

Submission on mental health.

1. I am 71 years old and well known in the Castlemaine area as a free source of assistance mainly in the legal area as I am still a current solicitor.
2. I am working with all ages of people but the majority of those seeking help are young people in their late teens or early 20s.
3. The majority of these people are either in public housing or homeless and couch surfing.
4. A number of these people are suffering from post traumatic situations and are users of a wide variety of drugs.
5. I have concluded that drugs, as alcohol and other drugs were used in the past, are a form of self medication to avoid the depression and anxiety that comes from a homeless, jobless, friendless, family less situation.
6. I have found that people who are in the above situation are constantly confronted by police and end up in court.
7. The usual charges are resist arrest, assault police, use and possession of various drugs.
8. I have found that these circumstances also seem to promote mental illness including bipolar and autism symptoms. It is so hard to tell when the individual is highly paranoid and easily triggered into reactive behaviours, whether they are suffering from a diagnosable mental disorder or whether they are reactive because of their past or present traumatic situation.
9. I was a youth worker from the 1970's to 1990 when I took the decision to be a solicitor. I worked in the hostels of Melbourne with young men and women from the institutions. Our success rates were excellent as we were able to train the young people in the skills of life such as healthy habits, cooking, financial management and some capacity to get on with other people.
10. I have a very simple idea of humanity: we are all the same. What you put into a human gives a determinable result: put in love, understanding, support, good food, education, skills to be independent and also to interact with other humans, love of oneself and one's body, respect for other humans as equal, opportunities for developing oneself etc and you get a human that does not need drugs, or crime.
11. We used to have a CYSS scheme where a number of local young people assisted other young people to get employment locally, to cooperate in social events and to get medical or other assistance where necessary. That has gone.
12. The answer is simple: government needs to finance and run services for the development of the full human being: Free education right through to tertiary; free medical services that can cater for all the known physical problems. A financial backing system that can fully assist people who are lacking that finance, not the pathetic funding now available through the CES system. Understanding staff that have a philosophy of assisting people not punishing people
13. We also need a Court or justice system that acknowledges that people do things (commit offences) for a reason and we should be finding out how to assist in removing the reason for criminal activity than just punishing people.

I have lots more to say as my life is full of people in desperate need of assistance of the basic needs: accommodation, finances, employment, independent income, supportive family and friends.