

Services

Wheatbelt Mental Health Service 9621 0999

Rurallink (after hours care) 1800 552 002

Avon Community Services 9622 2612

Avivo 9574 9800

Share & Care 9622 2828

Amity Health 9842 2797

Holyoake 9621 1055

Consumers of Mental Health WA 9258 8911

Helping Minds 9427 7100

Mental Health Advocacy Service 1800 999 057

Wheatbelt Mental Health Client Stories 2016—2017

Stories of recovery, hope and wisdom.



*With thanks for the effort and bravery it takes
to tell our story knowing others will have the
privilege of sharing it.*

*In the telling of a story much wisdom can be
gained.*

Compiled by NM Millett

*Member of the Wheatbelt Mental Health
Consumer Advisory Group*

Please tell us your story of your health care experience

When I was in my twenties I was diagnosed with schizophrenia. I'm 58 now. I have been to hospital a few times in recent years. My neighbours realised something was wrong when they didn't see me for a few days, and someone rang mental health. I was in hospital for a few weeks. I had set fire to the couch and was mixing up fertilisers and chemicals in the shed, trying to make explosives. I'm not sure now what my plan was. I got a bit paranoid as well. I thought people were coming into my house and stealing my clothes, old fire brigade and cadet uniforms which I've kept. Later I realised I'd moved them outside myself.

It was good that I was in the system. For a while I thought I'd be OK without any help and I think I upset some of the nurses. I do have a reputation for swearing. But they sorted that out and got me another case worker who seems to be able to handle me. They visit often and make sure I take my medication. I have been getting some counselling and walking more. I'm not allowed to drive. I do a lot of oil paintings of sunsets and bush scenes and I also tried fixing up the garden and have pruned the roses. They meant a lot to my mum when she lived here. I still smoke and drink too much, but you've gotta die of something...

What does your experience mean to you?

WMH were very important in my recovery and realisation of how serious it can be to have an untreated mental illness. I am grateful that through WMH, I was able to go to a Centre for Clinical Interventions course in Perth. There I took part in a long trial about understanding and coping with bipolar, which was useful.

Suggestions for improvement of the service for all consumers?

Case worker checks and visits were sporadic, and I think the system would be better if staff could contact patients by phone or text before visiting. I missed a lot of visits because I was out, or was caught unawares and sometimes still in my pyjamas which caused me some embarrassment and stress.

Please tell us your story of your health care experience

A series of deaths in my family, physical and social isolation, and life as a single parent of colicky baby and small boy contributed to my developing some mental health problems in 2008. I suffered dramatic mood swings from deep, black, depression to anxiety-fuelled mania, and was finding it very difficult to cope. From birth my baby son was not easy to comfort or settle, and up to the age of one, was waking up sometimes 12 or more times per night. So another trigger for my mental health was extreme sleep deprivation. I did have some thoughts of suicide and at this point, fortunately I sought help. My original GP in Perth referred me to Hollywood Clinic where I received some treatment, and a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. I was put on a relatively new and not fully trialled medication, Cymbalta, which did calm me down to a degree at the time. Practical assistance was also useful at that stage, and I was lucky to some help from my local childcare centre. Apparently though they had no vacancies, the manager took one look at me and said 'We will make space for your child'. I have never forgotten her generosity. There were many side effects from the medication – though mostly the one that I found hard to manage was frequent, horrible and realistic nightmares. I wasn't very proactive from 2008 to about 2011 though, just put up with things, when I finally got around to discussing a change of meds with a Northam GP. I also was referred to WMH and received a lot of help there. I wish I had been referred there earlier, as prior to that I had a lot of trips to Perth about my health. I was able to receive some free counselling, and was also given a care plan and a psychiatrist who reviewed my medications.

What does your experience mean to you?

I guess I'm glad I am back in the system and that help was available when I was suicidal.

Suggestions for improvement of the service for all consumers?

Maybe there should be some extra training so that case workers aren't scared off by some of their clients' behaviours. In my case, (going back to 2013) I was expressing my frustrations. After all, some of us are quite unstable at times. We have mental illnesses.

S, Toodyay

Please tell us your story of your health care experience

My mental health started to suffer in early 2015 when I had an accident at work. I had just got a job at an engineering firm and dropped a piece of machinery on my foot. I had to take a lot of time off work and was eventually replaced. The legal case was badly handled, I didn't have the energy to stand up for my rights and was accused of having a pre-existing injury so I could not receive compensation for the new, and very real injury – broken toes. From there, I became depressed and took to self-medicating using drugs and alcohol. My situation was worsened by my anger management problems and the stigma that surrounds mental health. These issues were very hard for me to talk about and for a long time I had trouble even admitting I was not feeling OK or coping. My parents and siblings were scared of, and embarrassed by me, showed little empathy and cut off contact, which made the situation even worse. I understand why they did though as I abused their trust and could not listen to their advice or warnings. It was only after I went off the rails and started having suicidal thoughts that I agreed to get help, and was referred to Wheatbelt Mental Health (WMH), where I saw a psychologist, was diagnosed with depression and was put on medication. At the moment I am feeling a little bit better and am able to work part time, which has improved my self-esteem. I suppose I have just begun to realise, there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

What does your experience mean to you?

I was grateful that there was an intervention and I was taken to hospital when I got very unwell.

Suggestions for improvement of the service for all consumers?

Back then, visits were sometimes unexpected. Now though I get a phone call first which I appreciate.

