daughter to appear in Court on 7 May, 2002, the matter already being adjourned from the original Hearing on 17 April. My daughter Tracy Gaddin has been in the Kiloh Psychiatric Observation ward since the night of 29 January, 2002. Only because a neighbour has kindly been forwarding Tracy's mail, do I, her mother, know about this.

I have in my possession, 9 Ambulance Transport accounts for January alone, aside from the those in December - had I not been forwarded these accounts, many of which had already gone to a collection agency, there would be other charges against my daughter!

What would've happened to Tracy had I not managed to obtain the Hearing Notices and the Ambulance accounts? What am I to do now - do I go to jail - she is not responsible - she was psychotic!

I hold Prince of Wales fully responsible and accountable. And Minister Knowles has the nerve to criticize John Brogden for his vision - Prisons are already filled with Mentally ill who should not be there, but rather in Long Stay facilities, where they can be rehabilitated, treated with respect and not punished for their illness!

Dianne Gaddin

VOTERGRAM

(Thank you for reading & acting on this Votergram. To respond please click Reply to Sender. Copy to please so that other voters will appreciate what you & your party do.)

I would like to make it known that my daughter Tracy Gaddin, from Kiloh Unit, Prince of Wales Hospital, presently held in the Acute Section, was taken on an outing Friday at about midday, together with 9 others and one carer. She subsequently allegedly walked off and has not been seen again. I believe she withdrew \$1000 from the ATM in Coogee.

How is it possible for one carer to manage such a large group of psychiatrically ill people? Tracy was due to go before a Magistrate on Monday - it has been recommended that she be held for a further 3 months. Apparently she has allegedly not been progressing on the medication she presently is on.

Would you please do whatever you can to see that she is located & given the psychiatric care, accommodation & compassion she needs - as a matter of extreme urgency.

Dianne Gaddin

Tracy disappeared and somehow managed to buy herself an air ticket to Canberra – she apparently tried to gain admission into hospital there but was refused admission. Again, because of the Privacy Act, the hospital were not able to trace our daughter's history, for had this been so, she would most definitely have been hospitalized. She was found wandering the streets of Canberra and fortunately recognized by a nurse who remembered her from one of her prior admissions – she was escorted back to Sydney by the Police. This is the 21st century not the dark ages. A situation like this should never have happened. Firstly, one carer with such a large group of patients, all with mental illness. When Tracy appeared at a hospital in Canberra, they should have been able to access her records and see that she had absconded and dealt with her accordingly. The stress and strain on my family from the time of her disappearance was enormous. We never knew whether she would be found dead or alive, and this situation happened numerous times.

07.05.02

VOTERGRAM

(Thank you for reading & acting on this Votergram. To respond please click Reply to Sender. Copy to please so that other voters will appreciate what you & your party do.)

My psychotic daughter, Tracy Gaddin, having been repeatedly refused admission to hospitals and psychiatric wards because there are too few available in Sydney, is alleged to have set fire to her unit. Other residents from units in the block were evacuated for a fire. It seems to be alleged that in her confusion and fear, she perhaps assaulted someone, because Police have charged her with something and she is to appear in court tomorrow.

Of course, she does not know that, because she is in Prince of Wales psychiatric unit too mentally ill to read mail, let alone comprehend a Police charge.

If she does not appear tomorrow, which she legally cannot as P of W would not discharge her or allow her out, she could be convicted of something alleged to have happened when she was mentally ill and when there were no hospital beds available to care for her.

A conviction would be grossly unfair. I have learned that she is due to appear in Waverley Court, Sydney, today, May 7. The Police Prosecutor's office has been helpful but on May 3rd said it could not give me any reference details. The gentleman there suggested I go to the court today or Wednesday 8th & they can give me the information required. I can only go after work today.

However, by then it may be **too late**. She may have been incorrectly convicted without any defence, for something of which she was not guilty that happened whilst she was in need of psychiatric care.

This has all been caused because the NSW & Federal Governments have failed to provide psychiatrically ill NSW voters and their families with the number of beds required for treatment. The consequence is that gaols already house people who should be in psychiatric hospitals.

Would you please help to ensure that my daughter Tracy, having repeatedly been refused admission to hospitals for lack of beds, will not now go to gaol for her illness?

I really need and would greatly appreciate your urgent help, **today** if possible, in this situation which is a national & state disgrace.

Dianne Gaddin

10.05.02

I am deeply indebted to the wonderful Members of Parliament who are so anxious to see better psychiatric facilities & services for others as well as for my daughter Tracy. My heartfelt thanks go to them all and I will sing their praises to all the voters I know and meet around the state.

How can hospitals care for sick people when they are denied the money to provide beds, nurses & doctors? They cannot!

How can Police tackle serious crime when they have to spend their time dealing with people whose only crime (like Ron Levi who NSW Police sadly killed) is that they have a mental illness for which the Government is consciously refusing them the appropriate medical treatment?

How can ordinary voters support the Government if it forces them to risk life and limb in confrontation with people whose minds are not working properly because of untreated psychiatric illness?

