

Submission  
No 16

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF DRUG  
REHABILITATION SERVICES IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND  
REMOTE NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Name:** Name suppressed  
**Date received:** 5 December 2017

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Partially  
Confidential

## NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

### **Inquiry into the provision of drug rehabilitation services in regional, rural and remote New South Wales Terms of Reference**

I write in response to your invitation to comment on the inquiry into the provision of drug rehabilitation services in regional, rural and remote New South Wales.

While I may not be able to provide the in-depth response to issues regarding planning, staffing, funding and models of service, I believe that the Committee should have access to the story of a family who has dealt with the lack of services and the disregard shown to family members by service providers.

As a mother, who has spent the past six years dealing with health workers, the education system and other departments and subsequently the police and the justice system, it is imperative that any rehabilitation services established in the Broken Hill region includes services for Under 18 year olds.

Our family experience has been that young people with extreme mental health and substance abuse issues are regarded as too hard by the service providers that are supposed to provide assistance. The care offered is sporadic, inconsistent and on occasion dismissive. The tick and flick attitude of service providers is not adequate. Those who do try fail dismally because they have limited resources, qualified staff or burn out because the problem requires a long term commitment.

Our family felt disregarded at every turn – there are such a limited support services offered in Broken Hill, primarily because the services do not have the resources to deal with a person Under 18 who has combined mental health and substance abuse issues. The lack of continuity in staffing in the health system also contributed to a lack in continuity of care.

In the first instance, probably, the easiest way to provide some of the background to our story is for the committee to read two ABC radio interviews that I did during the period when we were trying to seek assistance for my son and the following extract from the Daily Telegraph article in July 2016 in which the former Mayor's wish for drug rehabilitation centre in Broken Hill refers to the behavioural changes in my son.

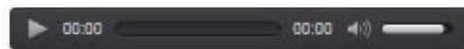


17 September, 2013 5:27PM ACST

## Brave Broken Hill mum in fight to save her son

By John Casey - Multiplatform Reporter

**A distraught mother who is paralysed by the fear of drugs leading her 15-year-old son to jail or an early grave has spoken out to expose what looms as a community crisis for Broken Hill.**



[Download this mp3 file](#)

After a hellish two weeks in which she has been threatened, robbed and forced to instigate legal action against her own son, the mother of two has issued a disturbing warning for the local community.

"There's no resources here that can help a family in crisis and we have talked to everybody," the woman, who wishes to remain anonymous, revealed.

"Certainly the police have been excellent and supported us in the best way they can.

"(But) how we deal with this as a community - I will have to leave that to the decision makers - but all I ask them is to start looking at the resourcing," the woman added.

In a raw - and at times harrowing - interview the single mother of two fought back tears explaining how her family life had unravelled in the space of two weeks because of what she believes is her son's addiction to methamphetamine - a drug commonly known as 'ice'.

"My life is a mess ... I almost feel like I am in a movie," she told Andrew Schmidt, the host of ABC999 Broken Hill's Morning Program *Outback Outlook*.

"My biggest concern is that he'll either end up in jail or dead - and as a mum sitting, waiting for that phone call - it's paralysing.

"This isn't my kid, this is not my child, this is something else and it's awful.

"The hostility in his eyes and the fact we have had to call police on a number of occasions because of the aggression has frightened me as a mum.

"We've had one night where he threatened us so we've actually moved out of the house for the night and gone to separate houses away from family members, so that if he did turn up at a family member's house we weren't there," the woman continued.

**Cold comfort in local action**

### Related Photos



Methamphetamine - a drug commonly known as ice - is increasingly available in Broken Hill. (ABC News)

### Map Broken Hill 2880

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## Cold comfort in legal action

For her own safety - and that of her teenage daughter - the woman has been forced to take out an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) against her son.

But more than one week after it was issued, police have so far been unable to locate the boy to serve the order.

"To take out an AVO against your own child is one of the worst feelings," the woman said, describing how her son had fled home chased by police.

"I will never lose that image of my child, basically being chased down the street by police.

"That image is tattooed in my mind forever," she added, fighting back tears.

