

Focussing On The Future: Youth Panel Hypothetical Scenario

“Drop In” is a center-based youth service in the Inner City. A regular group of about 10 young people use the Centre on a weekly basis and every month an additional 70 young people drop in for information, support, a meal and referral services.

Ali and Sharon have been using the services at “Drop In” for the past 2 weeks. Ali and Sharon met on the streets, and come in for an occasional meal and Centrelink information. They have been living under the bridge for the past 4 weeks. Both are using heroine “to escape...” Ali has had several admissions to Rozelle. Sharon appears to have a mild intellectual disability and has explained to the Centre’s coordinator that she was on “schizo” medication but stopped it because “H” works better. Ali refuses to contact his parents. Both appear to be physically unwell.

Introducing The Panel

Facilitator

Marika Kontellis, Community Sector Advisor and has a range of experience in the mental health, aged care and disability sectors and is currently supporting a number of organisations to plan and review their management processes and service delivery models.

Professor Nicholas Zwar, Director, Department of General Practice, Fairfield Hospital.

Karen Wells, Young Consumer of Services and employed with South Sydney Youth Services.

Lou Anne Lind, Young Person from a Non-English Speaking Background with a range of experience in the disability sector and employed with National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA).

Dr Matthew Lynch, Psychiatrist with Adolescent Mental Health Service and has experience with indigenous and non-English speaking communities.

Elizabeth Daswell, Highschool Student and consumer of mental health services.

Soour Gov, Multicultural Family Worker with the Burnside and has experience working with young refugees.

Panel Discussion

A panel of individuals were brought together to explore key issues faced by young people with mental health problems.

Since the last decade, the non-government and government services that make up the mental health sector, have continued to change and adapt models of service provision to meet the needs of individuals and their families/carers. These positive changes however, do not mean that the sector should become complacent. New ways of thinking about, and delivering meaningful supports and treatment are

essential. Supporting people with mental health problems to live successfully in their chosen communities is a vision that can be shared by all.

Key Messages

- Community attitudes to mental health;
- Access to services and support;
- Treatment approaches; and
- Focussing on the future.

How common is a scenario like this....?

Sharon and Ali's story is not uncommon according to the panelists and the audience. Many service providers claim that complex social situations compound the effects of mental health problems for young people. According to Professor Nick Zwar, doctors and other health/community professionals core challenge is to engage young people and keep them coming back for treatment and support.

Dr. Matthew Lynch, Adolescent Psychiatrist strongly advocated voluntary access to support and treatment as a key to successful outcomes.

How does someone like Sharon fall through the service gaps?

Sharon Wells explained many service providers shifted the responsibility of supporting a young person with a "dual diagnosis". In Sharon's circumstances it was assumed that her mental health problems coupled with an intellectual disability was a further barrier to successfully living in the community.

What are the likely cultural issues that Ali might be dealing with?

These were some obvious assumptions made about Ali's ethnic background, but according to Lou Anne Lind, mental health issues are the same across all ethnic groups. The major difference is that ethnic communities have not had the benefits of 25 years of community education.

How important are natural supports for young people in crisis

According to Soour Gov, supportive family and friendships are crucial. For young people with mental health problems, resourcing the family to support the young person is a positive step in recovery.

How do we treat young people like Sharon and Ali...? What are the attitudes of others?

Lots of assumptions are made about young people in circumstances presented in the scenario. Sharon Wells articulated the difficulties these two young people would have in being accepted. Dr. Matthew Lynch mentioned the low self-esteem young people have and the panel agreed that the core symptom of drug use, would position Sharon and Ali in a situation of blame for their circumstances.

What options are available?

Information and support is crucial. Drop In plays a vital role in engaging these tow young people. Professor Zwar suggested that a link with the local GP to identify physical issues would have been most beneficial. Establishing rapport and trust and encouraging voluntary access to treatment was Dr. Lynch's key message. Elizabeth Daswell commented that for her, the eventual stay in hospital was one of the best decisions she made.

Where to from here?

The future looks bright. The mix of services available to young people with mental health problems have continued to change and increase since the last decade. In the next decade we can look forward to better, more coordinated responses and preventative approaches to good mental health for all Australians. The key challenge will be to develop strong linkages between natural support networks and the mental health sector.