Why are people with psychiatric disorders put into situations where, through no fault of their own, they commit what would be crimes except for their illness and are put into gaol - often because their illness deprives them of the wealth needed to engage good counsel to prove that they were "not guilty" by virtue of mental illness?

I am grateful for those hospital staff who are caring for Tracy so well since I first raised this crisis with Members of Parliament. However, we must care for all those who need it, not just those who know to ask you for help.

I do ask you to encourage the Government to approve a 100% increase in funding of psychiatric health care in NSW straight away; to make another 500 hospital beds available to psychiatric patients in NSW located within existing hospitals or associated with them in a way that does not place stigma on patients & relatives, plus 500 NSW long-stay accommodation places, serviced by adequate numbers of fully qualified and experienced medical professionals, for the long slow process of dealing with a psychiatric illness after constant hospitalisation has ceased to be necessary and before such a patient should be placed back into the community. (Dianne - what we seek & what we get will generally be quite different, so don't get excited by my requests.)

It needs to be recognised in this world of speed and wealth accumulation that, whereas pregnancy patients can be sent back home with their babies just days after giving birth and knee replacement patients can do that weeks afterwards with continual visits back for check ups and physiotherapy, psychiatric patients often cannot be put back into the community for a long time because their minds are not functioning properly and they mistake or misinterpret things. A ring of Police officers around a psychotic person may be a terrifying thing, with them identifying their foes not as Police at all, but as mysterious evil assailants wanting to kill them. The potential consequences will be obvious to you, as with Ron Levi.

Gaol costs escalate to accommodate the psychiatrically ill. Gaol exacerbates the illness rather than cures it. Psych patients become victims of criminal violence in gaol instead of being cared for in a loving hospital environment, to the detriment of our whole society.

The following is extracted from the Police report about Tracy will explain to you how sick people get charged as criminals because the Government's health service does not care for them.

29.1.02 Police visited my daughter Tracy. Feeling she may have a psychiatric illness they took her to Prince of Wales Hospital as the Mental Health Act requires. She was assessed by a doctor and subsequently released without being admitted. (Please read that last sentence again as it is important.) Police then took her home where Police allege she screamed at and chased a man who ran into a unit and closed the door behind him. In their report Police said "There is an ongoing problem with regards to the defendant and her behaviour. Doctors at the Prince of Wales Hospital are aware that the defendant has a psychotic illness and have planned to have her admitted on Monday 4th February 2002."

The Police report says "She (Tracy) is suffering from schizophrenia and is well known at most metropolitan psychiatric institutions. Whilst in Police custody she threatened to take her own life with a piece of wire gauze. It is the opinion of arresting Police that the defendant is in urgent need of psychiatric assessment and ongoing assistance."

So why, if medical staff at Prince of Wales knew Tracy had a psychotic illness requiring admission, did they not admit her? The staff there are just wonderful, so there is nothing wrong with the care offered by staff, within the confines of their resources. To say she threatened staff there (as the Police report says), is no answer. That is what psychotic patients sometimes do. To say the Psychiatric Ward is closed for renovations for the next two weeks (as the Police report goes on to declare) is not relevant either. If any ward is closed for renovations then the Government would obviously make alternative satisfactory arrangements for care of existing and new patients.

Because Prince of Wales did not admit Tracy, despite seeing her in such a state that Police had seen fit to take her to the hospital, she was returned home by Police to be by herself, and is being charged with something- perhaps the alleged swearing at the man at her unit block, or allegedly chasing him.

But it got worse. Between when she was refused admission to Prince of Wales Hospital and was returned to her home to live alone by Police and the date on which it is suggested Prince of Wales intended to admit her, Tracy's home unit caught on fire and many residents in the block had to be evacuated. Somebody has alleged that Tracy set it on fire, intentionally or accidentally.

Why is this happening? Why was she not admitted to a psychiatric hospital to receive proper treatment for her illness? Why is a sick person being treated as a criminal? The Government has absolutely failed this citizen and probably thousands like her. Will you please help us change this terrible situation and provide the level of care which is needed for psychiatric patients in NSW.

I have been in such a state the whole of to-day - firstly calling the clerk of the Court at 8.30 this morning, only to find, what I already suspected, that the Dr had not sent a letter! I called my husband and got him to alert the doctor to fax through a letter. I was privileged to read this letter later on, and it was pathetic! I am not a doctor and could have written a far more effective letter. However, that is for another time! I left work at 2 and went off to the Court - was told that as Tracy did not appear and a fax just received, that the matter is being deferred

until 27 August. I then proceeded to go and see the Police Prosecutor. What an extremely pleasant, sympathetic and helpful gentleman! He gave me a copy of the Facts Sheet - well, when I read it I wanted to sit down and weep and scream! It shows the Prince of Wales up for being totally responsible for the tragedy that followed just a few hours later! I do not have access to a photocopy machine, so will type up the Facts Sheet and send to you as an attachment.