Broken Hill's most senior policeman, Barrier Local Area Commander Superintendent Brad Hodder, called on the local community to unite and tackle the scourge of drugs.

"We all need to stand on a united front, work together as a community to ensure that our children are educated," Superintendent Hodder said.

## Community must unite say police

"We want the community to stand up and say; 'no, enough is enough, we don't want this in our neighbourhood and ensure that these people (drug dealers) are taken off the streets and brought to justice.

"If you don't tell us and help us it is only going to destroy your kids and destroy the society as we know it in Broken Hill and I don't want that to happen," SI Hodder continued.

Police have reported "a little bit of an increase" in the drug ice available in the city and say it can be both manufactured locally and also brought in.

"I haven't seen any evidence recently of anything being manufactured (locally)," SI Hodder explained.

While full of praise for the work being done by police, the woman whose son has "hit rock bottom" feels let down by other agencies.

"There is no real resource to help families who have children with mental health issues or with drug and substance issues and we just don't know what to do," the woman said.

"He spent one night in ICU (Intensive Care Unit at BH Hospital) with a security guard because there is no mental health area in the hospital for a 15-year-old boy who is aggressive.

"The next night he was in the paediatric ward.

## No place for addicts

"I don't know how the community feel about that, but for me, ICU and paediatrics is not an area where you put an unstable 15-year-old, even with a security guard.

"As much as we argued as a family that we don't have the skills or the resources to deal with what's going on, basically the hospital doesn't either."

Asked why she had decided to go public with the family trauma the mother replied; "because I love my child".

"I've seen and heard and learnt about an awful side of our community that I never, ever thought I would have to learn about or know about - it goes against all our family values.

"If I can at least tell the story and at least get someone to sit up and go; 'our community is in desperate need of resources to help the young people who are going through this', then it may not be available to help my son, but it may be available in future to help somebody else's baby," the woman continued.

"I certainly don't blame him (her son); I blame a system that has failed a family who's been crying out for help on different occasions and on so many different levels."

## ABC Follow Up Interview

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-01-22/community-drug-forum-too-little-too-late/5212522?site=brokenhill>

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# Community drug forum 'too little, too late': mother

Updated 22 Jan 2014, 10:33am

**A local mother says she has little faith in a proposed community forum on drug abuse.**

The forum in June will respond to the community's concerns about drug and alcohol issues.

A Broken Hill mother, who's been distressed by her son's use of the drug 'ice', has told the ABC she has little faith in the forum's approach.

"It's just the same old same old let's just talk about it and see what happens in twelve months time," she said.

"And quite frankly for those of us that are caught in the middle of that kind of situation, it's too little, too late.

"They're going to actually use the same model that they've been using for the past 20-25 years, they're going to try and address every single drug on earth, all at one forum at a community talk fest in six months' time, and they wonder why people like I get angry."

The mother has had to take an AVO out against her son due to his violent behaviour.

**Topics:** [drugs-and-substance-abuse](#), [broken-hill-2880](#)



PHOTO: A packet of the drug Ice

MAP: Broken Hill 2880

First posted 22 Jan 2014, 10:34am

EXTRACT: This article refers to my son and the former Mayor's wish for drug rehabilitation centre in Broken Hill.

## Daily Telegraph

NEWS BREAKING NEWS NEWSLOCAL NSW NATIONAL WORLD TECHNOLOGY

BEN MCCLELLAN, Crime Reporter, The Daily Telegraph  
July 28, 2016 9:30pm



THE sleepy border city of Broken Hill is being used as a major drug corridor where deadly narcotics such as ice are regularly seized along its desert highways.

A handful of dedicated police, tasked with covering an area the size of the UK, are taking the fight to drug smugglers trying to hide among the caravans of grey nomads and families streaming through the "oasis of the west".

The Barrier Command, which covers 230,000sq km and borders three states, targets cannabis coming in from its South Australian border 50km to the west and ice and MDMA from Victoria, via Mildura 300km south.

Large amounts of cash from drug runs to the eastern seaboard are also regularly seized.

Seizures have had links to bikie gangs, with more than 10kg of cannabis and 400g of MDMA and amphetamine found in a van during the arrest of two men in April allegedly being linked to a senior Hells Angel in Adelaide.

