



Dear mental health consumer,

re: New newspaper - your thoughts and experiences

This is a personal letter inviting you to add something to the latest edition of **JUST US** being put together now. It is a fun, entertaining and informative newspaper, and will have letters from people you might know. We invite you to write a letter, article or comment too.

We are starting to get **JUST US** into mental health units. Justice Action was asked to help by consumer advocates and representatives across Australia and has become involved in defending consumers' rights.

We helped some of you to enrol to vote for the first time in the NSW State election. After **JUST US** was blocked we appealed to the Supreme Court to get the newspaper into consumers in hospitals. All states and territories were notified of this Australian Constitutional issue. In response new policies now allow newspapers into mental health units.

JUST US is a newspaper written especially **for and by** people with similar experiences to you. It provides information on significant topics that might affect you and informs you about your rights. We want your ideas about what you want in the next edition.

To let you know who we are, Justice Action has worked for consumers, prisoners and their communities for decades, running a business called Breakout to pay for it. For an example we fought a six-month campaign responding to a petition from mental health patients in the NSW Long Bay prison hospital. When we won, the government passed control from Prisons to Health, meaning consumers remained out of cells for much longer. More information about that campaign can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/3flvf86>

We represented all Australians held against their will at the 2009 Consultation for the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) Treaty. This includes the human right to dignity. We defended the prisoners right to vote in the Senate in 1997 and 2006.

JUST US

The next edition of **JUST US** will include your ideas and those of people on the outside. Your feelings and experiences will be published, along with current news and photos.

Also for something new, we are holding a competition! We'll give prizes for a letter about the best or worst experience with a service provider, such as a lawyer, health worker, institution etc. The people with the most shocking stories will get published and receive prizes. You can read the winning stories in the next edition of **JUST US**. Your stories will be published anonymously unless you say otherwise. If it is too long or defamatory we will trim the story for the paper as well as for our website, if that's OK.

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QUESTIONS

Tell us about your current experiences and concerns in mental health units. This will increase public awareness about your life and how you are being treated. Add a drawing if you want. We will help you get your thoughts and experiences across and will publish what we can in our next edition of **JUST US**. A copy goes to every member of Parliament in every state as well as every judge.

We will also use your feedback to identify major issues so we can effectively advocate on your behalf. What you write will be treated confidentially - we would not use your name unless you say so.

Here are a few suggestions you can use to guide your story.

- If you could change one thing about your stay in hospital what would it be?
- What are some issues/concerns you have encountered in hospital?
- What information do you wish was made available to you?
- If you could address Parliament, what would you say?
- What is your best experience with a lawyer/service provider?
- What is your worst experience with a lawyer/service provider?

NATIONAL CONCERNS

We receive many calls, letters and emails from across Australia about issues and concerns held by consumers nationally. We are lobbying for support from within government to address these concerns and bring about some real change. We'd love your help in this process. We want your opinion!

In Australia the issues have appeared in a long list of reports, including the 1992 'Burdekin' Report, 1994 National Community Advisory Group Report; "Let's talk about Action" and the 2005 Mental Health Council of Australia in association with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission "Not for Service" Report, all express the failure in the mental health system and the need for change for services in Australia. The time for ACTION IS NOW as the 10 year national mental health road map is being developed.

MAJOR CONCERNS

We have listed the top three major issues we believe need to be addressed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments;

1. Consumers being supported to smoke while being held as involuntary patients.
2. A lack of coordinated community support and appropriate housing creates difficulties for consumers trying to reintegrate with society.
3. Forced medication and lock-up of consumers is not an appropriate treatment or management solution. It is detrimental to your mental wellbeing.

Do you agree or disagree? If you disagree would you let us know what your top three issues are?

THANK YOU!!!

Thanks for taking the time to read this letter. It is urgent that you respond! Do it now – within a week please! We look forward to reading what you have to say, and helping you change your experience of hospital for the better. Pass this on to your family, friends and anyone else; we would love to hear from them too.

Send your letters to PO Box 386, Broadway NSW 2007, or alternatively send an email to justus@justiceaction.org.au. You can also write a review about a service provider in the directory section of our website (www.justiceaction.org.au).

With solidarity,

The Justice Action Team
September 6, 2011