

Christine's story 2

[Mum] was in Perth at the aged care... Mental health unit aged care. My visit to there was... I cried, I was in tears, and even my mum [was in tears] because it's the first time she went into an institution like that. But because of her severe depression, which came on the suicide of my second brother, it put her into like a mental breakdown state.

I found that there was nice staff and that, but there's no Indigenous staff that's... You know, really there as a cultural person that they can relate to, if you understand? Or even if they had got them involved in doing activities that relate to their own culture, you know? Because that's good therapy. Even if it's scrapbooking with photos or painting... However way they want to do it. But it's good to get them... You know, ask them what would be good, rather than you making the choices for them. And find out a bit of history, not just think that going in there, you know, and you give them this bandaid solution... But then they go home and there's no long term process of follow up.

[Mum is] home, but she's still not the same, still have her downs. She still says that being there she should have had more support, and they just more or less hushed her up... Well, not hushed her, but pushed her out the door.

Coz she was confused she just... Well, 'I don't know where to go and what to do.'

She's seeing [doctors]... Now this is another thing, all her life she only had one doctor, now in the past say four years or three years, she's seen maybe ten doctors.

We got Dr L that comes regularly. I think Dr T would be more Mum's... That Mum felt more comfortable with. Coz Dr... The male doctor... To be honest I don't think he is really very caring or supportive. He's always, 'Well you don't need this, you don't need that. It's all in your mind. You got to get over it.' More or less.

And you can't tell an Aboriginal person that, or any person that has been through that trauma... Twice! Well, actually three times. She's been robbed of a child and through her experience of the stolen generation... Now that's history there. You can't just... You know, you gotta think what's going on in her mind too.

She stays over there [regional town] for the time being. My house is getting renovated at the moment and would be ready in the next say four weeks. So I'm going to get her back home and get her into gardening and, coz I do art, I get her back into art, coz she likes art. Scrapbooking, coz I'm doing family albums for each family member and my dad, so I'll get

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Mum to be part of that... A lot of history research. Getting her to do a video recording of her connection to country and her life. Just positive things she can relate to, coz that's good therapy within itself too.

I think... Like they say when you're going down south to Perth... It's just a different world, you know? It's a different world. And they not even allowed to have a cigarette and what do you think is going to calm them down when they are having days like that? A cigarette, you know... But they don't understand.

I go to my daughter [in Perth] now... I've been up and down to Perth in the last couple of weeks. The death of my brother had really impacted her, like Mum, and now she's in and out of the... Now she's under [metropolitan area] Mental Health.

I said to them... I had a meeting with the psychiatrist and I said... 'Look,' I said, 'Are you culturally aware of Aboriginal people and our ways of living and our lives and understand our people?'

And he said, 'No.'

And I said, 'Do you have any Indigenous workers here?'

And he said, 'No.'

And I said, 'Well, you [are] actually Indigenous, but from another country.' I said, 'How do you feel when you got selected to be in this position and you walk in a room and sit at a table full of non-Indigenous people sitting there, how do you feel?'

He said, 'Oh no.'

I said, 'Well, now you know how it feels for an Aboriginal girl, and the same way all these nurses and doctors having control and she's got no control. You know, you need to listen and understand and support properly.'

So he's actually written a good comment letter, positive and supportive, and he was taking it back to the Board.

So I said, 'Just really consider, there are other options that you can use and alternatives. When they are on a [drug] high you have to restrain them straight away, but after that three day period you need to start adapting them back and bringing them back to the reality of life. And if it's where they need to have counselling, anger management, you know, get all those things in place other than just pushing them out the door. Because once you let them

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go out that door they are gonna be back again, but if you show them that there's education on drugs... On whatever it is, on depression, how to control it and that...

'No good giving them a paper because when you're depressed, you don't want to read. Show them visual stuff and even talk to them about things.'

He said that he would take it all back to the Board.

And I said that it would be a good thing if he did, because if I didn't come here... Because I think about other parents that just give up on their children while they are right there in hospital...

But I'm not one of those mothers. I love my daughter and I love all my family and if I can be there, I get up. If I have to be there in the morning or at night or whatever, I'm there. I don't care if it's a five hour trip, a four hour trip, whatever. But I'd like to know that I'm getting support at the other end too.

When they get them onto therapy programs and things, you know, in the first couple of months, it's best if you pick them up and take them, not expect them to find their own way there. They get distracted in that process of going, leaving the house, and if they're not in the right frame of mind they can be easily lead too... So these are things that you have to really consider too.

It's good to have an Indigenous Liaison Officer that can come in, talk to you, talk to the family, and just support. Explain at our level of understanding... Because if you are coming out with words that they don't understand, it just goes in one ear and out the other.

I was actually there, I was very persistent about getting the search for my brother. And the police ruled that out and said that he wasn't in the bush, where they [eventually] found him. And I went through to the Ombudsman and the Minister and everything and they ended up... They started the search about a week into it... And that's when they found his body.

So that's been a big impact on me as well as my family, but painting is my therapy. I just love painting. It release a lot in my heart, even though I am painting about something else, but I'm still releasing all that pressure, build-up of that stress. I have the old antidepressant, which helps me get through the day. But, you know, coming in here to these women [community group] and that is a big thing too, because we're a good close little support... Strong little network we got happening. And you know, we were all born and raised here. They are a lot older than me but I look up to them as they're my role models and just love to continue to do what they did when they were my age. And now I am here for them.

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I live in a house now with my partner until my house is finished renovating. And his son got burnt from head practically to toe, third degree burns, and all he's doing is drinking. He said he went to the doctor and talked to the doctor about it and the doctor was no help. So I don't know what to do, because he's 24, but he does need some help... To help him mentally.

He has his dad there but he needs someone else, not his dad. I been talking to him a little bit coz I organised counselling and everything with him, but he didn't go through it all.

He nearly had his first anxiety attack last night because he was panicking. So I give him one of them [medication] just to calm him down, but I think he's got a mental problem where he needs support and help.

You know how they got all them branches in Perth? Why don't they have something in the [regional area]? Because they're getting taken away from their own country and the best medicine is your own ground.

[Health professionals] really need to do their cultural awareness training, to understand our people, the way we are, and the history of our families as well. You don't have to go into the depth of it, but it's just about understanding our culture and how we live.

You know, we have different rules and regulations to other non-Indigenous families. I'm not saying that we allow certain things to happen but what I'm saying is, we Indigenous people tend to... Your aunty is like your mum, you know? Like, we're family orientated. Very strong support network with families. So I think they need to be aware of all this too.

[We have a] circle of care. Like, if you can't get any family members, like the mother or the father or the brother or the sister, always ask, 'Is there any other close families around that we can contact that can help us with this patient?'

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