The Gypsy Jokers control the cannabis trade out of South Australia, while the Rebels and Comancheros are prominent in Mildura.

The Rebels tried to establish a chapter in Broken Hill in 2014, believed to have been instigated by a high-ranking member on the Central Coast, but police moved quickly to shut it down. Syndicates, which go to elaborate lengths using false compartments in vehicles, are also operating within Broken Hill.



Broken Hill Mayor Wincen Guy says drugs have affected him directly. Picture: Dylan Robinson

Broken Hill Mayor Wincen Guy knows first-hand the effects of ice on his city. Earlier this month two people were arrested at his motel, with a 26-year-old man charged with dealing drugs out of one of the rooms.

Mr Guy said "it's a huge concern" drugs were being run through and dealt in the town credited as being the "birthplace of the nation".

"It has affected me directly through my motel business. There seems to be a bit of a pattern (of drug dealers using motels)," he said.

"There is an element in this community that are trying to induce our youth into this use, it is increasing. This ice is a horrible drug, it tears families apart," he said.

"I know a person whose grandson completely changed from a lovely young lad into an uncontrollable person."

With the closest drug rehabilitation centre 300kms away Mr Guy said one was needed in Broken Hill.

The high incomes from the mining and health industry make the town of 20,000 a "target rich environment" for dealers. Ice, which retails for \$50 per 0.01g in Sydney can be sold for \$100 in Broken Hill.

In his younger years, my lit son up the room when he was in it. He was loved by everyone. Placid and rarely naughty, he had the typical energy of an active little boy.

At Primary School he was a well-mannered, solid performer and received good reports in terms of academic achievement and behaviour. Despite some sadness with the divorce of this father and me, he participated in a number of extra-circular sports including cricket, tennis and football. Basketball and swimming were his strongest sports. He had a core group of friends but experienced bullying in Year 6. Approaches to the school regarding this were ignored.

During this period, he started to show signs of anxiety and anger management and he had several visits with a private psychologist who worked with him on these issues.

At the end of Grade 6, he decided he wanted to live with his father. He moved to the East Coast during the Christmas holidays. He moved back to Broken Hill by Easter 2010 due to relationship difficulties with his father's new wife and teenage daughters. School reports from Yr 7 and 8 demonstrated a solid performance, although comments often referenced a lack of motivation. It was also during this time that it was obvious that he had very real mental health issues.

Working with the psychologists at the Child and Family Health Centre, he received sporadic counselling, with Counsellors changing on a regular basis. Counselling services in rural areas for young people can be intermittent and there is limited to no continuity of care.

He was an excellent junior photographer, entering and winning sections at the annual show with his creative photos. He was also an accomplished scooter and BMX performer – but this sport was what introduced him to the seedy underside of Broken Hill. By 2012 (Grade 9), there was a

number of suspensions for threatening behaviour towards teachers, refusal to participate in class and walking out of class.

The school and Mission Australia worked to assist us to find solutions to continue his education. Despite all attempts, his behavioural issues and attitude to school continued to spiral downwards. The school made it clear that they did not have the staff or resources to manage my son and were becoming increasingly frustrated, as were we. We were lucky in Term 3 when Alesco School opened. His commitment to learning was re-established at Alesco and he attained a number of certificates which assisted him to build his self-esteem and confidence. He established an excellent rapport with the education team and the smaller class sizes assisted him to settle into a learning routine. However, by Term 4, the relationship with his girlfriend had broken down and his mental health deteriorated to a point that resulted in threats of suicide, significant self-harm and violent outbursts.

Before my son finally accessed drug rehabilitation services in 2017 (he had turned 18), our family could have been better supported by the education system, the health system, the police and Department of Community Services.

While a drug rehabilitation has absolute merit for this region, they have to be based on a collaborative and interagency approach to the welfare of the client and embrace the experiences and knowledge of the family. In Broken Hill and region, there is a significant lack of dedicated services to assist young people with early onset mental health issues that could stop their progress to using illicit substances.

