



The Hon. Warren Entsch MP
Federal Member for Leichhardt

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
CHAMBER

Wednesday, 9 February 2011

Cairns Mental Health Carers Support Hub

Mr ENTSCHE (Leichhardt) (7.10 pm)—I rise tonight to express serious concerns about the future of a fabulous support organisation in my electorate and to call on the government and the relevant minister to reconsider a decision to discontinue funding for the Cairns Mental Health Carers Support Hub. This is an organisation I helped to establish in 2006. I got some funding for a wonderful lady by the name of Adrienne Hicks, who was a carer of a son with schizophrenia.

Such was her commitment to her adult son that she took a university course and got a degree in that field and she wanted to pass on her experiences et cetera. I was able to secure a grant for a pilot program in 2006. So successful was this particular program that the Cairns Mental Health Carers Support Hub was launched in October 2009. The hub is accessible. It is a one-stop shop, and its approach has been a fantastic success for families and services alike.

Amongst many of the achievements it has seen there has been a threefold increase in families contacting the service, a 300 per cent increase in referrals from other services, a 350 per cent increase in referrals from the hub to other service providers and a tenfold increase in their ability to provide counselling support to carers and families throughout the region and not just in Cairns. My understanding is that there is something like 350 carers at the moment who are very heavily reliant on this service.

Such is the success of this service that there has been a plan to look at extending it. They were looking at opening a similar one in Rockhampton. They were also looking, through the Mental Illness Fellowship, at opening this Australia wide. We all know the desperate need we have in the community to be able to support the carers of people with mental illness. We also know the huge saving this is for government resources when these carers dedicate, in many cases, their entire lives to providing this service.

I just want to go through a couple of emails and letters I have received. The first one I am going to read from is from Christine Coop. She is a senior occupational therapist and director at Enable Occupational Therapy in Mental Health in Cairns. This is what she said:

Occasionally a pilot program comes into being that hits above its weight in terms of positive impact on a community. The Cairns Mental Health Carer's Support Hub is such a program

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On a carer-by-carer basis, I believe I have made a significant difference. However, in all the years that I have been plugging away at changing the system to be proactive and utilising carers effectively (and for carers to look after themselves so they can last the distance), I have NEVER seen results from any program/service that comes even close to the effect that the Cairns Mental Health Carer's Support Hub has produced.

For the first time, carers are acting powerfully, the system is listening, clients with mental health conditions are receiving better quality of care and a whole heap of angry people are using their anger productively to make the world a better place for those who are unable to advocate for this themselves.

I have another email here. I cannot mention her name, unfortunately, but she said:

My son, Sam, was diagnosed with Schizophrenia and ABI some time ago. I am his carer. I was despairing of getting any long-term and stable support.

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I suffer from anxiety attacks and related ongoing anxieties. My health and well being has been much better since I have had the support of the people at the Hub. Having someone who understood our individual and collective needs, who could provide information which was relevant and understandable, who could support and guide us through the MAZE of services, saved our lives and our sanity. I heard today that the Hub is having to close. My anxiety levels went through the roof immediately ...

I believe I am still alive today as a result of the support of the Hub.

These are the sorts of impassioned pleas that we are getting begging that we keep this service. It is absolutely crazy, it is insane, that a government that says it is committed to mental health and raising issues there and supporting carers could take away \$160,000 from this outstanding service. It is the best of its kind that we have seen in this country. It is a disgrace. (*Time expired*)