

Putting people front and centre: co-designing youth mental health services, Barrett Adolescent Centre Commission of Inquiry Implementation (Panel discussion including Q&A)

Transcript of video played in presentation

(VIDEO) This the last photo where I don't have any scars on my arms. I was about 12. I grew up in a middle class family, I was never exposed to any abuse, any drug or alcohol issues, any significant trauma, I don't think anyone really expected me to suffer from severe or complex mental health issues. After my 13th birthday my parents found out that I was self-harming and took me to see a private psychologist. After a few sessions he referred me to a psychologist in the public health system. At the time my self-harm continued to worsen and in an attempt to find me more help my parents started to present to an emergency department and after a few presentations my parents managed to advocate for me and get me into see a public psychiatrist. In that first session with the public psychiatrist, I deteriorated mentally to the stage where I started to plan my suicide and my self-harm was continuing to get worse. She said that I needed to be admitted into the inpatient unit and I went home, packed my bags and presented to the unit a couple of hours later. So pretty much immediately after I was discharged I went downhill again. My self-harming started to become much more severe, I started to have thoughts about suicide and start to plan my suicide again. I remember wanting to feel pain, wanting to hurt, and I remember being 13 and just leaving home to wander the streets at night. I don't think at that time I ever really wanted to die. I just wanted to escape the pain that I was in and I just wanted the pain to go away, because of that, I decided to write these and feelings down because I felt like that if I was to die at any one stage or any one point that I wanted to leave something behind that would

explain what I was doing. I don't want to commit suicide but I may have to. I might not have a choice. I'm hurting inside and out. My heart is breaking, splitting in two. My body is tired, ready for a rest. I'm living in agony, indescribable pain and I can't stop it. It fills you up and takes over all other feelings. It becomes your soul. I don't want to live the rest of my life like this. At the time the actual physical act of being driven to a school and having so many panic attacks in such a short period of time because people were trying to get me at school, just tipped me over the edge and fell into the deep end a bit mentally and I started to plan suicide again, my self-harm got much more severe and starting to leave home to self-harm and then would come home with open wounds requiring sutures and my parents would take me to an emergency department to get me fixed up at the time. It was one of those presentations that my parents took me to that my parents said, "I think my daughter is going to kill herself." And then I was admitted for my second admission into an acute inpatient unit. There was an incident where I self-harmed and I was taken down to the emergency department. During this time, during this episode so, they started to suture me up with very little anaesthetic on board and I found it incredibly painful. I remember at the time the staff that were with me at the time couldn't really understand why I was finding this so painful and after I'd been sutured up and bandaged up, then I was on my way back up to the unit and there was a few moments of discussion from some of the staff that said something along the lines of "I thought you would enjoy it" when I mentioned that the process was incredibly painful. It really created an us versus them, a doctors and nurses versus patients-type atmosphere, and attitude among patients. Any good will that I'd had towards my clinicians, any desire or want to get better, because of my clinicians' desire to help me get better, pretty much went out the window. When I next self-harmed I used a diversion within the unit to go to a different area of the unit that was unsupervised and self-harm and the diversion gave me more time to self-harm which meant that I could inflict more service injuries on myself and I meant that ultimately I fainted as a result of blood loss. They also brought in a new policy at the time and this new policy was that if someone self-harms they needed to clean up any of the mess they had made in the process of self-harming. After I'd self-harmed and been

bandaged up and was feeling well enough that I could stand up I then had to clean up all the blood left all over the bathroom. I just remember feeling at the time or thinking at the time that the nursing staff seemed to feel like I was self-harming out of an attempt to annoy them. At the time I felt like I couldn't be further from the truth, at the time I really just wanted a distraction from the incredible amount of emotional pain that I was in and self-harm for me was the only way that I could do that so soon after that time I was placed on the waiting list for the Barrett centre. However as the anxious teenager that I was I found the idea of moving to a new facility or changing and going to a new facility so incredibly anxiety-provoking that I physically lashed out at the psychiatrist that told me I don't have a choice. They placed me in this tiny room and had padded walls and really thought that this was it, this was as low as I'd ever been. I just remember those walls. I just remember lying down on the mattress in the foetal position in the room and I think it was at this stage that I really contemplated where my life was going, where it was heading. I just sort of remember making a conscious decision to get out of hospital. I started to engage with Barrett, started to engage as a day patient and they enrolled me in the school of distance education so I could complete a couple of courses through the school of distance education as well as attending a few of their vocational programs and other activities. This allowed me to start to engage in schooling again and getting back to school. What I was also really grateful at the time for was that I managed to find a psychologist who I thought got my illness and got the way my brain worked and got the way my brain affected my illness. They managed to engage me with a local high school and as part of my rehab I started to go to that local high school to attend a couple of subjects. This gradually built up from one or two subjects to attending the school full-time. This approach of generally - gradually introducing me to school again, was vital for me I think in terms of my recovery. It wasn't too fast that I would run in the other direction and would stop engaging, it was slow enough so I could gradually get used to the idea of going to school, build up friends and support groups, to the stage where I could attend school full-time again. By then graduated from year 12 and did well enough in high school to get accepted into a bachelor of physio which I completed in 2013 and from there I've started to - I am

working as a physio within Queensland Health and I took a six month break recently to go backpacking across Canada, fantastic, when I came back from Canada I heard about a position being advertised through Health Consumers Queensland, that was to sit as a representative on the commission of inquiry steering committee meeting for the Barrett centre. I think everyone's hope, everyone in the community's hope is that eventually one day we get some better services for adolescents with severe and complex mental health issues. I hope at least that I'm doing my part to ensure that does happen. What I'd tell the 13-year-old me is that it's tough, it's hard, but it's worth it. And you can do it. What I tell the clinicians that treated me at the time, I honestly believe that were worth your time and your effort and your money, where I think this is a patient population worth investing in (Voice breaking up) You can have such a profound effect on someone's life and you may not realise that at the time, but if you can get one person or one patient better for me that's worth it. It's worth all your time and all your effort.