When he started to get into trouble with the police at about 15 - mostly for petty charges - the police failed to follow up on the planned youth cautions. The Youth Liaison Officer always appeared to be out of town when a caution was required. This did not contribute to my son learning the consequences of his behaviour by an authority other than me or other family members whose intervention was regarded as confrontational by my son.

An alert to the school that I wanted to be contacted because of emotional and behavioural issues was ignored. In 2013 term one and two, the school registered more than 50 incidents of unacceptable behaviour. The school did not contact me and when I was finally contacted I was informed of those 50 incidents of classroom disruption, teacher abuse and threats to other staff and students, the descriptions mirrored what was occurring at home. It was at this point, with the violent and erratic behaviour starting to peak that questions were being raised that his assumed drug use had elevated to methamphetamine.

On a number of occasions we had to call the police and lock ourselves in rooms until help arrived – he would always get away and the police could never find him.

In one instance, following a self-harm incident, when he was clearly mentally unwell, I was told that my son's behavioural issues were not the hospital's problem by the head of the Mental Health Unit.

In another incident, I attended the hospital after he had threatened self-harm and threatened to kill me. This had been a violent encounter where police and ambulance were called to our residence. During this time, he spent a night in the Intensive Care Unit with a security guard as there were no beds in a designated facility or the Children's Ward.

Despite significant mental health issues and the obvious physical scars from previous self-harm attempts, the hospital would not listen to my family or myself. We indicated that we were not a

family equipped to help our child. They told us there was no service for an under 18-year-old. He was forced home. He disappeared within the hour.

Searches for rehabilitation services (or youth assistance centres) at that time served difficult for an under 18 year old. When the hospital was asked if there was a referral list, we were told that they couldn't provide a list – we could “google it”.

It was also impossible to discuss with him the need for help – he continually denied drug use of any kind and without his willingness to attend treatment it would have been an impossible task to transport him 100s of kilometres to a treatment centre.

My daughter and I lived in fear. There was an Apprehended Violence Order in place. On one occasion he threatened that he would kill me to my sister and I had to leave the house overnight. The house was fitted with an alarm and doors and windows locked at all times.

During this period, I twice visited the Broken Hill office of the Department of Family and Community Services for help. I was told twice told that the Department was for families in crisis. They let me walk away from their offices – inconsolable, desperate.

A mandatory detoxification program would have made such a significant difference to our family if we had access to that. Once again, a mandatory detoxification program would have, at the least, provided some form of foundational understanding that there are consequences for actions and may have prevented the inevitable of a 17-year-old being in so much debt to drug suppliers that he may not have ended up working for them and consequently in serious trouble with the law.

No longer living at home, he couch surfed and travelled between Broken Hill and East Coast (where his father resides).

On occasion, he would reach out to my parents when things were really low – he would stay with them – they would clean him up and I would drop in new clothes. I still at that point could not see him out of fear but was able to support him through the provision practical things. He then moved back to his father's house for a short period and then disappeared.

This is when we assume he developed a full methamphetamine drug addiction. His addiction really took hold and he was eventually arrested and charged with drug supply and possession. My son's rescue came from the not-for-profit sector. He was admitted voluntarily to William Booth House run by the Salvation Army in Surrey Hills Sydney in May. He had been clean for eight months by the time he accepted that treatment was an important option to build his resilience but in the meantime he had been arrested on very serious charges and spent time in jail. He was the youngest in the prison at that time – 18 years old.

I don't begrudge the costs to support my son during this time but it has been significant.

If private drug rehabilitation had been an option, as a family we could not have afforded it – even if we could have convinced him to go.

Even with his incarceration and eventual live-in accommodation at William Booth it has placed significant strain on my finances with trips to Sydney for court cases and rehabilitation – all of which I believe may have been avoided if the family had been able to access consistent and appropriate care from the start.



The consequences of the lack of appropriate rehabilitation and support services for young people in Far West NSW cannot be ignored. My son, who had such a promising future and now will battle for a long time to get his life back on track. Much of this could have been avoided if collaborative mental health and rehabilitation services for young people had been available in Broken Hill.

It is time to fix this. Not everyone will take up the offer and some might. And they deserve to have that opportunity closer to home – not hundreds of kilometres away.