



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS  
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## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT

**Submission Number: 18**

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1 June 2020

Judith Girdler

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Re: INQUIRY INTO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IN THE ACT

In 1999 my son [REDACTED] was 19 years old when he had his first episode in Sydney. He was studying at the Music Academy. It was then that Mental Health and drug taking surfaced. I did not understand it, I was so overwhelmed. When I picked him up from Sydney to come home, he was admitted into the Wagga Hospital Mental Ward. Then he got out and went back to Sydney where he ended up spending his 21st birthday in the Mental Ward in Penrith. A few days later he was discharged and roamed the streets of Sydney. I panicked and searched the streets of Sydney. It was hell. When I finally found him he refused to come home with me. Many times I would find him living in unsuitable accommodation. He missed both his sister's weddings, then the merry go round started and we are still on it 20 years later. He has been homeless, two attempts at suicide, in and out of mental hospitals and rehabs, still he is not in a good place. I still feel his pain every day as I am his mother and as his mother I am hardwired to protect him. I will never give up. Since the day he was born I have felt this bond between us that will never be broken.

[REDACTED] was very much loved and cared about by his peers. He was voted as school captain. I will add that he had a special way with people and was very good at sports, he made me very proud, and he had so much going for him.

My love and bond with [REDACTED] is unconditional and I will always be there and fight for him.

I cannot understand how someone who has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia is given all the rights to making decisions for getting help. I have, in numerous occasions, been closed off and shut out from helping [REDACTED] simply because he has said he does not want me involved. A parent that is desperately trying to help their loved one should have every right to be involved, especially when it comes to the fact there is severe mental illness. He can even sign himself out in the midst of receiving rehabilitation and treatment. [REDACTED] was inpatient at Wagga Wagga hospital and rehabilitation in Orange and finally University of Canberra Hospital. As a result [REDACTED] has difficulty maintaining stable accommodation and has in the past lived in his car, in a camper van and also at family residences.

At present [REDACTED] has an NDIS package and has permanent accommodation in Canberra, so his medication is currently under control. However, in the last week he has decided he wants to move in with a 'friend'. Then we start on that merry-go-round of missing medication and deteriorating mental health. How can it be allowed, that a person with a mental illness, such as [REDACTED]'s, along with his track record, be allowed to do that?

On another note, the amount of money he gets paid from the government is actually going towards his addictions. It is fuelling his habits and deteriorating mental health. We need to

have a rehabilitation where they are cared for and seen through to completion in helping integrate them back in to society so they can have good quality of life. They need to be safe and away from temptation. The dealers target him and see him as a 'cash cow'.

My wish for [REDACTED], that he is safe and cared for, he is a good person and one day we will get the right help. Everywhere I turn for help they say there is nowhere for people like [REDACTED] to go. I understand that [REDACTED] needs to change, however, In his state of mind, how is he meant to do that! But why would anyone be in this situation if they had insight into their Mental Health. Once he starts feeling better and is medicated, he thinks he is fine. So why would he ask for help? The legislation needs to change so we as parents can get help for our loved ones.

I do feel that the government has allocated enough money for mental health and drug addiction; however I also feel that there is no accountability from each department on how the funds are being used. Once [REDACTED] has been cared for in any area, he is let out and I have been told that it is up to him. It is his choice. How can a diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic make informed choices?

Anyone with an addiction will do anything to get their hands on drugs. They need to be in a secure and cared for environment, and get the right help. Needless to say, I support mandatory rehab. In other words, rights to be restricted so they can be admitted to rehabilitation only, not their total rights. Then release them only on assessment and approval, to be readmitted if they don't meet the requirements.

My journey has been going for 20 years! If we were able to have some intervention to help [REDACTED] in the early stages, I do believe we would have had a better outcome. In my heart of hearts I do believe containment in rehabilitation is a must, and if need be, mandatory!

The system has failed our children, and I mean all of our children. There are hundreds of [REDACTED]'s out there and I feel that if we do not do something about it, it will only get worse. Legislation needs to represent parent's rights as well as our children's rights. At present there are hundreds of parents and carers out there that have just given up, frustrated and traumatized by the poor outcomes and lack of accountability. Why is it we have the revolving door? It is simply because there is no scrutinizing of the outcomes. To do the same thing over and over again expecting a different result is itself insane.

Yours sincerely,  
Judith Girdler