

Ohio House Behavioral Health and Recovery Supports Committee
May 19, 2022
HB 523 - Proponent Testimony
Jacquetta Stephen

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Jacquetta Stephen, my daughter was diagnosed in 2013 at age 21 with bipolar disorder and episodes of psychosis. As a family we had no idea how to help her or find the necessary services/resources that she needed. We struggled for many days not knowing where to turn for help. Unfortunately, we had to call the local emergency squad and police to our home to keep our daughter safe and try and find help. This day ended with an involuntary admission in West Virginia. This was a very traumatic battle and by far remains one of the worst days of our lives as parents. We finally were able to transfer her to Ohio State Harding in Columbus, Ohio. This day I will forever remember and from that day forward I knew I had to learn more about the mental health process, so she never had to experience the trauma that she did in that West Virginia facility.

My journey into the unknown world of being a parent of a daughter with mental illness had begun. I read every resource I could find. I learned about medications, partial hospitalization, lack of therapists and psychiatrists in our rural area, support groups, and the painful ugliness of STIGMA. I knew I needed to become involved in some way because of my experience those first few years of our daughter's battle with mental illness. Those first few episodes and traumatic hospitalizations she experienced made me realize I HAD to become a voice for her and others...an advocate...someone to find how to get QUALITY help for her and others. That is when I sat down, and I set my goals:

- 1) Make sure that those in charge could understand our struggles finding therapy and psychiatrists and a place close to home to go for hospitalizations.
- 2) Find information/guidelines to give "new parents" coming into the world of mental illness to help them understand where to turn for help...and for them to understand they are not alone.
- 3) To find resources to help my daughter and others that experience this horrible disease to have hope for their future not just in psychiatric care but in daily life skills and jobs and recovery.
- 4) To follow through on my promise to her that I would never give up on her or stop fighting for the best treatment options close to home.

Those four goals led me to seek membership on the Belmont, Harrison, & Monroe Mental Health and Recovery Board. I found a place where the story of my daughter's struggles could help others, by helping our Board of Directors understand what our communities are lacking in services and supports. I believe that my participation on the board has helped bring more providers to our area because the other members listened when I voiced the issues, we faced trying to find services and resources. I was able to advocate to the Board that funding was needed for new services and additional providers. As a

Bord member I have expanded my knowledge of available local and regional resources which has enabled me to help other parents navigate the system.

My daughter is currently employed with Coleman Health Services as an Ohio Certified Peer Supporter. She lives in her own apartment and has a job she loves. Again, this was a direct result of hearing about the peer support process during one our monthly Board meetings.

I know we are still lacking enough resources and I know as a parent and a Board member we have more to do; but we are making strides in the right direction. I truly feel that my position on the Board has helped the Belmont, Harrison and Monroe, Mental Health and Recovery Board become more aware of the strengths and the challenges within our local continuum of care. I decided that regardless of the stigma I faced in a small rural community, I could make a difference in not just my daughter's mental health battle but for others in our community who struggle with mental health issues. I am not just a Mother of a daughter with mental illness. I am a PROUD Mother of a daughter with mental illness who has made great strides her recovery. I never gave up on her and I never will. I will continue to advocate as a Board member for funding and programs to support those who fight the disease of mental illness, their families and our communities.

***"Hope is being able to see that there is light, despite all of the darkness."-
Desmond Tutu***

Thank you,

Jacquetta Stephen
527 W Main St
Barnesville, OH 43713
740-238-1211