Now, I am so angry that I do not know what to do first. You have always helped me and guided me, so I ask that you advise me - I am too emotional to make the right decision. My instinct is to go to A CURRENT AFFAIR, The Newspaper and also to call or write to the Director of the Prince of Wales! I ask you to guide me please.

Just by the way, the charge sheet stated time of arrest 15.40 on 29 January - now 5 hours later her flat was on fire and all the tenants had the property and lives exposed to a situation WHICH SHOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED!

----- Original Message -----

From:
To:
Sent: Tuesday, May 07, 2002 8:08 AM
Subject: Re: Tracy's Case

Dianne,
I am not sure either. It is really a question for a lawyer. The Environmental Defenders Office, 9262 6989, might point you in the right direction or be able to tell you.

I would not assume anything about whether or not she could be found guilty. My completely uninformed opinion is that someone should appear at court or you should at least phone the Police prosecutor or clerk of the court and explain that she is in hospital and you cannot get time off court. Deferment might give you time to have the matter discontinued or to arrange for someone to appear.

A fax to the prosecutor and clerk of the court would be better than a phone call because you could later prove you sent it.

I have sent the Votergram with "alleged" .

Greg

----- Original Message -----

From:
To: **Sent:** Monday, May 06, 2002 8:30 PM
Subject: Re: Tracy's Case

I was not able to get hold of the Doctor who had promised to write a letter asking for the Hearing to be deferred, but I am going to go myself tomorrow and speak with the Clerk of the Court to get details. I don't see any point in deferment, because she cannot be guilty of any offence as she is still in hospital since just a few hours after the alleged incident took place.

Insofar as sending the votergram - I don't have a problem but feel it very important to say she ALLEGEDLY set fire as nobody was present when it happened. I would only be able to find out if the letter was sent tomorrow, the day of the Hearing. Do I assume it was sent and just go to the Court after work in the afternoon to get a case no. etc? I cannot go before work but could get to the Court by 3 - not sure what to do.

----- Original Message -----

From:

Sent: Monday, May 06, 2002 5:40 PM

Subject: Re: Tracy's Case

Dianne,

Someone probably has to appear in court, perhaps you, to at least explain the situation.

As soon as you have a reference number or anything, please let me know so that, if you wish, we can send a Votergram into parliament.

As we don't seem able to get that & the case is tomorrow, what about if we send the following to State & Federal MPs.

"Help urgently needed. My psychotic daughter, having been repeatedly refused admission to hospitals and psychiatric wards because there are too few available in Sydney, set fire to her unit. Other residents from units in the block had to be evacuated. In her confusion and fear, she must have assaulted someone because Police have charged her and she is to appear in court tomorrow.

Of course, she does not know that, because she is in Prince of Wales psychiatric unit too mentally ill to read mail, let alone comprehend a Police charge.

If she does not appear tomorrow - which she legally cannot as P of W would not discharge her or allow her out-, she could be convicted of something that happened when she was mentally ill and when there were no hospital beds available for her.

A conviction would be grossly unfair. She is due to appear in Waverley Court, Sydney, tomorrow, May 7. The Police Prosecutor's office has been helpful but on May 3rd said it could not give me any details. The gentleman there suggested I go to the court on Tuesday 7th or Wednesday 8th & they can give me the information required.

However, by then it may be too late. She may have been convicted without any defence.

This has all been caused because the NSW & Federal Governments have failed to provide psychiatrically ill NSW voters and their families with the number of beds required. The consequence is that gaols already house people who should be in psychiatric hospitals.

Would you help to ensure that my daughter, having repeatedly been refused admission to hospitals, will not now go to gaol?

I really need and would greatly appreciate your urgent help in this situation which is a national & state disgrace.

Dianne Gaddin

16.05.02 From Premier Carr

AA02/25378 - SPB

Dear Mrs Gaddin

I am writing in response to your emails concerning your daughter Tracy's recent experience with the NSW mental health system. I recognise the distress your concerns about your daughter's situation must have caused you.

I am advised that Tracy is currently receiving expert treatment from the Prince of Wales Hospital Mental Health Service and is expected to remain in their care in the medium term.

I am further assured that Tracy's accommodation and follow-up care needs will be given full consideration as part of her release into the community. This will involve consultation between NSW Health, the Department of Housing and non-Government organisations.

My Government has acknowledged the need to develop and improve the mental health system in NSW. That is why we have committed recurrent funding of \$107.5 million per year for mental health services over three years, the biggest increase in mental health funding in NSW history.

We are fully committed to ensuring that people with mental illnesses are afforded the best opportunity to live in the community with the same rights as other Australians. In line with the World Health Organisation and other developed countries, NSW is moving mental health service provision away from institutions, and the stigma and isolation attached to them, to community based service.

To aid this transition this Government announced in 2000 that it would be doubling the number of community mental care staff and increasing funding to the non-Government organisations who carry out invaluable work in supporting people with mental illnesses in the community.

