

I am his mom, He is mentally ill.

he is an adult now... I am still his mom and he is still mentally ill.

Diagnosed at 6... Most severe anxiety disorder we have ever seen. At 19... Most severe anxiety disorder we have ever seen. What about those 13 years in between? Alternative schools Baird and Jean Garvin. Intensive Family Based Services, First Call Crisis, Respite, Living skills, Family Community Based Services, Clinicians, therapists, psychiatrists. Thoughts of diagnosis. Looks like this, nope its not that. Sounds like that, nope. Medications up and down, whats next. Crisis stabilization at Jarret House, Brattleboro Retreat, Hospital Diversion and most recently Assist. Residential stays at Lyndon Street, Brattleboro, Shelburne House, Williston and currently T House, Essex. Most of these are programs of Howard Center with a tiny NFI blended in. We are so very thankful for all of these services and all of the human beings that work in this field and have kept my boy safe and helped with his progress. For years we worked through things that you could never imagine having to do with your child. Your child that looks like any other child in "that neighborhood" that you live in. Your child that has an illness that nobody can see, what they see is like the principal said early on... He just needs to learn to behave. These words will forever be in my head. He made such progress, worked so hard. I can't tell you the joy of seeing him walk to the bus on his own as it sat at the end of our driveway after years of having to coax him out of the corner or out of the bathroom and walk him out there with all the worries spewing out of his mouth. Or witnessing him take a shower alone in the bathroom with the confidence he could do it. Or seeing him work with a new person. New people are scary. Even now, that is hard. Just when you think, we have made so much progress he is going to get there. He can be independent! What will he be!?!? Then... the voices appear. This is what brought us to residential for assessment. New diagnosis, scary meds. Now he is 19, in a residential program working hard but what is his future looking like. A friend asked me today. What happens after T house? Hmmm well there is one program that NFI runs but that is really just a bandaid and there are limited spots. I honestly don't know. He struggles to stay with a

job, school, you name it. He is receiving disability but that is nowhere enough to live on. There are programs that howard center has opened like “my pad” but spaces are limited. After an episode at our house last summer its not safe and we are not structured enough to have him at home. And he doesn’t want to be there. He wants to be an adult. He wants to be NORMAL!

Well that is the super short version. Why am I here? I am here to ask for your commitment to help the mental health world!

1. Crisis beds... for kiddos most times they end up in Brattleboro. I can tell you I don’t have enough fingers to count the times I watched the ambulance pull away with my kiddo strapped in the back heading on a several hour trip staring out the back of the ambulance. Then we spend the next several days visiting, attending meetings in person or on the phone, meetings here with his team making plans for “step down”. It is unacceptable for families to have to make that trip and for those kiddos as well. Don’t get me wrong, we have been there so much I can tell you there are some wonderful people that work at the retreat and we are grateful and I can say that is always where my boy said he felt the most safe!

Why is the state endorsing a new crisis unit in central Vermont that won’t serve kiddos?

I stood in tears of joy last summer when my now “adult” was told in the ED that they had a bed for him upstairs in the ward! Tears of joy. Something is wrong with that!

2. Funding... in my opinion this goes hand in hand with stigma! Why is physical health treated differently with insurance companies and the world in general. Why is it that when someone has a family member sick in with a physical illness there are casseroles, people offering to mow their lawn, go fund me. You name it. Not for mental illness. Why? STIGMA. Because of that

people don't talk. If an employee has a doctors appointment for a physical illness they are talking about it in the lunch room. If they are seeing a therapist they don't even dare tell their boss thinking their job might be in jeopardy. Shame on us!!! Insurance companies are just the tip of the iceberg... how is it then when my child is in a residential program 3 hours away we can't have any home visits for several months because according to the insurance company if they can go home to visit they can just go home! What?!?!?! And if you have personal insurance and Medicaid you have to use the personal insurance first so you are stuck. Not very therapeutic!

3. Access to treatment, housing, etc for emerging adults. This is a new area for me. I am blown away at how they are just out there. There is support but the support can't talk to family without sign off "hippa" ok well what about the fact that the person is mentally ill and doesn't know they need family to be there to help support?

Thank you so very much for your time. I would be happy to chat with any of you as a follow up. Please help!