T, 55 Toodyay

Please tell us your story of your health care experience

I have lived in Toodyay for most of my life and have had schizophrenia for a long time. I live in the family home and mostly keep to myself. A few years ago, I attempted suicide but was unsuccessful: I'm still here! I tried to shoot myself in the heart but I went for the wrong side. It'd be funny if it wasn't so pathetic. Another time I fell asleep on the couch with a ciggie and the furniture caught fire. I survived that as well. I smoke and drink but I don't take medicine. I don't think I need it. I'm not allowed to drive so if I want something I have to walk to get it. I used to be in a few clubs here, like lawn bowls, but I don't get on very well with all the old ladies. They say I swear too much. I walk to the bowls club to have a few drinks each week and I spend time watering my roses and citrus trees. I was a client with Wheatbelt Mental Health but I told my nurse 'where to go', so they organised another person to come out. He is OK. I quite like to get visits as otherwise no one comes to my place.

What does your experience mean to you?

It was life saving in my case as I was put on anti-depressants and taken seriously by WMH. They also gave me useful information in terms of where I could access a rehab program.

Suggestions for improvement of the service for all consumers?

I think it's really important to feel that you have been listened to, and in a non-judgemental way. The most helpful workers I saw seemed to understand without making me feel even worse by being overly critical of my behaviours.

C, 41 Dewar's Pool

Please tell us your story of your health care experience

For twenty years I was an ordinary, well liked and productive member of rural society, working as a teacher. I loved gardening and planted an orchard and lots of rare and beautiful trees on my bush block. I babysat for, and socialised with my neighbours. All that changed though when I began experiencing bouts of schizophrenia around 2008. It was a frightening time, during which I alienated friends and family and became increasingly isolated, paranoid and delusional. Despite being known to 'the system' Wheatbelt Mental Health there wasn't much any carers or health workers could do for me until I actively sought assistance—or my behaviour became dangerous or extreme enough to force some intervention. The few friends I had left tried to persuade me to get help but at the time, I really couldn't see that there was anything wrong with me. By 2012, I was acting bizarrely, having hallucinations and damaging my house so that the conditions became unliveable. My gardens died, I rarely went into town, and when I did venture out, I shouted abuse at people in the street, ate meals in cafes then refused to pay for them, thinking the food was tainted or poisoned, and walked an imaginary dog on a leash. While in a psychotic stage, I also drove erratically, had several minor crashes, smashed my home's plumbing and toilet and set up camp in the front yard to keep watch over my neighbours. At one stage, I broke all my plates, bowls and cups and scattered them around the property to ward off what I imagined were evil spirits. Things became even worse when I was accused of stalking and trespassing, and also of dangerous driving. When I broke a restraining order, I had to spend a few nights locked up. Then I had a serious car accident down South, was badly injured and wrote off the vehicle. It took my reaching this terrible point, the worst of my life, for me to finally get some help for my mental illness.

What does your experience mean to you?

It is hard to remember a lot of my experience with WMH as mentally I was in a pretty bad place at the time. But I am grateful to WMH for making me aware of courses such as the My Recovery (through MIFWA) and the peer group coffee mornings.

Suggestions for improvement of the service for all consumers?

I feel that communication could have been better about appointments. Sometimes it's hard though to remember them when you are unwell so it might be more my issue.

R, 60 Julimar

Please tell us your story of your health care experience

I have had anxiety and depression for most of my life. My kids and grandchildren call me Mad Mum, but affectionately. They have accepted me for who I am. Sometimes I have to withdraw from things for a while when I start to go off the rails. Mental Health was helpful a few years ago when I had a breakdown. I couldn't work (in the care industry) anymore. They sent a nurse out to visit me as I wasn't up to driving at the time. I decided to concentrate on my creativity as I am getting older, I am in my late sixties, and I had always put my art last in life. I've always had quite low self-esteem. I take a lot of meds and accept that I need to do this to stay well. My husband works away so I need to find lots of activities to occupy my mind. I have taken rescue pets to care for, and I visit the family or they come to my place whenever possible. I'm a fan of oriental style tattoos, so I have designed and got quite a few now and am very happy with the way they look. My recovery involves rediscovering my self-confidence.

What does your experience mean to you?

Not much at the time as I did not want to accept that I was unwell. WMH did their best for me but it wasn't until I came before the courts that I realised I needed to change and accept that I have a serious illness.

Suggestions for improvement of the service for all consumers?

I think what needs to change is, the ability for health care organisations to intervene. As I refused to actively seek help there was nothing anyone – police, social workers or mental health – could do until I had my accident.

N, 61 West Toodyay

Please tell us your story of your health care experience

When my teenage son committed suicide, I felt so lost I considered doing the same to be with him. It was me who found him. But how could I leave my wife or my pets; that would make the situation even more horrible. Our health has taken a beating, psychologically and physically. I fell into deep depression that lasted two years. I tried going to the Men's Shed, but it was hard to get any empathy there. I think some of the members did not know how to deal with someone grieving. They reckoned I should just toughen up and 'build a bridge and get over it.' There is still a great deal of stigma attached to things like depression and grieving in Western Society. It's encouraging that there is more recognition of men's health issues happening in the Wheatbelt, though it's going to take time to change things. Right now I'm channelling my energy into caring for foster children and selling my house. We are down-sizing as we are getting older, and also there are just too many sad memories here for us to want to stay any more.

What does your experience mean to you?

My experience of having caring staff to talk with was great during that time.

Suggestions for improvement of the service for all consumers?

I was discharged because I had recovered but I think some follow up to see if I needed any extra support would have been useful down the track.

D, 68 Toodyay