We are also providing more mental health beds in general hospitals so that people with mental illnesses can best access beds and follow-up treatment close to their home and support network. We have provided new units at the Prince of Wales and St George Hospitals and specialist child and adolescent units at Campbelltown and Newcastle. More beds have been provided at Coffs Harbour, in the Blue Mountains and at Dubbo, just to name a few.

The NSW Government acknowledges the need for more supported accommodation for mental illness sufferers. We are currently working closely with experienced non-Government organisations to ensure that we meet this need.

I hope this information helps to address your concerns. I would like to take this opportunity to wish your daughter the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Bob Carr
Premier

VOTERGRAM

(Thank you for reading & acting on this Votergram. To respond please click Reply to Sender. Copy to please so that other voters will appreciate what you & your party do.)

According to the Charge Sheet against of my sick daughter, Tracy, she was described as being well known at most metropolitan psychiatric institutions. She tried to take her own life whilst in Police custody. The written opinion of the arresting police was that she was in urgent need of psychiatric assessment and ongoing assistance.

Police attended Tracy's home in relation to an unrelated incident on January 29. She was conveyed to Prince of Wales Psychiatric Hospital for assessment under requirements of Mental Health Act. She was assessed by Dr. (name deleted) and released - reason given was - the Hospital planned to have her admitted 6 days later on Monday 4th February and the ward was being closed for 2 weeks for renovations, and she had made threats against staff on previous occasions. The Doctor was aware she had a psychotic illness.

Tracy was taken back to her home and the police say she started screaming and swearing and running after a tenant and it is said that "if conditional bail is not granted the defendant will continue to commit similar offences upon residents in her block".

So, why was she not admitted to hospital? Just 5 hours later her home was alight and all the residents in her block were exposed to losing their homes, their possessions and maybe their lives. Tracy was later taken back to the Prince of Wales and it took that tragedy for the hospital to then find a bed for her, where she is still being kept!

Surely it cannot be expected for psychotic patients to be on good behaviour in psychiatric hospitals. If the hospital was closed for renovations (Kiloh at Prince of Wales is only 2 yrs old), why was she not sent elsewhere? The tragedy would then never have happened.

Why was she denied treatment when she needed it so desperately?
Why is she right now being treated like a criminal when she is in reality ill?
Why has her Government failed her and so many like her?

As a mother, I beg you to please help change this situation and provide the level of care which is so desperately needed for Tracy and other patients like her in NSW.

Please, tell me what you personally will do to assist.

Dianne Gaddin

28.05.02

Health Minister Knowles tells Hon Ron Dyer MLC that my daughter Tracy is an adult, I am not her guardian & implies I should not discuss her personal circumstances.

I ask you to thoroughly investigate whether the Minister is trying to silence me and cover up the failure of his government to properly deal with the needs of psychiatric patients in NSW.

Yes Tracy is an adult, but not a well one. If the Government was half doing its job I would not need to trouble you at all. Tracy has now walked out of psychiatric care three times, is accused of assaulting someone and of setting fire to government accommodation. Someone has to see that she is treated fairly & it does not seem that it is going to be Minister Knowles.

If I had guardianship of her, Tracy would not be given a bed at Prince of Wales at all. That is how this Government treats mental patients.

Mr. Knowles says "I can advise that Mrs Gaddin's daughter is currently understood to be well cared for and safe". How does the Minister relate that to her walking out of the psychiatric unit for the third time, only last week? The real question is "Why was she not well cared for by being admitted when Police took her to Prince of Wales, just hours before the alleged assault for which she is charged as a criminal & the house fire, are claimed to have taken place?"

Certainly she is under the care of an excellent team of doctors and nurses. No-one could ask for better. However, they are under-staffed, under-paid, under-funded & under-resourced. Why is this Labor Government treating doctors, nurses, hospitals, patients and voters generally, in this very neglectful way when they have never before collected so much money in taxes? Labor MPs should be seeking some urgent changes.

Mr. Knowles suggestion that I "should continue to liaise with the medical team providing care to" my daughter is of course true but of no significant benefit if the Government will not give the medical team the resources they need, or if she is found guilty of assault or arson & sent to gaol because the Labor Government would not provide her with a bed when Police said she needed one.

Would you please ask the Minister to tell Parliament whether, in the 1999 & 2000 years, more than 300 people supposedly under the care of NSW mental health services, committed suicide. Would you please ask him how many people in the same years and under the same care, committed homicides.

The real need is not just to help Tracy. It is to encourage the NSW State Government to accept its responsibility to provide the necessary medical & residential support for the thousands of NSW people with illnesses like Tracy's. Currently the neglect of the NSW Government leaves large numbers of people wandering the streets or in gaol, rather than giving them the compassionate medical treatment and long-stay accommodation that they deserve. the impact on our community is enormous.

----- Original Message -----

From:
To: Sent: Friday, May 24, 2002 9:11 PM
Subject: Reply from Minister Knowles

Been thinking about the reply from Minister Knowles and these thoughts I pass onto you.

1. Privacy and Personal Information Act deprives him of all the facts.
2. Yes, Tracy is an adult, but not a well adult, otherwise she would not be in a Psychiatric hospital being treated with the most stringently controlled medication in Australia.
3. She is not capable of dealing with the injustices that have been served her.
4. No, I do not hold Guardianship - if I did, it would negatively affect Tracy in that she would not be entitled, as a voluntary patient, to a gazetted bed, and Prince of Wales only have gazetted bed. So I was advised against Guardianship.
5. No, I do not have Tracy's consent - she is afraid that it would cause problems for her in the hospital, and because she is a mental patient, nobody would believe her.
6. She told me that the nurses were her only friends and she didn't want to hurt them.
7. I told her it wasn't the doctors and nurses that I had problems with, but the SYSTEM that had let her down.
8. The Doctors and staff have been absolutely wonderful and I am eternally grateful to them, for all they are doing for her.
9. It is obvious that Minister Knowles is totally out of touch with the reality of all that has happened to Tracy, who had the insight she needed to be hospitalised. 8 ambulance accounts

for December/January, would show that. She was turned away each time. The Police stated she needed to be hospitalised, verbally to me, and in the Charge Sheet - yet she was denied admissions. In her state of mind, she never had the resources or ability to insist or demand admission. As a mother, that is why I am fighting - it is the System, not individuals, that is to blame.

10. Minister Knowles advises me to liaise with the medical team providing care for Tracy "within the framework of consent to do so provided by her daughter" - and that is exactly what I am doing. I do not want to know what she says and what she does in the hospital, but want her to have the continued treatment she and others like her deserve.

Why is there a criminal charge against Tracy -
Why was she denied admission, so many times.

Would the hospital being doing all that they are doing now, had it not been for the fact that I have raised so much fuss?

In all, I need to carefully put together a response to both Mr Carr and Minister Knowles. I will not be intimidated by Minister Knowles, except to say, he is totally out of touch with what is "happening out there".

Regards,

Dianne

VOTERGRAM

(Thank you for reading & acting on this Votergram. To respond please click Reply to Sender.)

On May 21st Minister Knowles kindly advised The Hon. Ron Dyer that Dianne Gaddin's daughter, a psychiatric patient whose case is probably typical of many & who like all of us when we are ill deserves the very best attention, that " I can advise that Mrs. Gaddin's daughter is currently understood to be well cared for and safe."

It is certainly true that she has been given superb attention by the doctors, nurses, staff & social worker in hospital. Nobody could fault the health professionals who have looked after her.

However, given that on 29th May the daughter was found in the main street clad only in a towel and given that on 3rd June she was once again reported missing from Prince of Wales Hospital, are we to understand that the Health Minister's definition of psychiatric patients being "well cared for and safe" is for them to be near naked in the streets and constantly missing from the psychiatric hospital?

Would you please ask the Minister whether in his opinion this perception of his as to what constitutes "being well cared for and safe" has any bearing on the number of suicides in NSW, the number of homicides in NSW, the number of assaults in NSW, the number of fires including bushfires in NSW, the number of domestic disputes in NSW and the number of people held in NSW gaols, during his term of office.

Would you please also ask the Minister whether his statement that "Mrs Gaddin...does not appear to have the consent of her daughter to discuss her personal circumstances" was an attempt to muzzle Mrs Gaddin & prevent her from advocating appropriate health care for sick people in NSW & from alerting other Members of Parliament to the failings of his Ministry?

(Name taken out) is seriously concerned at Labor's apparent failure in its duty of care to those who are psychiatrically ill. This is yet another indication that by pandering to property developers to gain stamp duty revenue and campaign contributions and by allowing an increasing number of homes to be built in Sydney instead of directing them elsewhere in NSW, the Government has created a monster which it cannot tame, because it cannot possibly provide the necessary infrastructure to service the burgeoning Sydney population.

We will be interested to know the Minister's replies and intentions for the future.

(Name deleted)

Thank you for taking the time to reply to me - I hope I am not being pushy by asking you for advice?!

Maybe I am wrong to be thinking of a rehab programme because Tracy can cook and take care of herself. I am just concerned that to take someone out of psychiatric hospital after 7 months, most of the time she was totally psychotic, and just expect her to cope on her own, without assistance is not right. Last year she was so unwell and was in hospital for over 5 months and released with a CTO - WHICH WAS RIDICULOUS. Had it not been for my husband and me, she would never have had her injections. She was so difficult to manage and it just got worse and worse and the toll on my health and my husband almost took us to the edge.

Tracy had tried to get into hospital and was turned away each time. I have 8 ambulance accounts just for January. The day she was hospitalised, it was only after the police had been called in because of her behaviour - they arrested her, took her to hospital and recommended she be admitted. Hospital refused and the police returned her to her unit. I was called from work by tenants in her building saying that she was destroying everything in her apartment and screaming and going crazy. I could get no help at all and went out to see her after work - she had destroyed everything in her apartment and told me to get out of her life and that I would never ever see her again. I immediately went to the Maroubra Police Station and made a statement that I knew something terrible was going to happen. Unbeknown to me, her apartment was alight. She was taken to Prince of Wales and they then had a bed for her! That is where she has been since.

Now the hospital tell me that they can't apply for Public Housing as they can't guarantee that this won't happen again, and yet they expect me to set her up in a furnished bedsitter for 3 months trial. I don't think it would work and I definitely don't think she is going to cope. It is all very scary and I don't know what to do.

I know you are a very busy man, but I would appreciate a reply when you can.

Dianne Gaddin

7.11.04

I ENDORSE THE ARTICLE BY RUTH POLLARD IN THE STRONGEST TERMS! IT IS NOT THE JOB OF POLICE TO TRANSPORT THE MENTALLY ILL TO HOSPITAL BUT TO KEEP OUR STREETS SAFE FROM CRIMINALS – THE MENTALLY ILL ARE NOT CRIMINALS!! HOW MANY TIMES HAS MY DAUGHTER BEEN TAKEN TO HOSPITAL (WITH RESPECT AND CARE I MIGHT ADD) AND THEN TURNED AWAY BECAUSE OF A LACK OF BEDS! THE POLICE WOULD THEN HAVE TO DROP HER HOME, AND ON MANY OCCASIONS SHE HAD LOST HER KEYS AND WOULD BE LEFT OUTSIDE HER UNIT. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE THE POLICE TOLD ME HOW BAD THEY FELT BECAUSE THEY KNEW SHE NEEDED HOSPITALISATION BUT THEY WERE POWERLESS TO ENFORCE ANY ACTION.

OUR MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM IS COLLAPSING! THIS IS A NATIONAL DISGRACE ESPECIALLY AFTER THE GOVERNMENT SPENT SO MUCH MONEY ON HOLDING A MENTAL HEALTH INQUIRY AND RESPONDING TO THE 120 RECOMMENDATIONS.

TO ADD TO THIS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS THE AUDACITY TO NOW WANT TO CLOSE 2 MENTAL HEALTH CENTRES IN CREMORNE AND CHATSWOOD. NO PRIOR CONSULTATIONS WERE MADE WITH THE WORKERS IN THE CENTRES, NOR THE CONSUMERS USING THESE SERVICES. WHAT WAS THE ULTERIOR MOTIVE BEHIND THIS I WONDER – A MONEY GRAB PLOY BECAUSE THESE 2 SITES COULD BE SOLD FOR VAST SUMS OF MONEY. WOULD THIS THEN BE PUT BACK INTO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES? OF COURSE NOT!

DIANNE GADDIN

03.09.05

I AM NOT SURE WHETHER IT IS TO YOU THAT I SHOULD BE ADDRESSING THIS AS I WOULD LIKE THE PRESENT HEALTH MINISTER TO READ THE LETTER THAT I SENT PREVIOUSLY TO Mr Iemma WHEN HE WAS HEALTH MINISTER.

HEREUNDER IS A COPY:

I believe that you have agreed to visit the Cremorne Community Mental Health Centre. I would therefore ask you, with respect, to view not only through a politician's eyes, but through the eyes of those that use and need this centre. Our population is growing rapidly, our services sadly not keeping up with this growth, and in particular the mental health services are in crisis.

In 2002 the mental health inquiry was held and quite clearly showed how inadequate our mental health system was. I personally was involved in the Public Forum which gave me an opportunity to tell my story. The 120 recommendations which came out of the inquiry gave me some hope, particularly with Dr Brian Pezzuti promising to stay on and ensure that these recommendations would be acted on.

Weekly, I read articles of how desperate the mental health system is, doctors revolting and patients being put at great risk. In particular, I would just mention that a close friend of mine has spent over 8 days sitting in the Emergency Department at Hornsby hospital, despite being scheduled, as there are no beds. And so the sad tale of our failing mental health system goes

To my utter dismay, I was told of the imminent closure of both Chatswood and Cremorne Mental Health Centres. My first reaction was – this cannot be – but of course I was wrong. How can anyone entertain to take away from our already under-resourced facilities?! Who could have thought up the idea of putting these 2 centres in the grounds of a hospital? Hospitals conjure up very unpleasant memories and this would be a travesty of justice.

The Cremorne Centre came to my rescue in the early days of my daughter's mental illness and I am not sure what my husband and I would've done had it not been for the Centre. I ask you to please carefully review this decision for the effects it will have on those that depend on them could have devastating outcomes.

I thank you for taking your valuable time to read this.

Dianne Gaddin

I HAVE DONE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE IMMINENT CLOSURE OF CREMORNE AND CHATSWOOD MENTAL HEALTH CENTRES – BUT IT SEEMS TO NO AVAIL. I HAVE RECENTLY BEEN HELPED OUT BY CREMORNE MENTAL HEALTH, IN A SITUATION I DO NOT KNOW I WOULD HAVE DEALT WITH ON MY OWN. I CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHY THIS HAS NOT BEEN DEALT WITH – IT HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR MORE THAN A YEAR.

I WOULD APPRECIATE A REPLY FROM MR HATZISTERGOS, OR BETTER STILL, AN APPOINTMENT WITH HIM, TOGETHER WITH A NUMBER OF CARERS WHO WOULD BACK UP THE IMPORTANCE THIS CENTRE HAS TO THE COMMUNITY

06.09.04

To - Minister Hatzistergos

I am writing to ask you to please speed up the review in regards to the proposed closure of Cremorne Mental Health Centre – Chatswood has already been closed, which is a disgrace.

This situation has been running for over a year and it took our previous Health Minister about 9 months before he even went to visit the centres to see for himself, yet he still sat on the decision. Public Meetings, Workshops, letters, all to no avail and I am wondering, naively perhaps, why!

You sat on the Mental Health Inquiry in 2002, and I was fortunate to have been able to stand up and tell my sad story, and listen to all the other sad tales. 120 Recommendations came out of this Inquiry, and yet Mental Health Issues are still put in the TOO HARD BASKET! Is it because these unfortunate people do not vote and therefore count for nothing? I don't believe it would be too hard to muster a campaign to get families, carers and friends of the mentally ill to get together and use their vote to the party that promises to finally do something for these disadvantaged people in our community.

I for one will stop at nothing until something positive is done. I have recently had firsthand experience of Cremorne Mental Health who intervened when my daughter absconded from a Clinic who were then not prepared to re-admit her, espousing that she had discharged herself, and the privacy act also reared its ugly head. Centres like Cremorne and Chatswood are the first line of defense in preventing re-admissions, which saves the Government huge sums of money.

I look forward to a reply.

Dianne Gaddin

To Premier NSW 17.11.05

I am writing to tell you, as the former Minister of Health, and now our Premier, that my sweet, gentle, troubled daughter, finally could not cope with the loneliness and isolation, and took the ultimate step – SHE JUMPED OFF THE CLIFF AT THE GAP.

WITH EVERY LAST BIT OF STRENGTH MY RESOLVE, IN HER MEMORY, IS TO FIGHT FOR OUR DISADVANTAGED MENTALLY ILL.

DIANNE GADDIN

TO – Tony Abbott – 17.11.05

I wrote the e-mail below just a few weeks ago, not knowing that my daughter would reach the very end of her will to continue to get up out of bed each day. Her strength was finally sapped from her she jumped off the Gap. And so Tony, her struggle is over and she is finally at peace..... Through her death the rest of my family is now united. Her death will be the reason for me to march on in my campaign to create better awareness of mental illness and ask that our Government finally sit up and act as human beings, not politicians, stop the buck-passing and get on with what needs to be done.

Tracy was an extremely intelligent woman, in her youth she excelled in tennis, swimming and hockey. Her life and death must be a lesson for us all – the mentally ill are not the lepers of society, and deserve the respect, dignity and assistance just like anyone else.

I met you at the public meeting voicing my opinion about the proposed closure of Cremorne and Chatswood Mental Health Centres – please Tony, do what you can!

AND SO THE BLAME GAME CONTINUES THE DENIALS AND THE BUCK-PASSING! ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT A SHAMBLES OUR MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM IS IN? I AM HAPPY TO SHOW YOU PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN OF MY DAUGHTER'S DOH UNIT WHEN SHE WAS SO SEVERELY PSYCHOTIC AND YET THE HOSPITALS WOULD NOT ADMIT HER – POLICE PICKING HER UP ON SO MANY OCCASIONS, BRINGING HER TO HOSPITAL, ADVISING THAT SHE BE ADMITTED, BUT NO – OUT INTO THE STREET WITH HER. ONLY WHEN HER UNIT WAS ON FIRE AND ALL THE RESIDENTS WERE AT RISK, WAS SHE FINALLY ADMITTED, AND THERE SHE STAYED FOR 8 OR 9 MONTHS, THE DOCTOR TELLING US THAT HAD THIS OCCURRED 20 YEARS AGO SHE WOULD'VE BEEN TOSSED INTO AN ASYLUM AND THE KEYS THROWN AWAY! AT LEAST SHE WOULD'VE BEEN SAFE! MEDICATION ALONE IS NOT THE ANSWER, FIRSTLY BECAUSE THEY HAVE TO BE TAKEN REGULARLY! MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THEY ARE NOT – NOT BLAMING ANYONE FOR THIS. I CAN GO ON AND ON, BUT THERE REALLY IS NO NEED. IT IS JUST TIME THAT RESPONSIBILITY AND OWNERSHIP WAS TAKEN ON. NO MORE TALKING THE TALK, BUT DARE TO CARE!

HOW COME IT IS ONLY PEOPLE WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS THAT ARE SO ABYSMALLY TREATED? ANYONE WITH SEVERE HEART DISEASE, DIABETES OR LIVER FAILURE WOULD BE GIVEN WHAT THEY RIGHTFULLY DESERVE – TO BE ADMITTED, TREATED AND ONLY DISCHARGED WHEN THEY ARE FULLY WELL ENOUGH. THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN WITH MENTAL ILLNESS – IS IT BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE ONLY TAKE FROM THE SYSTEM, DON'T WORK AND CERTAINLY DON'T VOTE? PERHAPS SO, BUT THERE ARE MANY OUT THERE, LIKE ME, WHO HAVE HAD ENOUGH AND WILL NOT STOP STANDING UP FOR WHAT OUR MENTALLY ILL DESERVE I FOR ONE AM ONE OF THOSE!

PUT YOURSELF INTO THE SHOES OF A CARER OR SOMEONE WITH SEVERE SCHIZOPHRENIA..... I HAVE NO DOUBT YOU WOULD BE DOING EXACTLY WHAT I AM DOING - THAT IS, FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE.

I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR RESPONSE.

DIANNE GADDIN

A year after my daughter died, I challenged the NRMA and the RTA – The NRMA handled the matter of the fire in my daughter's apartment most inappropriately and refused to pay out the claim – they maintained that on expert opinion my daughter had deliberately set fire to her unit. My response was that if that person was such an expert, why was she not admitted when the police begged him to do so? I was the last person to see her and managed to take

some photo's of her apartment which clearly indicated how unwell she was – not 2 hours later her flat was on fire – Tracy had been denied admission twice earlier in the day despite being brought to hospital by the Police begging her to be admitted – she then ‘allegedly’ attacked a person and was charged (then had a criminal charge against her, despite the fact she was psychotic, which the Police stated in their charge sheet) After the fire she was admitted as a bed had been found (!) and there she remained seriously unwell for 8-10 months. It took a tragedy of that scale for the ‘expert’ Registrar at the hospital to realise how unwell she was and admit her. After showing the NRMA the proof I had, and that I held them partially responsible for Tracy’s suicide, they paid the claim! I urged the NRMA to review its policy when dealing with those with a mental illness and they gave me that guarantee.

Again, after Tracy had died, I read of people parking in the city in Disabled Parking bays and not being fined. Tracy had parked in a Disabled Parking Bay when she felt unwell and did the responsible thing and parked in the nearest available parking – called an Ambulance and was taken to hospital. Despite letters from her case manager and treating Psychiatrist, the RTA refused to cancel the fine – she had also parked on the grounds of Prince of Wales Hospital in order to admit herself and was fined for parking there – again, despite letters explaining the situation, they refused to cancel the fine. The charges escalated to over \$650 – Tracy had decided to go and pay and had withdrawn \$500 from her savings – but the next increase had kicked in and so they took away her Licence. It was not long after that she took her life. I told them I held them responsible for their despicable behaviour and eventually they refunded the fine! For me the most important aspect was the guarantee they gave me that there would be a serious review of dealing with clients who had a mental illness.

Reading the above information will clearly illustrate the enormous emotional pressure that was placed on my husband and me, and began to have terrible effects on my general health, which I shall refrain from going into. Again, I do not believe that my family was unique and these situations are played out on a daily basis throughout Australia, because hospitals are under-resourced, staff over-worked, resulting in the ‘casualties’ that ensue as a result.

On one occasion, after trying to get Tracy hospitalised as she was severely under-nourished, her home was like a pig sty, bloodied sheets shoved down the toilet, blood-stained linen on her bed, the voices in her head telling her that everything was poisoned and that is why she wasn’t eating, I was beyond knowing just what to do, because she had been denied admission so many times. I managed to persuade her to see her own GP. I called her GP and explained what I had seen and that I knew her to be psychotic. The Acute Care Team were notified by the GP to pick her up and take her straight away to hospital. The recommendation was that she be Scheduled. I went to the hospital only to be told that a certain doctor ignored the recommendation of the GP as well as the Acute Care Team’s plea that she be admitted. What happened next still makes me shake – my daughter ran out of the hospital, with no money, no warm clothing and just disappeared. The Acute Team were totally dumbstruck that the doctor denied her admission, saying that he believed she had Borderline Personality Disorder and the hospital was not the place for her! My entire family spent the next few hours driving through the streets nearest the hospital in the hopes of finding her, called the Police and feared that she would take her life or harm someone. My daughter appeared many many hours later, having walked all the way from the hospital to our home, and literally collapsed. The next couple of hours are a blank for me, but I do remember calling the Director of the hospital that next morning and relating the story. He organised for my daughter to be picked up and taken to hospital where she was given a bed. What a disgrace for a situation like this to happen, and the ending could well have been a tragedy.

I conclude by saying, that every ounce of energy was consumed by fighting for the right care for my daughter – I believe she had been denied her very basic human rights. Had I not done what I did during all those years, my daughter could well have gone the same route as Claudia Rau, been homeless, or worse still dead! Is it any surprise that it got all too much for me to bear, my marriage suffered, my husband and I separated twice, and I attempted to take my life!

As citizens of Australia, we all need to be treated with the same respect, and should not have to encounter such inequalities in our health system. Suicide should not be an option or a choice – every problem has a solution, we just need Government to take ownership that there is something rotten in the land that can be fixed..